

THESIS ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies
Emphasis in Systematic Theology

Adventist University of Africa

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Title: THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST PERSPECTIVE ON DIVORCE:
A THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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Divorce poses a serious threat to society because it destroys one of the divinely originated institutions, which is the family. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has consistently maintained a position that divorce falls short of the divine ideal for the marriage institution. Until recently, when abandonment was included as a ground for divorce, the Church had restricted the legitimacy for divorce to marital unfaithfulness. But this has engendered controversies as to whether the church's position is biblical. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to biblically and theologically ascertain the grounds for divorce, when permissible.

The study adopted a comparative-theological approach in its methodology. This includes a comparative and theological analysis of relevant texts on divorce in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

The findings reveal that a juxtaposition of Jesus' teachings on divorce and Moses' in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 shows that Moses' teachings were descriptive and not

prescriptive. Jesus intimates that the concession of Moses which is because of their hard heart borders on permission, not a command. Divorce is biblically allowable only on the issue of an exception clause of *porneia* or unfaithfulness to the marriage vow. Paul's counsel on abandonment in 1 Corinthians 7 hardly serves as a basis for divorce but a giving of admonition on mixed marriages.

The Church should see marriage as sacred and guide it against secular ideology which trivializes the institution. There is need for the church to be proactive in initiating a redemptive approach in marital conflicts, through counseling, in order to bring about reconciliation between a couple before the disagreements escalate to the point of divorce.

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A thesis

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

by

Emmanuel E. Nwakanma

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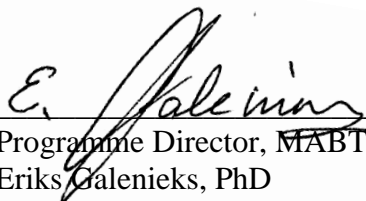
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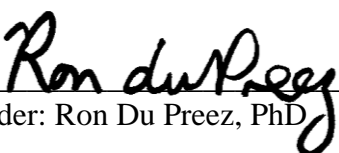
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To God be the Glory

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The creation of the traditional family,¹ that is marriage between a man and a woman,² seems to have been made by God in Eden to replicate the unity that exists in the Godhead,³ and a symbol of cordiality in the relationship of God with His chosen people.⁴ Thus the incompleteness of the man is brought to completion by the creation of the woman,⁵ and as such marriage should be treasured and held in high esteem as holy and honorable.⁶

Although this assertion seems to be held by many proponents of the marriage institution in Christendom, it is unfortunate that divorce poses a serious threat to the institution of marriage.⁷ In fact, divorce is one of the greatest challenges that the modern society is facing;⁸ more so for believers in Christ, it tends to eclipse the

¹Brian Jones, "A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage" (MTh thesis, Baptist Theological Seminary, Detroit, 2002), 1, accessed 17 August 2013, <https://search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?>

²In the discourse of marriage and divorce, this study will center on heterosexual relationships, that is, the marriage from a biblical viewpoint. So whenever divorce is mentioned, it is on this premise.

³Craig Keener, *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 21.

⁴Calvin B. Rock, "Marriage and Family," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 726.

⁵Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 15.

⁶Jones, "A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage," 4.

⁷*Ibid.*, 1.

⁸Ekkahardt Mueller, "Jesus and Divorce and Remarriage in Mathew 19," *Biblical Research Institute*, accessed 12 June 2014, <http://www.biblicalresearchinstitute.gc.sda.org>.

simplicity in Christ Jesus,⁹ a virtue that should be adequately exemplified in the traditional family because a godly Christian family is a reflection of the evidence of the grace of God in the life of people.¹⁰ Divorce, which seems to be marriage in reverse,¹¹ has become a challenge in these contemporary times and as a result affects churches and societies.¹²

Statistics indicate the alarming rates of family breakups.¹³ The centre for disease control and prevention in the United States recently stated that forty—three percent of first marriages end in divorce within fifteen years.¹⁴

This rate of increase in divorce, though disputed by many,¹⁵ seems to have precipitated other abnormal societal ills both in developed and developing countries,¹⁶ ranging from teen pregnancy, increased drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, violence, to the reluctance of young people to engage in marriage for the seeming fear of heartbreak. Indeed, divorce seems to be dealing a dastardly blow on society.¹⁷ Alarming as this might be, there are other opinions that suggest that Christian

⁹Paul E. Steele and Charles C. Ryrie, “Are Divorce and Remarriage Ever Permissible? No.” *Fundamentalist Journal* 3 (1984): 19-20.

¹⁰Jones, “A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage,” ii.

¹¹Raoul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 725.

¹²Mueller, “Jesus and Divorce and Remarriage in Mathew 19,” 12.

¹³Jones, “A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage,” 1.

¹⁴Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, News release: 43 percent of First Marriages Break up within 15 years, accessed 24 May 2013, <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/release/01news/firstmarr.htm>.

¹⁵See <http://patriot.net/~crouch/adr/50percent.html> for one attempt to counteract this statistics.

¹⁶A. Clapp, *Separation as a Solution, Unhappy Marriage and Divorce* (U.S.A.: John Wiley and Sons, 1969), 23.

¹⁷See Kerry Cohen, *Loose Girl: a Memoir of Promiscuity* (New York: Hyperion, 2008), 10.

believers are more prone to divorce than non Christian believers.¹⁸ Though this may have been overstated, nevertheless, divorce is a problem in the church.¹⁹

The Statement of the Problem

The Seventh-day Adventist Church as an evangelical Protestant movement started sometime in the nineteenth century.²⁰ As a Christian Church, she teaches permanent sustainability of marriage as God's ideal for humanity and includes "marriage and family" as one of the fundamental beliefs of the Church. In spite of this, the problem of divorce seems to have been compounded by the Church when she included abandonment as another ground for divorce apart from adultery and fornication which the Church had held for decades.

Consequent upon this, it is, therefore, pertinent to ask: According to the Seventh-day Adventist theology on "Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage," what informs the theology, and forms the basis for the allowability of divorce in the Church; a valid biblical basis theologically consistent with the historical-grammatical method of biblical hermeneutics which the Church upholds in continuation of the Protestant tradition or culture or both?

There is no gainsaying the fact that this question among others should be looked into as it will help ascertain the Church's stand on the issue of divorce and remarriage as well, and to also verify if she formulates a consistent, coherent biblical theology on divorce.

¹⁸See George Barna, "Christians Are More Likely to Experience Divorce Than Are Non Christians," accessed July 20 2014, <http://www.barna.org/cgibin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=39&Reference=C>.

¹⁹Jones, "A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage," 2.

²⁰See George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 87.

Purpose of the Study

Whereas the issue of divorce cannot be isolated from marriage for it is the disintegration of the union between a man and a woman who are legitimately married, the purpose of this study is to look at divorce within the context of the doctrine of marriage between a man and a woman and evaluate theologically how Seventh-day Adventists perceive it. While there is a strong belief in the rules of exegesis and an overall agreement on the proper procedure of theology, there is no generally accepted theology among evangelicals on the issue of divorce.

Instead, there is a wide polarization of views among theologians on the issue and they fall basically into one of three or four camps.²¹ Upon this premise, this study will examine the perspective of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on divorce in relation to what obtains in the Bible, with a view to ascertaining the development of thoughts in this regard, and examining the biblical-theological implications of the views related to the concept of divorce in their various forms.

Significance of the Study

In as much as an inconsistent approach to the theology of divorce can mar the reputation of the Church as a citadel of spiritual upbringing, the issue of what should constitute divorce need to be properly, coherently, and adequately explored from a biblical point of view. Thus, this study seeks to buttress what is apparently the biblical standpoint that God created marriage to be permanent. Therefore the formulation of an enduring theology of divorce and remarriage within the context of what the Bible

²¹Cyril J. Barber "Marriage, Divorce, or Remarriage: A Review of the Relevant Religious Literature, 1973-1983," in *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 12 (1984): 107-177, suggests that some view divorce and remarriage as always sinful and not permitted in the Bible, while some view divorce as permissible but no remarriage. Also, another view seems to believe that divorce could occur in certain circumstances and so remarriage can also occur, another views divorce as something that could be brought about by various things and in such occasions remarriage is needful.

teaches is significant as it will establish the primacy of the Bible over tradition or adjudications by the court of law.

Delimitation of the Study

The scope of this study centers on a theological evaluation of Seventh-day Adventist's interpretive principles and perceptions on the issue of divorce. And because divorce cannot occur in a vacuum except in the context of marriage, the study seeks to discuss divorce as it relates heterosexual marital relationship. Though the focus of this study is not remarriage, references will be made to it to clarify the concept more so as marriage, divorce, and remarriage are discussed together in one section of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's policy book, the Church manual and seems to always go together.

Definition of terms

Marriage: The institution of marriage dates back to Eden.²² It is one of the two most notable institutions which God, the creator of the universe, made²³ and perhaps the one that seems to bear the greater marks of damage in a world marred by sin and teetering from spiritual and moral decay. The belief in the permanence of marriage among Christians is based on the Genesis model created and solemnized by God.²⁴ Christians accept that marriage is God's initiative, and so could be properly and adequately defined by Him.²⁵

²²Robert J. Plekker, rev., *Divorce and the Christian: What the Bible Teaches* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1983), 21.

²³Dederen, *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 725.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵ Dederen, *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 726-727.

It is a covenant under God,²⁶ and not a contract²⁷ that can be broken when one party breaks its terms even though the teachers of the law seem to have developed a convoluted way in which a man could divorce his wife. Marriage appears to be an agreement that is kept by both parties under the authority of a higher power.²⁸ This truth is brought to limelight in the fact that Christ's relationship to the Church is compared to a man's relationship to his wife (Eph 5:25-33).²⁹

Divorce: The Bible teaches that God never intended divorce when He instituted marriage. In fact divorce in its various forms is man's innovation to counter the heterosexual relationship that God established at first in Eden.³⁰ Its concept is never found in God's plan for He does not divorce His church; a relationship He seemingly desires forever exemplified in the heterosexual marriage relationship.³¹

The entrance of sin no doubt appears to have affected this institution together with its twin sister, the Sabbath.³² Nevertheless, God made and performed the first heterosexual monogamous marriage ever recorded; He also blessed and sanctified the

²⁶Ralph H. Alexander, "Marriage," *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2007), 512.

²⁷Jones, "A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage," 9. He intimates that a believer should lead a life of faithfulness with his mate for life. This is God's ideal for creating marriage, therefore divorce is antithetical to this divine purpose

²⁸Jay E. Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 4.

²⁹Dederen, *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 726.

³⁰B. Ward Powers, *Marriage and Divorce: The New Testament Teaching* (Concord NSW, Australia: Family Life Movement of Australia, 1987), 294-323. He asserts that there exist eleven separate views on the issue of divorce and remarriage.

³¹J. Carl Laney, *The Divorce Myth* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1981), 72.

³²These two institutions by God have had several attacks by Satan for he knows that any family where peace reigns is a little heaven on earth, and the observance of the Sabbath brings to mind God's creatorship of the earth and its fullness. For the sake of this study though, it is only marriage, divorce in its various forms and remarriage that will be discussed; the Sabbath is not within the scope of this paper.

union Genesis 2:21-24. The severity of this covenant via divorce therefore appears to be an antithesis to the divine ideal.

Methodology

The paradigm shift in the development of thoughts on the subject of divorce in Seventh-day Adventism and what should be its likely causative agent requires a reflection. This study therefore combines aspects of history but assumes a comparative-theological approach. Since this issue is of immense importance, methodological variety and terminological fluidity are inevitable, but this approach seems to view the biblical stand as key to properly understand the concept of divorce and not the socio-cultural view or the postmodernist approach.

This thesis comprises four chapters. The first chapter deals with the introduction in which there are: statement of the problem, purpose of study, significance, delimitation, definition of terms, and methodology. The second chapter will seek to bring out the perspective of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on this all important subject. The third chapter will seek to delve into the biblical perspective of the theology of divorce within the context of marriage. These perspectives would be evaluated theologically with other scholar's views. Then there would be the fourth chapter comprising the summary, conclusion, recommendations for further study, and the bibliography which brings the thesis to a close.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Seventh-day Adventist Church doctrine of “marriage and the family” forms an integral part of the fundamental beliefs espoused and upheld by the Church. And whereas divorce is a lifestyle issue which may occur within the context of a heterosexual marriage relationship and has a debilitating effect on the divine ideal, this chapter would seek to look into how the Church sees the biblical motif of marriage in both the Old and New Testaments coupled with the interpretive thoughts through the years in relation to the concept of divorce among other things.

Biblical Motifs on Marriage and Divorce

The Bible, in Genesis 1:1-2:3, elaborately describes God’s creation of all things in six literal twenty-four hour days. On the sixth-day of the creation week, Genesis 1:24-31 testifies that God created humans in His image in the form of man and woman.¹

In chapter two of Genesis, the creation account is in a more detailed form than in chapter one. Likewise, the creation of the first couple, man and woman, is much more explained than in Genesis 1:27.² All other created things were made immediately; He “said” 1:3, 6, and 9, among others.³

¹Jones, “A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage,” 4.

²Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 122. A closer look at the account of creation will enable us know that there was no sin in the uncultivated world and that the first humans were created differently from how the other creatures were made. The creation of man

It appears that God made humanity unique to emphasize their special role and occupancy above and within the created order of things.⁴ The special nature of mankind is further made clear in the special place God made for humankind to live (Gen 2: 8-14) and, the special instructions he gave to man (see verses 15, 17, 19-20).⁵ Both the instructions on eating (verses 15-17) and naming the animals (verses 19-20) require a free moral thinking agent that sets humanity apart from other earthly creatures.⁶

Old Testament Perspectives of Marriage and Divorce

In an attempt to address the biblical motifs concerning marriage and divorce, it would be suitable to begin with the Old Testament of the Bible. This would enable us see how the concept of marriage came into being from the creation narratives and how and when divorce emanated as recorded in the Pentateuch and other books of the Old Testament.

Marriage in the Creation narratives. In Genesis 2:18 God said, “It is not good for man to be alone I will make a helper suitable for him.”⁷ Noteworthy is the

involved a medium, something-and-which had already been created, and to bring life into the creation the Bible writer affirms that God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Gen 2:7).

³Unless otherwise noted all scriptural quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible (Zondervan, 1984).

⁴James M. Efird, *Marriage and Divorce: What the Bible Says* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1985), 22.

⁵According to Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 122, he said that everything about man is unique for “This word for breath is used in the Bible for God and for the life imparted to man – never for animals”.

⁶Jones, “A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage,” 5.

⁷The analogy of events described in this passage suggests that although Genesis 1:27 mentions the creation of humans as male and female, thus indicating perhaps that they were created together, it is clear in chapter two that though man and woman were created on the same day, they were not as a matter of fact created at the same time. It is one thing to believe that God created man and woman and decreed for them to be married in heterosexual monogamy as companions, it is another thing, importantly, to believe that the man was created first and then God thought it fit to create for him a

fact that God stated His intention to make man a woman, one who would be his wife (2:18); but first, He told man to name the animals (19-20). The order is of immense importance and significance here, the author concludes, “But for Adam, no suitable helper was found” (2:20b). While giving name to the animals as they came in pairs indicates Adam’s supremacy over these creatures, it appears God wanted to use that avenue to arouse the curiosity of wanting a help meet in him, one who would be like him.

It is therefore of little surprise that when the woman was created, the man makes an exclamation that seems to suggest that his longing has been provided. Moses, the author of Genesis, points to this creative event on the sixth-day of creation week as the basis for the institution of marriage,⁸ “for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh” (2:24).⁹

Although verse 2:24 does not suggest a clear-cut definition of marriage, there is no enduring, coherent theology that could be formulated on marriage without this verse at its foundation.¹⁰ The Genesis chapter two accounts imply that the marriage commitment is made before God notwithstanding if the parties involved acknowledge

companion. Therefore, that the woman and the marriage relationship were created by God to complete and compliment humanity may not be an overstatement.

⁸Jones, “A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage,” 6.

⁹The commentator, John H. Sailhamer in “Genesis,” *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 2:47, opines that there was no helper who corresponded to the man among the animals. Therefore a special act of creation of the woman was necessary. The implication that the author saw in man’s naming of the animals is a search for a suitable partner. Thus in recounting that no suitable partner was found, the author seems to assure the reader that man was not like the other creatures, hence his word when the woman came to him, “This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh (verse 23). The man recognized his own likeness in the woman without any formal introduction.

¹⁰See Jones, “A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage,” 6-7. It is very important to have a good understanding of this passage in order to understand the Bible’s teaching on divorce, marriage and remarriage. By the creation of the institution of marriage, God seems to demonstrate that it is a quintessential organizing principle in the human race. Thus the institution was created by God, and not by human invention. This biblical truth is very profound and pertinent here.

God or not. Marriage is a covenant relationship before God and exemplifies the Creator-creature relationship that transcends the fall.¹¹ In addition to this assertion, Genesis 2.24 seems to state two other essential elements of marriage:

First, one of the overarching elements stated here is that marriage is made between a man and a woman.¹² This is explicitly made clear from the phrase “a man will ... be united to his wife.” Thus when we are talking of divorce or marriage annulment, it implies a pervasion of the heterosexual marriage alliance.¹³ Therefore, divorce does not apply to homosexuality, incest, bestiality and the likes for they are already wanton perversions of a biblically defined marriage alliance and civil authorities in Bible times were to sever them by death of the persons involved.

Second, marriage is a covenant and involves a formal commitment. This is its essence, created and intended by God to last for life (Rom 7:2).¹⁴ It appears to be so because the leaving and cleaving expressed in Genesis 2.24 seems to recognize a formal, public commitment of some sort between heterosexual couples. These are covenantal terms.¹⁵ Concerning the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, when He asked of her husband, Jesus affirmed the truthfulness of her reply

¹¹ Jones, “A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage,” 10.

¹²This excludes homosexual relationships, incest, and bestiality which other Bible passages also condemn.

¹³That the human race began with marriage among close relations seem to be a necessity that was exceptional in God’s plan. Later as the human race multiplied and became diversified, God clarified His will about marriage by forbidding the marriage of close blood relatives (Lev 18:9; 20:17). So, homosexuality, incest, and bestiality in their various forms are marriage covenant perversions, illegitimate and invalid.

¹⁴This formal commitment is the dividing line between couples who are cohabiting and those who are genuinely and legitimately married. It is true that some societies in their common law of marriages recognize cohabitants as married couples but only those who formalize their commitment according to societal customs can be considered married.

¹⁵Ralph H. Alexander, “Marriage,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 512; See also William F. Luck, *Divorce and Remarriage* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1987), 11.

when she said that she was unmarried (John 4:17b-18). Thus Jesus did not take her cohabitation as a genuine marriage.¹⁶

Simply put, marriage from the foregoing is an institution created by God, and also a solemn commitment or covenant made before Him after some divinely acceptable societal norms have been met between a man and a woman to form an exclusive relationship with each other.¹⁷ On the other hand, divorce is the reverse of marriage, the supposed severance of the one-flesh covenant. It follows then that a stable marriage is predicated on compatible companionship.¹⁸ Thus whenever companionability is viewed as a relationship of convenience, the demeaning of marriage inadvertently begins to set in.

Again, on the marriage which God made and established in Eden, love was the bedrock of the relationship. This “love” is distinguishable from “being in love.”¹⁹ Hugget²⁰ adds that the love which brought about the exclamation made by Adam when God made a help-meet for him was more than a feeling, but a commitment that

¹⁶David J. Macleod, “The Problem of Divorce Part 1: A Survey of Opinions,” *Emmaus Journal* 1 (summer 1992): 140.

¹⁷See Jones, “A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage,” 9.

¹⁸Robert C. Kistler, *Marriage, Divorce, and...* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1987), 27. He suggests that if the meaning becomes properly actuated, the “better” in the marital vow would prevail and as such reflect God’s ideal for marriage creation, but when short-circuited, the marriage may become a marred age, a situation bedeviling our world.

¹⁹C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 85. He suggests that love is not merely a feeling as opposed to ‘being in love,’ but a deep affective unity which is nurtured by the will, strengthened deliberately by habit, and subsequently reinforced by the grace which the husband and wife ask and receive from God.

²⁰Joyce Hugget, *Two into One: Relating in Christian Marriage* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1981), 13.

involved and should involve the whole being, the emptying of self²¹ for the good of the other partner.

Divorce in the Pentateuch. While marriage is God's initiative, divorce is not. It appears in our world today to have become the norm rather than the exception because many a marriage seems to have been contracted only as a short circuit reaction of romantic love.²² He created and solemnized the first marriage on the sixth day of the creation week.²³ It then means that it is a union that should be carefully and thoughtfully entered into between a man and a woman who share a common faith.²⁴ Thus in Genesis 2:18-25, there is no injunction for divorce; even upon the pronouncement of curses because of the entrance of sin, God did not mention divorce. So even though divorce came as part of the aftermath of sin, it is never God's ideal. Marriage is a covenant made before God and so only He can define the circumstances upon which the covenant may be annulled.

Marriage was meant to reflect the love, closeness, compatibility, sanctity, and permanence that pertains to the relationship in the Godhead and that which obtains

²¹Hugget suggests that if heterosexual couples love themselves, their creativity, sensitivity, and inventiveness would be geared towards engendering the growth and maturity of the marriage.

²²See Hugo G. Beigel, "Romantic Love," *American Sociological Review* (June 1951): 327.

²³See General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *The Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), accessed July 22, 2015, <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental>. Marriage is adjudged divine, and reiterated by Jesus as an enduring, life-long union between a man and a woman in a heterosexual relationship. In Genesis 2:18-25 it involves detachment from, to attach permanently to one's spouse. The Bible uses the words 'leave', 'cleave' and 'become'. Thus the couple is to leave other influences and distractions, cleave to each other for them to actually become one as God intended.

²⁴This is so because marriage appears to be a commitment not only to God but also to one's spouse, a commitment predicated on love, honor, respect, forbearance, faithfulness, truthfulness, and forgiveness.

between Christ and His Church,²⁵ who in spite of the wrinkles, frailties, and failings of His Church, has not divorced her; rather, died for her as His Church's redeemer. This is so because the word rendered "be united to" or "cleave" (Gen 2:24 KJV) used sometimes of inanimate objects being stuck together as though one, denotes the idea of commitment in interpersonal relationships but when used metaphorically expresses a state of loyalty, affection, and or close proximity.

Therefore, divorce entered through sin and is always tragic even though some tend to think it is probably a necessary measure to protect the sanctity of marriage because without it as they think, a spouse might do all sort of evil against the other without fear of losing his or her marriage. But this thinking of divorce as a necessary condition though faulty, is because fantasy seems to have overtaken the meaningful²⁶ in humanity's scheme of things, a deal which appears to have come with its attendant doleful consequences²⁷ and societal ills.

Suffice it to say that the first book of the Pentateuch and of the entire Bible where the creation of marriage is mentioned (Gen 2:18-25), does not give any clue to

²⁵It is true that the entrance of sin adversely affected God's creation, marriage inclusive, but allowing God to fix such misgivings and squabbles, as it were, thus cultivating a humble, humane, gracious and forgiving spirit may prove beneficial.

²⁶Robert C. Kistler, *Marriage, Divorce, and ...*, 24.

²⁷See Roland H. Bainton, *What Christianity Says about Sex, Love, and Marriage* (New York: Association, 1957), 17-19. To ensure that divorce and its consequences are adequately checkmated, he enunciates suggestively that marriage is somewhat sacramental. Not as others seem to regard marriage as a sacrament but in the sense that any leverage to its sacredness or anything that shortchanges its holiness, automatically demeans it. It is an institution made by and before God and therefore holy; any human ideology that tends to regulate it apart from God's ideal renders it unholy. Also Kistler, *Marriage, Divorce, and ...*, 24 opines further that to curb the ills of divorce, the prerequisite of marriage which is love is to be imbibed. Nothing will seem to be fundamentally amiss if love becomes the basis of marriages. The Bible records that Isaac took Rebekah as his wife and loved her (Gen. 24:67). This does not just suggest a strong emotion because when the emotion subsides, the love wanes. Another fact that can curb the ugly menace of divorce he suggests as being companionable. This emphasizes having a common set of ideals, aspirations, goals, and a common endeavor. See also Allan Hubbard, *Is the Family Here to Stay?* (Waco, TX: Word Book, 1971), 16, and Williston Walker, *John Calvin* (New York: Schocken Books, 1906), 236. Calvin was said to have exclaimed upon the demise of his wife that he had lost the best companion of his life.

the emergence of divorce. In fact no one knows how divorce began.²⁸ The most often quoted text in the Pentateuch in support of divorce is Deuteronomy 24:1-4. But does this text legislate or sanction divorce?²⁹ The scholarly debates and discussions elicited by this passage seem unending. But when adequately dissected, the Deuteronomy passage seems to contain a subjective element of divorce and a concrete ground for divorce.³⁰ Also 24:1b contains the procedure for divorce, while 24:2-3 addresses the issue of remarriage and the second divorce, and 24:4 contains the apodosis.³¹

Subsequently, Isaksson³² intimates that the phrase is euphemistic and is used to denote an indecent exposure of the wife's *pudenda*. Also Merrill³³ elucidates that the noun *erwah* connotes both nakedness and sexual organs and as such when put

²⁸See Jay E. Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 13. While no one knows how divorce came, it seems to be introduced by the enemy of God's Church as a rejection of God's original plan of indissolubility of the one-flesh marriage institution. Jesus also refers to this original intention of God when he referred the Jews (Matt. 19:8) to the Genesis account of marriage.

²⁹Richard M. Davidson, "Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament: A Fresh Look at Deuteronomy 24: 1-4," *Journal of Adventist Theological Society*, (Oct 1-2 1999): 2-22. Some of the earlier English translations of the Bible like KJV, ERV, ASV, seem to infer such in their rendering of the passage for it appears they began the rendering of the legislation on verse 1b. But the passage seems to be a case law as opposed to apodictic laws, that is, where there is an explicit command. He suggests that there is no legislation of divorce in the passage. The only legislation can be found in verse 4 which begins with the apodosis or actual legislation, thus the protasis via conditions in verse 1-3 do not contain any legislation. What this implies is that God does not in any form sanction or approve divorce in Deut 24: 1-4, rather the block of verses seem to be expressing a tacit disapproval even though the act of divorce was tolerated and not punished.

³⁰See Richard M. Davidson, "Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament: A Fresh Look at Deuteronomy 24:1-4," 5-11. It is suggested that the subjective element of divorce in the passage has to do with like or dislike, where there is no approval or affection, hence the sentence "If she has not found favor in his eyes." It does not end here for the passage seems to give a concrete ground for divorce and that is because he has found some indecency in her, Hebrew *erwat dabar*.

³¹Ibid.

³²See Abel Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple: A Study with Special Reference to Mathew 13:12 and 1Corinthians 11:3-16*, trans by N. Tomkinson with J. Gray (Lund, Sweden: Gleerup, 1965), 26. The inference here is that any other exposure of the wife's private part besides that which the husband champions is loathsome to the husband.

³³Eugene H. Merrill, "Deuteronomy," *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 317, quoted in Davidson, "Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament: A Fresh Look at Deuteronomy 24:1-4," 6.

together suggests indecent or improper nudity. Davidson seems to be in agreement with Isaksson when he asserts that *erwat dabar* includes adultery but not synonymous with it.³⁴ It may suffice to say that the divergent opinions or interpretations³⁵ on the phrase may have been brought about as a result of the two Hebrew schools of Shammai and Hillel³⁶ whose interpretations differ one from the other.

On the phrase *erwat dabar*, Shammai in his interpretation emphasized *erwat* as unchastity or illicit exposure as legitimate ground for divorce. But Hillel, on the other hand, emphasized *dabar* and interpreted it to mean virtually everything or anything that is detestable³⁷ to the husband as ground for divorce. Thus, upon these two schools of thought hinges the somewhat seeming perennial argument concerning what should or should not be a legitimate ground for divorce to be actuated.³⁸

Furthermore, Davidson in his exegesis of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 seems to suggest that though the passage allows divorce on the ground of *erwat dabar* consequent upon the hermeneutic principle espoused by Shammai, such divorce was not in tandem with divine injunction pertaining to the marriage institution³⁹ made by

³⁴He concurs when he asserts that the phrase encompasses not only illegal sexual affiliations but lesser exposures as well.

³⁵See Davidson, "Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament: A Fresh Look at Deuteronomy 24:1-4," 5.

³⁶See Jacob Neusner, translator, *The Talmud of Babylonia: An American Translation, vol 18c*, Gittim, chap 6-9 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1992), 117-119.

³⁷See Roy Gane, "Old Testament Principles Relevant to Divorce and Remarriage," (Paper presented to Pacific Union Conference of SDA's Divorce, Adultery, and Remarriage Committee, 1993, revised 1995 for syllabus for Andrews University Class in Law, Covenant, and Sabbath), 162. According to Shammai, a man is not supposed to divorce his wife unless there is confirmed unchastity found in her, but Hillel's school supported divorce even if the woman spoiled the husband's dish.

³⁸For example John Murray, *Divorce* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1961), 10-11 seems to have enumerated six reasons while the Deuteronomy 24:1 cannot refer to adultery, prominent among them being the fact that adultery in the Bible was punishable by the death penalty and as such cannot also constitute divorce.

³⁹Davidson, "Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament: A Fresh Look at Deuteronomy 24:1-4," 21.

God in Eden. But he sees an intertextual relationship between the prohibitions given by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:29 and Leviticus 17, 18⁴⁰ and seems to conclude that *erwat dabar* of the Old Testament anticipates the *porneia* of the New Testament.⁴¹ Thus Jesus' exceptive clause of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 anticipated Shammai's speculation of unchastity or equivalent of those practices that elicited the death penalty in the Old Testament, although Jesus' exceptive clause is viewed as stricter compared to the schools of Shammai and Hillel.⁴² But the question would be if Jesus the creator of marriage needed to depend on the thoughts of created mortal man to know what to say on marriage.

On another instance, Bacchiocchi⁴³ had viewed Deuteronomy 24:1-4 to be a discouragement to hasty divorce, an act which was prevalent among the nations that surrounded Israel.⁴⁴ So, instead of sanctioning divorce, it is Bacchiocchi's view that it

⁴⁰Davidson, "Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament: A Fresh Look at Deuteronomy 24:1-4," 21.

⁴¹Ibid. But Mueller writes that what was translated sexual offense included a woman being in public with open hair or with bare arms, an outgoing attitude toward slaves, neighbors, spinning on the street, drinking on the street and bathing with men, see Ekkehardt Mueller, "Jesus and Divorce and Remarriage in Matthew 19," 12.

⁴²The stricter sense is seen to be referring to those listed in Leviticus 18 which includes incest, bestiality, adultery, and homosexual practices.

⁴³Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1991), 43.

⁴⁴See also Fred H. Wight, *Manners and Customs of the Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody, 1953), 125. The author infers in his work that divorce was practiced randomly among the heathen nations that surrounded Israel. A man could divorce his wife for anything, all that he needed to say before witnesses was that she ceases to be his wife and that was all. Consequently, women were seen wearing their chains of diamond, gold, and rings anywhere they went in the case of any eventuality because those costly chains constituted means of income. Also J. Carl Laney in his work *The Divorce Myth*, 29; writes that men were divorcing their wives for a weekend fling only to call them back when clothes have piled for laundry and the house was unkempt. Thus this prevailing culture occasioned Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which supposed to serve as deterrent to the men of Israel.

was a means applied⁴⁵ by Moses to disabuse the mind of his countrymen from doing as their heathen neighbors. It was a measure to counter hasty divorce as it were.

Again, consequent upon the fact that adultery does not constitute divorce in the Old Testament times (Lev 20:10; Deut 20:22-24), even the act of defiling one's spouse before marriage (Deut 22:28),⁴⁶ translating *erwat dabar* to mean adultery seems not to be acceptable to Bacchiocchi. To him *erwat dabar* is used often to refer to shameful exposure of the human body (Gen 9:22-23; Exod 20:26; Lam 1:8; Ezek 16:36-37). The term seems to be also used to refer to inability to cover excrement (Deut 23:13-14). Therefore, it applies from Bacchiocchi's view that *erwat dabar* in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 seems to intimate the allowability of divorce for some unspecified kind of indecency which could be unprecedentedly heinous and original upon the perpetrator and therefore unforgiveable other than an illicit sexual affair.⁴⁷ This assertion though logical may portend some theological ambiguity as it were.

Moreover, concerning certificate of divorce initiated by Moses, the process did not give the husband license⁴⁸ to divorce his wife at will. Rather it served as a stringent requisition⁴⁹ that whoever did so should endeavor to secure his wife from

⁴⁵The point by Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 43, that the passage of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 in the Pentateuch does not sanction divorce is so salient that Davidson writing in 1999 agrees with as has already been pointed out, see Davidson, "Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament: A Fresh Look at Deuteronomy 24:1-4, 21." But Bacchiocchi had opined that the meaning of the Hebrew word *erwat dabar* is uncertain and in as much as the two rabbinical schools of interpretation Shammai and Hillel are divided as to what it actually refers to, it then follows that the non credibility of their views cannot be overemphasized.

⁴⁶Ibid. Bacchiocchi suggests that Deuteronomy 24:1 must refer to something other than adultery or sexual uncleanness, for those were sins subject to the death penalty.

⁴⁷See Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 43.

⁴⁸Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Gospel according to Mathew Explained* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984), 145.

⁴⁹Alexander, *The Gospel according to Mathew Explained*, 145.

unnecessary injury by certifying that she was not chargeable with unchaste conduct, but divorced upon some minor pretext.⁵⁰

It was to discourage these occurrences and alleviate its effects in the case of their occurrence that perhaps prompted the injunction given in Deuteronomy 24:1-4.⁵¹ Also it does appear that the signing of the divorce document suggests the possibility of reconciliation in so far as the woman had not entered into another marital relationship.⁵²

Sequel to the various views about *erwat dabar*, it could be observed that they are somewhat distinct one from the other. But the overarching principle undergirding these views is that divorce is not part of God's plan when He instituted marriage, it is an antithesis to His original plan of marriage and equals a negation or rejection of the divine plan of indissolubility.⁵³

Therefore, it is worth deducing from the elucidation so far that notwithstanding what one takes *erwat dabar* to mean, the contemporary understanding of marriage as a social contract⁵⁴ which is governed by civil laws rather

⁵⁰See Joe M. Sprinkle, "Old Testament Perspectives on Divorce and Remarriage," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society (JETS)* 40 (December 1997): 539.

⁵¹See Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 169. He infers that divorce negates God's original plan for marriage (Gen. 2:24) and thus did not originate with or from God. Also he suggests that the bill of divorce while it might elicit reconciliation also serves to prevent perpetually the room for marrying the divorced woman again by her first husband in the case of a second divorce by her second husband or his death, so that the bill does not become a license for licentiousness.

⁵²See also William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984), 106-110. It is viewed that if remarriage occurs between two divorcees, it becomes incest, a sin which necessitated the extermination of the Canaanites from their land (Lev. 18:25-26). It is viewed in the Pentateuch that by the first union they were not only husband and wife but bloodily related through sex as husband and wife.

⁵³See Jay E. Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), XIII.

⁵⁴See E. A. Griffin, *The Mind Changers* (Wheaton, IL: 1983), 32, many appear to view marriage in today's world as a human institution not divine any longer, entered in order to satisfy one's

than a divinely instituted sacred covenant guaranteed by and made before God Himself, gives rise to divorce.⁵⁵ Again, apart from the Pentateuch, there are some other books in the Old Testament that talk about divorce, one of which is Malachi. In Malachi, divorce is addressed as a big threat to the institution of marriage for it serves to erode the premise to raise a godly family.⁵⁶

It appears that God raised Malachi upon the return of Israel from captivity to expose the sin of exogamous matrimonial affiliations and divorce among other vices. So in the book of Malachi, divorce seems to be likened to the act of covering one's garment with violence. It is equivalent to a nefarious, treacherous act (Ezek 16:8; cf. Ruth 3:9).⁵⁷ Thus, God made marriage not divorce, and is a witness to all legitimately contracted heterosexual marriages. It is obvious that the book of Genesis does not give any reason for divorce nor sanctioned it. But because it was practiced during his era and he could do virtually nothing to stop the inhuman act, Moses gave the injunction in Deuteronomy perhaps to prevent his people from doing as other

social, emotional, sexual and economic inertia. Thus when these cravings are no longer satisfactorily met, termination seems indispensable.

⁵⁵Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 164, apart from the rendering of *erwat dabar* of Deuteronomy 24:1-4, there are conflicting worlds which are discussed that militate against the backdrop of incessant divorce bedeviling the society in contemporary times; secularism tend to have reduced marriage to a social contract that is temporal and governed by state laws, thus the sense of its sacredness seem to have become oblivious to many; also, the quest or right for self-sufficiency, self-fulfillment, self-development, and self-actualization is another conflicting worldview with marriage, so if marriage poses a threat to self actualization, it should be dissolved. Also the postmodern concept of relativism is another conflicting worldview, militating against marriage; here, nothing is absolute, and it appears that this concept of relativism brought about the divorce law which has made divorce very easy and cheap with lawyers advocating for low costs for consultation and arbitration.

⁵⁶Ibid., 171; God hates divorce. The Church is seen as His bride, He does not divorce His Church either by abandonment, through litigation or divorce law in spite all the inadequacies of the bride; rather, He sought and delivered her. This seems to be the message God sought to teach the Israelites through the ministry of Hosea and his marriage to Gomer.

⁵⁷In fact, thinking and effecting divorce is akin to faithlessness, and that God abhors divorce is mentioned three times in four verses in Malachi 2 to show emphasis. See Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 163.

surrounding nations were doing, for though the practice seemed prevalent, it actually was not God's intention.

New Testament Perspectives of Marriage and Divorce

Due to the fact that the audience that made up the New Testament were mainly Jews who had imbibed the teachings of either Shammai or Hillel as far as divorce is concerned, but mainly that of Hillel, the controversy as to what should bring about divorce and remarriage continued. And upon seeing Jesus, the renaissance of the teaching came to focus. What informs the theology of the New Testament regarding divorce? Does the hermeneutics of divorce in the New Testament offer a different but clear insight to the existing hermeneutic imbroglio? Or does it posit a relapse to one of the existing schools of thought already known and held by the people?

Divorce in the Gospels. In the gospels, Jesus spoke on divorce and remarriage when He was approached by the Jews with a question to that effect. But prior to that, during the Sermon on the Mount, He had made a declaration (Matt 5:32). The statements Jesus made on divorce and remarriage seem to have been understood in various ways by various people.

The understanding has culminated in various views concerning the concept of divorce and remarriage. The first view seems to suggest from the passages that divorce is not permissible even in the case of adultery⁵⁸ and so no remarriage.⁵⁹ Another view sees the possibility of divorce only in the case of adultery but no remarriage.⁶⁰ Yet there is another view that sees unfaithfulness during the engagement

⁵⁸See Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 163.

⁵⁹Joseph A. Webb, and Patricia L. Webb, *Divorce and Remarriage: The Trojan Horse Within the Church* (Grand Rapids: Xulon, 2008), 153.

period as the only factor that could necessitate both divorce and remarriage.⁶¹ Also another view sees divorce and remarriage of the innocent partner as tenable upon the case of adultery.⁶² In the gospel narratives, Jesus' comments on divorce and remarriage could be seen in Matthew 5:32; 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12; and Luke 16:18.

The crucial difference however, which has been the object of scholarly speculations remains the exception clause found in Matthew's narrative⁶³ which does not appear in Mark and Luke. This exception clause has been understood in different ways by many, but it is the submission of this study that instead of Jesus supporting any of the existing thoughts, He stood alone among Jewish teachers and directed their attention to the Genesis account of marriage creation.⁶⁴ His view as the creator of marriage is paramount and therefore should supersede that of other rabbis. But while

⁶⁰See Gordon J. Wenham and William E. Heth, *Jesus and Divorce* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 19-44.

⁶¹John De Reeper, "Marriage and Divorce in Present Day Theology," *AFER* 16 no 3 (Oct 1974): 390-394.

⁶²See Craig S. Keener, *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teachings of the New Testament*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 49. See also Wenham and Heth, *Jesus and Divorce*, 73-99; also the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 145-155; "Divorce," *The Seventh-day Adventist Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1956), 5: 454. It is opined that the innocent party is at liberty to remarry in the case of a confirmed intolerable, unfaithful, and or adulterous relationship of a spouse. This seems to be the stand of the Seventh-day Adventist Church too.

⁶³Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 173. The inquisitiveness of the Pharisees which perhaps was occasioned by the hermeneutical impasse surrounding the schools of Shammai and Hillel seems to be the context upon which Jesus gave an answer at least in Matthew 19 and Mark 10. They may have come to Him in order to know who among the rabbis Jesus would support consequent upon their understanding of Deuteronomy 24:1-4, or it may have been their aim to entrap Him either of laxity on the issue or an obnoxious narrow conservatism. But Jesus' answer in Matthew 19:4; and Mark 10:6-9, objects to the concession to any of the rabbi's view, but draws their attention to the origin of marriage at creation in Genesis thus pinpointing that God's ideal for marriage creation is indissolubility. Mueller did have this opinion too; see Mueller, "Jesus and Divorce and Remarriage in Matthew 19," 12. See also John Murray, *Divorce*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1961), 33; He infers that divorce is the breaking of a seal engraved in God's hand.

⁶⁴See Hugh Montefiore, "Jesus on Divorce and Remarriage," in *Marriage, Divorce, and the Church: The Report of the Commission on the Christian Doctrine of Marriage* (London: SPCK, 1971), 37.

some appear to see the difference in the renderings of Matthew, Mark, and Luke as an interpolation⁶⁵ on the side of Matthew, some others see the difference as a result of the target audience or reader community of each writer.⁶⁶

Again, on the issue of the exception clause proper which is *porneia*,⁶⁷ scholars are divided. Bacchiocchi's view of *porneia* is that it has wider and narrower meanings.⁶⁸ He seems to infer that if Jesus had meant *porneia* as extramarital sexual infidelity in Matthew, the people would have understood Him to have conceded to Shammai's conservative school of rabbinic interpretation. But it appears that Jesus really inferred that *porneia* should be the only legitimate cause for divorce because the word connotes every act of illicit sex outside of marriage and stands at variance from *moicheia* which is adultery, an act perpetrated between a married man and a married woman who is not his wife. Thus *porneia* is used in a general sense not otherwise as Bacchiocchi seems to infer.

⁶⁵This appears to be the stand of Laney when he reasons that for Matthew who wrote later to have been the only one to have included such when others who wrote earlier like Mark did not write any exception clause suggests an interpolation, because it may seem unlikely for Christ who pointed his detractors back to the Genesis account of marriage creation which is predicated in indissolubility as the divine ideal, to have come back to give an exception; J. Carl Laney, *The Divorce Myth*, 29.

⁶⁶Bacchiocchi in *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 173 seems to be of the view that Matthew wrote having the Jewish community in mind, while Mark and Luke had Gentile communities in mind. It seems likely that in Matthew 5:32, Jesus emphasized the spirit of the law rather than the letter which they appear to cling unto.

⁶⁷According to F. Hauck, "*Porneia*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 6:580, the word is generally translated to mean fornication, unchastity, and marital unfaithfulness. It is from the root word *pernemi* which literally means "to sell" which invariably implies selling of one's body for money. And the English word 'pornography' is a derivative of the Greek, *porneia*.

⁶⁸Ibid. He intimates that its wider meaning includes extra-marital affairs such as prostitution, fornication, and adultery, while the narrower meaning includes other pervasive sexual escapades and indulgences like incest, bestiality, homosexuality and lesbianism, coupled with unlawful marriages within the forbidden boundaries of familial relationships (1 Cor 5:1; Rom 1:29; and Acts 15:20, 29).

Also they might have reported Him to Herod Antipas in whose territory He was in Perea.⁶⁹ Again, it would have meant teaching the Greco-Romans a different thing as recorded in Mark 10:1-2; Luke 16:18, while teaching the Jews a different thing altogether.⁷⁰ Still on the gospels and the exception clause, Bacchiocchi seem not to subscribe to adultery as the right meaning of *porneia* in the Matthean context. This he seems to opine because the Greek word for adultery is not *porneia* rather *moichea*, and in the Bible, *moichea* was never a reason for divorce, rather death.⁷¹ But it appears the death penalty for adultery had been abolished by that time. It has been stressed in this study that *porneia* includes every illicit sexual act, *moichea* inclusive. Thus Matthew may seem to have retained the words uttered by Jesus to a people that no longer practice the death penalty for adultery.

On the other hand, Mueller suggests that *porneia* included adultery, and that while adultery amounted to death penalty, the penalty was not always carried out on

⁶⁹Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 179-180, thinks that interpreting *porneia* as extramarital affair would tend to contradict the immediate context where Jesus had already rejected the concession of Moses as an antithesis to the one flesh, permanent, indissoluble union of marriage which God made, in Matthew 19:6. The Greek word *konizeto* translated asunder connotes the abrupt cessation of a practice in progress. Thus as Jesus did not accept the provision of Moses in putting asunder the one flesh union in marriage via divorce, it would seem unlikely for Him to come here in Matthew to support a rabbi's school of thought by referring to fornication in its wider sense. He could not teach that our righteousness should exceed that of the Jews and yet subscribe to their concessions.

⁷⁰Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 180-182.

⁷¹Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 180-182. He affirms that interpreting *porneia* as adultery would seem to contradict Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, where the apostle emphasizes the "no divorce" teaching of Jesus in Mark and Luke. But as has been succinctly analyzed above, we have seen that *porneia* includes adultery and other sexual pervasions outside of marriage. Still on the exceptive clause, it should be noted that in Matthew 19:9 Jesus pinpoints that except for *porneia*, any man who divorces his wife and remarries commits *moichea* whereas in Matthew 5:32, it was the woman who was referred as being forced into *moichea* if the divorce is not as a result of *porneia*, thus making Christ's words stern and direct, absolute and all-encompassing.

perpetrators like Herod Antipas and Herodias in Matthew 14:3-4.⁷² But the death penalty was for Jews. Also the question of whether Jews had the power to execute the death penalty on Roman procurators is another thing. The cases of Hosea's wife and Joseph and Mary are also cited as exceptional cases where the death penalty was not carried out.⁷³ Although Bacchiocchi seems to assert that *porneia* as used by Jesus in Matthew refers to other pervasions like incest and not adultery hence his reference to the death penalty, yet using instances of Hosea and Joseph and Mary may be over stretching the issue as those cases were exceptional. Also see the footnote quoted above.

It is worthy of note that apart from those who may hold the view that Jesus did not give any exception clause, others are of the opinion that *porneia* should constitute a cogent reason for divorce to be effected. Another contention seems to brew around what *porneia* actually stand for. Does it mean adultery and or fornication, or marriage to a near relative or unfaithfulness during the betrothal period?

Some have suggested that if indeed *porneia* referred to adultery or sexual misconduct as reason for divorce, the disciples could not have been so amazed and astonished at Christ's word which made them to say it would be better not to marry.⁷⁴ The point here is that Bacchiocchi, Mueller, and Nichol among others hold firmly to the exceptive clause of the Matthean gospel as the only reason for divorce, but while

⁷²Mueller, "Jesus and Divorce and Remarriage in Matthew 19," 12. But it appears that the case of Hosea's wife was quite different and for a purpose. In the first instance, a prophet was forbidden by the law to marry a whore; Joseph had to be intercepted by God before he could abandon the thought of divorcing Mary.

⁷³See Mark Geldard, "Jesus Teaching on Divorce: Thoughts on the Meaning of *Porneia* in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9," *The Churchman* 92, 2(1978):134-143.

⁷⁴See Edward Schillebeekx, *Marriage, Human Reality, and Saving Mystery* (London: SPCK, 1965), 153.

Bacchiocchi suggests that *porneia* in the passage does not refer to adultery, Mueller writes it can refer to adultery.⁷⁵

It appears that Bacchiocchi understood *porneia* as marriages contracted which conflicted with the laid down rules of Leviticus 18:6-18, which is a reference to the marriage of near relatives,⁷⁶ as the marriages that Jesus said required divorce. But this assertion may seem ambiguous as the Jews were well conversant with the law which enjoins non-marriage with near relatives; also most marriages in ancient near east seem to have been contracted by the parents.⁷⁷ And as such, the parents who knew the biological lineage of would-be husband and wife could not allow such.

Again, if it were so Mark and Luke should have also incorporated such in the gospel books that bear their names for such prohibition should reach the Gentiles also. Also Ezra 9-10, which Bacchiocchi cited as an example of divorce because of incest,⁷⁸ which he refers to as *porneia* seem not to have been referring to incest rather exogamy which was prohibited by God in Deuteronomy 7:3-4.

⁷⁵Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 180-184; Mueller, "Jesus and Marriage and Divorce in Mathew 19," 14-17.

⁷⁶Ibid., 184. See also Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Matthean Divorce Texts and Some New Palestinian Evidence," *Theological Studies* 37 (1976): 213-221.

⁷⁷See Wight, *Manners and Customs of the Bible Lands*, 126.

⁷⁸Bacchiocchi's whole suggestion centers on the fact that there is an exception clause - *porneia*, but that it is not adultery, rather marriage among people who are related. But other SDA scholars view the exception clause of Jesus teaching as referring to sexual immoralities; adultery, fornication, incest, bestiality, homosexuality, and as factors that could elicit divorce with the innocent party having the legitimate right to remarry. See also Bruce Vawter, "The Divorce Clauses in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 16 (1954): 155-167; quoted in Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 184-185. See also William Lillie, *Studies in New Testament Ethics*, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), 119-120; quoted in Mueller, "Jesus and Marriage and Divorce in Matthew 19," 15 where he goes further to suggest that since the divorced woman in Jewish culture has the right to remarry, and the husband too, only that both of them could not marry each other again, it follows then that such practice was also carried out during New Testament times. It would seem probable to infer that in New Testament times the innocent party was prevented from remarriage after the promiscuous partner had divorced.

Divorce in Pauline writings. The books written by Apostle Paul have also been alluded to in the issue of divorce. The outstanding passages are Romans 7:1-3 and 1 Corinthians 7. Paul in Romans while discussing the believers' freedom in Christ likens it to a marriage relationship where the wife is bound to the husband as long as both of them are alive. But upon the death of the man, the wife is free and can remarry if she chooses to do so. The concept of divorce seems not to be the focus here.

In his discourse of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, it appears Paul re-echoes Christ's injunction of the indissolubility of marriage.⁷⁹ Regarding the issue of the unbelieving spouse, some seem to understand it to mean divorce upon desertion or abandonment⁸⁰ by an unbelieving spouse. But separation does not intrinsically mean divorce;⁸¹ the Greek words, *koridzo* or *chorizo*- means separate, but *apoluo*- divorce does not mean the same thing, although some see it as "separated by divorce," thus alluding that divorce is implied, it is also deduced by some that the two words are used interchangeably.⁸² But was it the actual message the Apostle sought to convey consequent upon the letter he got concerning the things happening in the Church which made him to write the canonical 1 Corinthians?

⁷⁹See Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 190-192.

⁸⁰General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 145-155.

⁸¹F. F. Bruce, *Paul: An Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: 1977), 267. He intimates that for Christian couples, divorce is excluded by the law of Christ.

⁸²Bacchiocchi in *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 192 summarizes Paul's sayings to be perhaps that for believers, no divorce, marriage is indissoluble, but an unbeliever who instead of getting converted wants to depart, the Christian spouse can remarry because the will of the Christian cannot be forced on the one who does not want to remain in the marriage. On the other hand, Mueller in "Jesus and Divorce and Remarriage in Matthew 19," 12 opines that desertion by an unbelieving spouse equals divorce but suggests affirmatively that the case of 1 Corinthians 7 is different from the exception clause of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9; See also Craig Blomberg, "1 Corinthians," *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 134.

The word *chorizo* in verse 10-11 means to separate, to divide, leave; and in its passive form, to separate oneself or be separated from, thus Paul cautions that a wife must not *chorizetai* herself from the marriage but if she eventually does should remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. But the man is cautioned not to *aphienai* the wife. This word which means to send off, let go, comes from two Greek words *apo* and *hiemi*, its object may be material or a personal one. But its meaning traverses on both *aniemi and pariemi, apoluo* which stipulates “to release as from bond,” “to loose or set loose” is also from the word. It appears that its legal use is much attested to.

Thus to release someone from a legal relation is inferred, “be it office, marriage, obligation or debt.” So from the verses 10-11, Paul’s submission seems to be that there should be no separation and there should be no divorce.

Although Thiselton⁸³ in a bid to support his view that *koridzo* or *chorizo* implies divorce together with *aphiemi* opines that the difference between the two words may be partly explained in terms of the gender of each agent. But worthy of note is that in verse 15, the Apostle uses *chorizo* to refer to both male and female when he talks of the unbeliever departing. So if in verse 10-11 he uses two words in respect of the gender being talked about, which of the genders owns the injunction of verse 15. Paul’s admonition in that passage seems to be that in the case of an eventual separation, the couple should remain permanently unmarried or get reconciled, and he seems not to proffer another formula for divorce. It appears that in verse 15, he reiterates what he had buttressed in verse 10-11 that there shall be no separation, but if it occurs, it should not lead to divorce and remarriage rather reconciliation or else

⁸³See Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 520. See also F. Hauck, “*Porneia*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 6:580.

both remain unmarried. In the passage, the issue of divorce seems not to be what the context suggests. It appears that Paul is discussing the issue of mixed marriages and not divorce.

The task would be to ascertain what constituted unbelief in the days of Paul. Could it be that at the early stage of the Church those tagged unbelievers were pagans who had not yielded their lives wholly to Christ? Can people who believe in one God and worship together allege today after a misunderstanding between a husband and wife that one is an unbeliever and thus seek for divorce? Marriage therefore should not be entered hastily and the presence of the creator of marriage ought to be adequately sought before entering into it proper.

Sequel to this, it is obvious that some husbands and wives, because of societal influences, tend to be nagging, pugnacious, belligerent, troublesome, abusive, intolerant, among other bad things; some even go to the extent of trying to murder their spouses. These situations call for caution as those who engage in such things seem not to be converted, but though caution is to be applied, these situations seem not to call for legislation of divorce of what God has joined together no matter how difficult or hard it may seem; the prayer therapy may also seem needful.

Again, in Paul's letter, the separation is the initiative of the unbeliever not the believer. He had earlier suggested that those married to unbelievers should not leave upon conversion rather with a winsome attitude help them come to Christ. Thus reading desertion or abandonment into the passage as another legitimate reason for divorce may seem ambiguous. Only death separates permanently husband and wife.

Divorce in Extra-biblical Sources

Divorce in the Inter-testamental Period

During the inter-testamental period, reference to divorce is scarcely made in their literature. Some seem to find no apparent necessity to include it in their interpretation of the Apocrypha or even in their purview of the Pseudepigrapha.⁸⁴ It is only in such texts like Ben Sira that three passages appear to refer to the termination of marriage, a stand that seems more Hillelite.⁸⁵

Philo. He seems to retain the patriarchal structure of Jewish marriage and divorce. His interpretation is rather more restrictive and cannot be the Hillelite interpretation. He seems to defend one-time marriage but accepts divorce as part of the general culture. Being an Egyptian Jew, he could not bring divorce to an end but seem to have maintained a conservative stand or approach to it.

Josephus. It could be succinctly pointed out that the liberal tradition on divorce which Philo cited but did not subscribe to was completely and wholeheartedly embraced by Josephus.⁸⁶

Qumran. The Qumran scrolls seem to posit a very strait attitude toward marriage and divorce. Both polygamy and divorce⁸⁷ were strongly condemned and there was a tendency to rule them out at Qumran.

⁸⁴Philip Sigal, *The Halakah of Jesus of Nazareth According to the Gospel of Matthew* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), 106-107. Notwithstanding the divergences in the Apocrypha and the Pentateuch, the Jubilees in the Apocrypha contain no divorce interpretation which varies from that found in the Pentateuch.

⁸⁵Ibid., 106. See also Peter Tomson, "Divorce Halakhah in Paul and the Jesus Tradition," in *Reimund Berringer et al*, ed (Boston, MA: Brill, 2010), 308-310. The inference here suggests that throughout the post-exilic period, there were two principal competitive attitudes toward divorce: the first was the anti-divorce attitude as could be seen in Malachi, the second was for easy divorce occasioned by male dominance.

⁸⁶For more on Philo, Josephus and intertestamental period, see Peter J. Tomson, "Divorce Halakkhah in Paul and the Jesus Tradition," 308.

⁸⁷Ibid.

As could be observed in the first century, the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, the writings of Philo, Josephus, and the Qumran scrolls, all point to the diversity of opinions and prevalence of flexibility in the understanding and interpretation of divorce. Some maintain very strict opinions while some others were more liberal, a give way to what obtains in contemporary times not just in the secular society but also in the Church including the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Divorce in Church History

It appears that some early Church Fathers like Hermas who wrote as early as AD 90, Ignatius AD 110, Justin Martyr AD 151, Clement of Alexandria AD 208 among other early Church Fathers from AD 90-AD 419, advocated and or maintained a position which suggests an indissoluble marital alliance.⁸⁸ But upon the allowance of divorce and remarriage for a variety of reasons by the Eastern part of Rome, Augustine made marriage a sacrament perhaps to ensure that the liberalism did not infiltrate into the West.⁸⁹

Sequel to this, it could be that the understanding of many who refer to marriage as a sacrament may have come about consequent upon the rendering of Ephesians 5:32 by Jerome in the Vulgate where he translates ‘mystery’ as

⁸⁸D. J. Atkinson, “Divorce,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 2:345. Some early Church Fathers like Hermas who wrote in AD90 opined that even if a woman is caught in adultery, she should be forgiven unless she persists in the act; also Ignatius in AD 110 frowned at divorce. It is believed that these people among some others worked directly with some of Christ’s disciples. But later things changed. It is reasoned that the Eastern part of the Catholic Church developed a tradition that allowed divorce with right of remarriage for a variety of reasons.

⁸⁹Ibid. It is suggested that although Augustine championed the course and brought it to the fore, the view had many adherents: Hugo of St. Victor in his *Dogmetica, Patrologia Latina*, CLXXVI, 153-174, 479-520, stresses that marriage is indissoluble, reason being that it reflects Christ’s relationship with his Church and as such a sacrament. Peter Lombard in *Sententiarum iv, Vol 1, Patrologia Latina* CXCII, 841-842 views marriage as a sign of God’s grace and thus a sacrament. Thomas Aquinas seems also to have consented to the notion of marriage as a sacrament. See Thomas Aquinas, *Commentum in Lib. IV, Sententiarum*, XXVL II. III. 4, Opera, XI, 75.

sacrament.⁹⁰ This rendering perhaps seems to be the reason behind the sacramentalization of marriage by the Roman Church coupled with the liberalism prevalent in the Western part of the empire.

Though this view might have been held by some, yet some others do not view it as such.⁹¹ And this was mainly during the era of reformation. Desiderius Erasmus as quoted in the last numbered footnote does not see sacrament in the text likewise Martin Luther and John Calvin who seemed willing to allow divorce in cases of desertion. On the other hand, Zwingli and Bucer⁹² in their hermeneutics suggest that divorce could be necessitated by an incurable disease which hinders sexual relationship. To what time is not specified although other reformers seem not to agree to this assertion.⁹³

It could be perhaps that what obtains in contemporary times as regards the divorce and remarriage controversy may have been a renaissance of what obtained in antique times in the Roman Empire.⁹⁴ The social aspect seemed to have

⁹⁰See V. Nørskov Olsen, *The New Testament Logia on Divorce* (Tübingen, Germany: J.C.B. Mohr, 1971), 2.

⁹¹Erasmus does not see sacrament in the text, but opines that the mystery suggests the unity which exists in the Godhead, and between Christ and His Church, which should become an example for husband and wife to love one another. Also, other continental reformers in seeking to revert to the biblical understanding of the concept of divorce during the middle ages, rejected the sacramentalization of marriage or its indissolubility. Pollentius a contemporary of Augustine in his bid to refute the indissolubility of marriage suggests that a person who commits adultery is dead already and as such the 'innocent' party should remarry. In his analogy, adultery is tantamount to spiritual death. See also Philip Schaff V. "Marriage and Concupiscence," *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1956), 7.

⁹²See Olsen, *The New Testament Logia on Divorce*, 4. See also Jeremy Collingwood, "Divorce and Remarriage," *Anvil* vol 3, No 1 (1986): 73-74; it is stated that some modern evangelicals like Martyn Lloyd-Jones, John Murray and John Stott sees willful desertion as a worthy cause for divorce. Also John Dillenberger, ed., "The Pagan Servitude of the Church," in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (NY: Anchor Books, 1961), 339.

⁹³Olsen, *The New Testament Logia on Divorce*, 4-5.

⁹⁴David L. Snuth, "Divorce and Remarriage from the Early Church to John Wesley," *Trinity Journal* II, No 2 (Fall 1990): 131-142. So the problem of divorce and remarriage is not recent for the Church. The Church upon inception found it an irritant. Christian leaders throughout the centuries tend

overshadowed the spiritual and thus marriage was regarded as a social contract which could suffer a dereliction peradventure its terms become violated by any of the parties involved. Marriage during that time also was mostly regarded as a private contract which could be dissolved like other contracts. Divorce was easily granted and because financial burdens placed on the singles were heavy, remarriage was encouraged.⁹⁵

During the time in focus, it appears secularism had made inroads into the Church and Christian virtues were adversely affected including that which pertained to marriage. But prior to that time, even though marital infidelity constituted a cogent reason for divorce, forgiveness as understood by Christians was imbibed.⁹⁶ It seems obvious that those who were contemporaries to the apostles took marital infidelity as the only reason for divorce to occur but even at that, there was room for forgiveness.

There was no hasty remarriage according to the rendering of this ancient book.⁹⁷ The point is that while some of the Church Fathers held marriage in high esteem and vouchsafed its indissolubility,⁹⁸ some were also somewhat lenient as it were.

to grapple and are still grappling with the pros and cons of the issue, because all people in the then Roman Empire possessed the right to divorce their wives in spite of one's religious preference and affiliation.

⁹⁵Pat Edwin Harrel, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Early Church* (Austin, TX: R. B. Sweet, 1967), 173 quoted in Snuth, "Divorce and Remarriage from the Early Church to John Wesley," 131.

⁹⁶There is an injunction in "The Shepherd of Hermas," a book adjudged by many scholars as one of the earliest writings which was regarded by many in the early Church as being almost at par with New Testament writings, that deals with whether a husband sins if he continues to live with an adulterous wife. The book indicates that he must divorce her but for the sake of her repentance there should be no second marriage. The book goes further to say that if the woman repents, that the husband must take her back as wife. So from this early writing any remarriage other than to the repentant wife was regarded as adultery. See Harrel, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Early Church*, 174.

⁹⁷Also Athenagoras in his book showed that the resistance to remarriage by the early Church was based on the Church's understanding of Jesus teaching on the matter. Thus second marriage was considered a specious adultery; see Snuth, "Divorce and Remarriage from the Early Church to John Wesley," 132-133.

⁹⁸Ibid. It is affirmed that Tertullian objects to remarriage even after the demise of a husband or wife, though this may have been taken too far then just as it is the case today, the fact remains

Those who could be adjudged lenient are those who saw the position of the Roman Church as harsh.⁹⁹ Thus during the era of the renaissance, some Christian humanists tried to remove the traditions of the Church and return to the Scripture. Upon this return to the Bible, more speculations concerning divorce and remarriage began to come in.¹⁰⁰

Again, the period of the continental reformers spanned another time when the Bible was brought to the fore against the excesses of the Church.¹⁰¹ But the controversy still raged as one reformer after another propounded his view about divorce, with some views somewhat identical while some were distinct one from the other with no coherence of opinions.¹⁰² Thus it has been so since then until these contemporary times. But even though the Bible does not explicitly give a definition of

that divorce was not allowed. Origen, though he did not seem to have consented to the notion of putting away a wife for any and every reason, he did not rule out divorce entirely.

⁹⁹Stephanie Coontz, "The Origins of Modern Divorce," *Family Process* 46 (2007): 10, accessed 10 July 2015, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.as...>

¹⁰⁰See Snuth, "Divorce and Remarriage from the Early Church to John Wesley," 134-136, it is observed that Thomas More believed that divorce of couples who cannot tolerate each other is needful and also remarriage. Also Desiderius Erasmus frowns at the idea of total prohibition of divorce and the issue of referring to marriage as a sacrament and therefore indissoluble. He added in his treatment of Paul's teaching on divorce by saying that there could be other causes for divorce such as cruelty, and mutual hatred.

¹⁰¹Ibid. Also, Martin Luther held a high view of marriage but did not consider it as something the Church can legislate. He regarded it a worldly matter to be legislated by secular authorities. But he saw many causes for divorce like: adultery, desertion, incompatibility, and comments on Paul's writing on I Corinthians 7 that if an unbelieving spouse hinders the believer from following Christ, divorce would be needful. Calvin on his own like Luther held a high view of marriage but did not subscribe to the notion of it being a sacrament. He maintained that marriage is indissoluble except for adultery, impotence, extreme religious incompatibility, abandonment, and or physical infirmity which prevent the performance of the conjugal act. William Tyndale was another reformer who shared Luther's views. Thomas Cranmer objected to remarriage when divorce eventually occurs and the parties are still living. Martin Bucer held the view that while marriage necessitates continuous living together, any separation either by mutual consent or against the will of each other that divorce has occurred. To Bucer anything like leprosy, impotence, and insanity could cause divorce. John Knox maintained the view of Calvin. Also Philip Schaff V. "Marriage and Concupiscence," 7-8.

¹⁰²Wilson Yates, "The Protestant View of Marriage," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22 (1985): 51-52, accessed 10 July 2015, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.as...>

marriage, the intent of marriage is clearly expressed in the Bible for man and woman to form an enduring relationship. Thus, divorce though real is never God's ideal plan.

Seventh-day Adventist Church and Divorce

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church, is an evangelical Protestant religious movement that has tenets of faith which includes "marriage and the family" as has been earlier stated. The teaching of marriage, divorce, and remarriage forms part of the cardinal beliefs espoused and cherished by the Church to keep the membership abreast with biblical standards because many people in the world seem to have abandoned biblical standards of lifestyle and thus trade the sacred experiences of marriage for the bitter fruits of sin.¹⁰³ Thus, the permanence of the traditional family in a heterosexual marriage relationship between a man and a woman is jealously guarded¹⁰⁴ by the Church.

As a Church principle, divorce is viewed with scorn because God's overarching purpose in the creation of marriage is negated by its emergence. But the disparity of opinions in various countries and areas of the Church polity¹⁰⁵ regarding the upholding of the biblical standard about marriage, divorce, and remarriage

¹⁰³General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Hagerstown, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 145.

¹⁰⁴Michael G. Coleman, "A Critical Look at the Seventh-day Adventist Position on Divorce and Remarriage," (A Term Paper Submitted to the School of Arts and Sciences, Andrews University, 1991), 1; accessed 17 August 2015, <http://www.andrews.edu/library/car/cardigital/digitized/d...> He asserts that Church administrators and Pastors alike seem to be having serious challenges in seeking to uphold and maintain Church standards and at the same time seek to minister to wounded people in order to reclaim them, because despite the high standard which the Church has hitherto had on the institution of heterosexual marriage, divorce and perhaps incessant wanton remarriages seem to pose a serious threat.

¹⁰⁵Coleman, "A Critical Look at the SDA Position on Divorce and Remarriage," 1-2. He observes that there are variations in the application of Church rules. This means that though the Church is a world Church, what obtains in one country may differ from what obtains in another country, more so as it relates to the divorce issue. Thus while some tend to maintain the status quo, others may seem to be more dynamic and at times more liberal, and as a result, the stand of the Church regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage, is being questioned by many who seem disillusioned.

hitherto maintained by the Church, appears to precipitate myriad of concerns about the continuity or otherwise of the soundness and practicability of the doctrine of marriage and the family which the Church holds.¹⁰⁶

Marriage is apparently held in high regard by the Church. It is a covenant, a promise to love and be supportive to each other, a relationship that should be founded, and, built upon faith and truth.¹⁰⁷ It is a relationship that should replicate, illustrate, and symbolize our relationship with God. Thus the SDA Church understands marriage to be a union for life. It is created and solemnized by and before God and not a contract to either be rushed into or opted out at will.¹⁰⁸ Because this study is on how the SDA Church perceives divorce, it may be good to include what Ellen G. White, one of the pioneers of the Church writes concerning the issue of divorce.

Ellen G. White and Divorce

As one of the most outstanding pioneers of the SDA Church whose writings are of immense importance and adjudged inspired, she views marriage as a step taken

¹⁰⁶Bert Haloviak, "Law or Compassion: SDA Approaches to Divorce, Remarriage, and Church Fellowship," 12-15; *General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Archives* (September 1997), accessed 12 June 2014, <http://docs.adventistarchives.org/docs/AST/DivorceRema...>

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 13-14. He appears to be saying that the SDA Church though frowns at unfaithfulness to the marriage vow as a legitimate ground for divorce and disciplines the offenders in accordance to laid down Church rules, mercy should also be shown to the repentant.

¹⁰⁸Ibid. Haloviak suggests that being dogmatic in regimenting what should or should not constitute divorce is being ironclad. He historicizes that right from inception, the Church seems to have given only one condition for divorce and that has to do with the case of adultery, he appears to be asking for more conditions. From the pioneers until sometime in the 1930s when the policies or rules and regulations of the Church were codified into Church Manual; adultery has been the only recognized legitimate ground or condition for divorce. He further opines that since inception, the Church Manuals have repeatedly elaborated on it with some modifications. Thus, his article is somewhat a suggestion for the Church to look into the issue again. His opinion is that the Church "has ignored to her detriment other elements" which are "equally destructive to the marriage relationship." Like "when one has been abandoned emotionally or physically without viability of restoration in sight," he asserts, "that marriage is dead and divorce is the only measure to apply as a way to end the dead marriage." These speculative ideas coupled with issues that have almost become daily occurrence seem logical but rife with some theological upheavals. This speculation may have informed the Church's inclusion of abandonment as another ground for divorce early in the twenty-first century.

for life.¹⁰⁹ On the issue of the incessant divorces of the Jews for the most trivial offences which in today's language may be equal to the "no fault" divorce legislation, she writes that such practice led to great "wickedness and sin." She concurs with the exceptive clause of unfaithfulness to the marriage vow in Matthew's gospel as the only factor that could bring dissolution to the marriage tie.¹¹⁰

Sequel to this, in regard to the separation by an unbelieving spouse in 1 Corinthians 7:15, Ellen White counsels that the believer cannot in view of the law of God put her away on this ground alone.¹¹¹ Thus the legitimate course to pursue seems to be reconciliation or both remains single because irreconcilable differences may not be cogent reason for severity of the one flesh bond. And obtaining a divorce legally based on the "unbeliever" motif when *porneia* is not involved but not to remarry unless *porneia* occurs in the long run or death may seem to be neither in harmony with the injunction that Apostle Paul seems to convey nor the writings of Ellen White.

Development of Thoughts

In what has formed the integral part of the Church's position as regards the theology of divorce and remarriage, unfaithfulness to the marriage vow has been the only ground¹¹² upon which divorce could be sought while remarriage was for the

¹⁰⁹Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1980), 345.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 340. She writes that even when the Jews questioned Christ on the issue, to see if He could consent to the popular ideology of the time which stipulates the dissolution of marriage at will or based on irreconcilable differences which contemporarily have caused irremediable breakdown of many marriages, He pointed them back to the Eden model.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 344-345. She further opines specifically that if a wife is an "unbeliever or an opposer" the husband is to abide with her in order to be in harmony with the law of God unless she chooses to depart by herself [this seems to be vice versa in that if it is the husband that is an unbeliever, the wife has to abide with him too]. Although it may be hard to bear if the unbeliever leaves and at times devastating, but the counsel is that "God will grant the one thus abandoned the comfort, strength, and support," and will also grant the one thus affected the "wisdom in regard to the course to pursue."

¹¹²The unfaithfulness here refers to adultery; in the case where divorce occurs as a result, the one who is guilty remains unmarried as long as the innocent party remains single. Any remarriage on

innocent partner or in the case of the death of a spouse (Rom 7:2). The Seventh-day Adventist Church had maintained strictness as regards their biblical stand on divorce and remarriage. It could be observed that prior to 1950, any persons engaged in unscriptural divorced and remarried states, were not granted legitimacy as Church members as long as they remained in such relationship.¹¹³

This stand of the Church is not without further deliberations as the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not have creed. The suggestions of William Spicer and the theologian Roland Loasby presented in the 1942 Church Manual that apart from marital infidelity, desertion of a partner should form another ground for divorce, making reference to 1 Corinthians 7, sparked off another round of deliberation to study the passage thoroughly before taking a stand. Consequent upon this, a three man committee was inaugurated to look into it and bring recommendations to enable the 1940 edition of the Church Manual to be rewritten,¹¹⁴ but the committee came back affirming the traditional position of the Church.¹¹⁵

his or her part attracts Church discipline. See General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Hagerstown, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 150-155. Before the General Conference Session of 1950, Coleman in "A Critical Look at the SDA Position on Divorce and Remarriage," 4-5, observes that the focus of the Church had primarily centered on who the guilty or innocent parties are in any divorce issue. There seemed to have been little or no emphasis on forgiveness by the innocent party as some of the pioneers seemed to have advised.

¹¹³Haloviak, "Law or Compassion: SDA Approaches to Divorce, Remarriage and Church Fellowship," 15, writes that this was the view and practice of the Church before the 1950 General Conference Session when permission was granted to those who may have repented to re-enter the Church.

¹¹⁴Haloviak, "Law or Compassion: SDA Approaches to Divorce, Remarriage, and Church Fellowship," 14, writes that in September 1942, Spicer had prepared a statement to present to the commission which had been set to look into what the Church teaches as reasons for divorce, look into the Bible once again to see if there are other possible causes. It was there that William Spicer wrote that desertion, a willful utter forsaking of the other destroys the tie that binds husband's and wife's heart in Christian love and thus frees the innocent partner from the marriage bond, he or she would be free to remarry.

¹¹⁵See Coleman, "A Critical Look at the SDA Position on Divorce and Remarriage," 4, he infers that prior to 1950, there were no clear statements in the Church Manuals which outlined the Church's position; It seems that even the disfellowshipping of the parties involved was not codified but orally transmitted and assumed.

It was not until during the 1950 General Conference Summit that the Church Manual was revised.¹¹⁶ Consequent upon the revision, the Church Manuals from 1950 contains the position of the Church in eleven basic points¹¹⁷ as against six points contained in previous Church Manuals. In the 1970s, another group of scholars carefully studied the contextual setting of Jesus sayings in the gospels and the messages of Paul in reference to divorce and the issue of remarriage. They ended up in agreement that neither Jesus nor Paul made inflexible rules and laws concerning divorce and remarriage.¹¹⁸

Again in the 1970s, the concept of the “no fault”¹¹⁹ divorce came up and so many denominations within Adventism seem to have been taken unawares. In spite of the ‘no fault’ divorce concept, the Seventh-day Adventist Church maintained that only the biblical ground of *porneia*,¹²⁰ which is unfaithfulness to the marriage vow

¹¹⁶Haloviak, “Law or Compassion: SDA Approaches to Divorce, Remarriage, and Church Fellowship,” 14, opines that many saw liberalism come into the Church at this time as a result of a seeming deviation from the hitherto held fundamental beliefs of the Church mainly as it affects marriage and divorce and remarriage. Roland Loasby was said to have challenged the idea of carving out a Church legislation on divorce upon Jesus teaching in Matthew. In a paper he presented to the 1949 committee, he seems to have suggested that Christ was not establishing a legal code for divorce rather, He was blaming those who disrupted the divine covenant at creation. He seemed to write that *porneia* encompasses all forms of immoral behavior.

¹¹⁷The subsequent Church Manuals made provision for securing through legal means the couple’s divorce if it becomes obvious that they cannot live together as husband and wife, See Coleman, “A Critical Look at the SDA Position on Divorce and Remarriage,” 5; but it advocated reconciliation and forgiveness in the case of adultery, and reinstatement of the guilty one after some time has elapsed and remorse shown for such an act; for more on how we got where we are now see Neal C. Wilson, “Annual Council Passes Actions on Conciliation, Divorce, and Remarriage.” *Review and Herald* (1977): 19 quoted in Coleman, 6-8.

¹¹⁸See Haloviak, “Law or Compassion: SDA Approaches to Divorce, Remarriage, and Church Fellowship,” 19 for the articles written by these theologians.

¹¹⁹Coleman, “A Critical Look at the SDA Position on Divorce and Remarriage,” 14. The “no fault” divorce was the child’s brain of the California State which stipulates the allowability of divorce not only on the grounds of adultery but also on domestic or filial disagreements that defies every attempt toward reconciliation. Simply put, “no fault” divorce pertains to irreconcilable differences. Thus, while the Church upholds biblical standards in her policies as it were, some churches subscribed to the “no fault” divorce speculative legislation.

¹²⁰Ibid. The Church has clearly set her views on what she understands is the proper scriptural understanding of *porneia* as not only fornication but includes other sexual irregularities (1 Cor 6:9; 1

constitutes a legitimate reason for divorce, and not just differences that appear incompatible to reconciliation.

Noteworthy is that the Seventh-day Adventist Church seems to continue the Protestant tradition in maintaining that only unfaithfulness to the marriage vow could bring about divorce with remarriage for the innocent partner. But while the Church maintains that the innocent party should remarry in the case of unfaithfulness to the marriage vow, it is the opinion of this study that there should also be a clearly defined biblical injunction that prevents the guilty partner from remarrying also, if not it may portend some liturgical or theological aberration. Another fact worthy of mention is that of late the Church has also added abandonment as another ground for divorce.¹²¹ Indeed, while the new official stand of the Seventh-day Adventist Church persists that desertion or abandonment by the unbelieving partner is another factor that could lead to divorce; others like Haloviak seem to subscribe to other things like bullying, nagging, witch-haunting a spouse and every other bad thing that could be thought of, as capable of making divorce possible. It is the contention of this study that the former traditional position of the Church which sees Christ's exception clause in Matthew's gospel as the only legitimate ground for divorce be maintained.

Again, the Church sees *porneia* as encompassing all forms of illicit sexual escapades, this is a welcome development and as such the view of understanding it to refer only to the injunctions in Leviticus 18 and not in its holistic sense by some like Bacchiocchi should be discarded.

Tim 1:9-10; Rom 1:24-27). Prior to the present Church Manual, the previous ones seldom contained what the Church understands fornication in the New Testament to imply.

¹²¹The issue of abandonment as another scriptural ground for divorce should again be adequately looked into biblically and theologically. It is the same point that some people presented in the past as have been outlined in this study. It seems probable that Paul was giving a ground for divorce

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's Position on Divorce under Biblical Scrutiny

From the analysis, it could be deduced that the Seventh-day Adventist Church prior to 1977 had maintained officially that adultery remained the only ground for divorce; fornication was earlier perceived to be a perversion of and a deviation from a normal sex life which seems to have defied every means of cure.¹²² But the 1977 Annual Council's definition made it more biblical and less ambivalent a stand when the term was referred to as a physical sexual activity not restricted to adultery but rather encompasses all illicit, abnormal, and wanton sexual relations, adultery inclusive. This elucidation does not in any way nullify the Church's position but broadens the scope of the Church's traditional understanding.¹²³

Thus upon this broader scope of fornication hinges the understanding of the Church as it relates to what could bring about the severance of the marriage tie. But this understanding of fornication in its broader sense though plausible, was not to be the continuous singular reason upheld by the Church that could bring about divorce with remarriage for the innocent partner, as the Church sees it worthwhile to have another reason biblically cogent enough to bring about divorce.

Thus the official document of the Church was revised after the 2000 General Conference Session in Toronto. In this revision "abandonment"¹²⁴ was included as

where he was giving admonition on mixed marriages. What makes one an unbeliever in the Church of today compared to the context in which Paul wrote? The next section looks into this the more.

¹²²See Coleman, "A Critical Look at the SDA Position on Divorce and Remarriage," 15-16.

¹²³See Dwight Hervey Small, *Remarriage and God's Renewing Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986), 108 quoted in *Ibid.*, 17-18. He posits that fornication is the most common meaning of the term *porneia* and that it refers to a variety of illicit sexual acts.

¹²⁴See General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2000), 191-198. Upon the revision of this official document of the Seventh-day Adventist Church where policies of the Church are written, under the column "Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage," there is a sub-section on page 194

another legitimate ground for divorce. The inclusion of this clause as an official stand of the Church may seem controversial and may portend a postmodernist tendency, as such, the Church need to look at this again.

The book of 1 Corinthians 7:10-15 where this clause is coined out from has been succinctly looked at previously in this study. Many in the Church seem not to find any exegetical warrant for including abandonment in the official document of the Church as a ground for divorce.

Consequent upon this revision, the Seventh-day Adventist Church manuals that follow have contained this as part of the official position of the Church as regards divorce.¹²⁵ Thus abandonment by an unbelieving spouse according to the official stand of the Church is considered a legitimate biblical ground for divorce but does not give one the right to remarry unless one party commits adultery or fornication in the process, or died. This point may portend an ambivalent situation as it were, the logic seems asymmetrical. It may be inconsistent hermeneutically for the grounds for remarriage to be different from the grounds for divorce.

written “Grounds for Divorce” the official statement of the Church states “Scripture recognizes adultery and/or fornication (Matt 5:32) as well as abandonment by an unbelieving partner (1 Cor 7:10-15) as grounds for divorce.” Note that this statement is not in previous manuals. Furthermore, underneath the above statement is a sub-section “The Church’s Position on Divorce and Remarriage,” where the eleven positions of the Church as regards the subject at hand and as found in some previous manuals are reiterated. Almost all the entries in the eleven points are the same as in previous church manuals save for the second entry which starts out as in other manuals that “Unfaithfulness to the marriage vow . . . should form a just cause for separation or divorce.” But goes further to add in the second paragraph of the second entry “Even though the scriptures allow divorce for the reasons mentioned above, [that is the first part of the second entry] as well as for abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor 7:10-15)”. The document goes further to state in the second paragraph of the sixth entry of the section that “A separation or divorce which results from factors such as physical violence or in which unfaithfulness to the marriage vow-as in entries or sections one and two- is not involved, does not give either one the scriptural right to remarry, unless in the meantime the other party has remarried, committed adultery or fornication, or died.” This is the official stand of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with regards to the issue of divorce and remarriage as revised in the 2000 Church manual after the General Conference session.

¹²⁵General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 204-208. This together with the 2010 and 2015 editions contain the official positions of the Church as revised in 2000.

Apparently, if divorce is actually divorce from a biblical standpoint, it should afford the one abandoned the legitimate right to remarry. If as the official document of the Church asserts that the Bible allows divorce on the ground of abandonment by an unbelieving partner, it may seem unlikely for the Bible to allow the abandoned believer to suffer in aloneness or stand as a watchdog to see when the other partner will commit adultery or fornication or die for the partner to be liberated.

It is true that the issue being discussed is an official position of the Church, but this study suggests that the matter should be revisited. If truly the Bible allows for divorce not only because of the unfaithfulness of a partner but also on the ground of abandonment of an unbelieving partner, then those who have been given a biblical allowable injunction should also be allowed to remarry consequent upon the biblical injunction otherwise, second class divorcees and other practical problems may be the aftermath effect and the intention of the Church to be compassionate and or redemptive may be far from being actualized.

Thus, it is obvious that the Seventh-day Adventist Church officially includes abandonment by an unbelieving spouse as a biblical legitimate ground for divorce which other faith groups call desertion but differs with them on the ground that there should be no remarriage except the abandonment by the non-Adventist has led any of them-the abandoner or the abandoned- to commit adultery or fornication or die eventually. But the suggestion here is for the policy to be revisited and discussed further as the passage (1 Cor 7:10-15) does not seem to be giving another ground for divorce, and if it does, it may portend some theological fuzziness and inconsistency not to allow those who have been given a biblical injunction to divorce upon abandonment not to remarry when the abandonment occurs.

Even though this policy has been the position of the Church for some years now, there seems to be the need to adequately look at it again as a Church that does not advocate for hypothetical-historical method rather historical-grammatical method of Bible hermeneutics. This seems so because the human speculative concessions, adjudications, and even cultural biases as it were that may tend to sever the marriage tie consequent upon seeming marital incompatibility and irreconcilable differences via abandonment may have been foreseen by Jesus yet he pointed his detractors to the creation plan of marriage without leaving any loopholes in his statements that could elicit further human interventions. Suffice it therefore to say that there ought to be a clear distinction between changing social norms and ecclesial moral authority.

Divorce Views in Seventh-day Adventist Church

Consequent upon the inclusion of the abandonment divorce clause in the official document of the Church, divergent opinions exist among scholars just as it is in other evangelical Churches.

Divorce is Permissible only by *Porneia*

This is the traditional or conservative view of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The proponents maintain that given that *porneia* refers to physical illicit sexual activity in its various forms and is the exception clause which Christ enunciated as recorded in Matthew's gospel, and also has been officially held by the Church as the only ground for divorce, with the injunction of remarriage for the innocent partner, the status quo should be maintained. Pipim¹²⁶ seems to hold this view among others.

¹²⁶See Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Here We Stand* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005), 495-510.

Divorce is Permissible by *Porneia* and Abandonment

After the Toronto General Conference Session in the year 2000, this became the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Thus the Church body and other proponents of this view seem to find Apostle Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 7:10-15 as propounding another ground for divorce. The term abandonment is a Seventh-day Adventist rendering of the term desertion which some evangelicals subscribe to as a legitimate ground for divorce to be actuated, but the Church differs from some other faith groups for the fact that remarriage is not allowed unless any of the parties involved commits adultery or fornication, or has died, then the other party could remarry.

The Church need to theologically revisit this official position as has been earlier suggested in order to ascertain if the present position is biblically and theologically sound or an ideology consequent upon some societal norms. This is so because when the Church, the citadel of spiritual upbringing loses the respect of the society it is commissioned to transform together with the power and authority of the living God which are needed to accomplish the task, by being like the society, it becomes tragic. If this happens, it will not be traceable to the strait testimony found in the gospel of Christ, but in the inability of the Church to bear the divine strait message it was given to model and teach as it were.

Divorce is Permissible for other Reasons

In some countries, there seems to be members of the Church who think that anything can bring about divorce. While the former two views are predominant in the Church and held as the official position of the Church with remarriage only in the case of unfaithfulness to the marriage vow, some others like Haloviak as mentioned earlier think that an incurable disease, cruelty, life-threatening issues among others

are capable of severing the one flesh bond which God made. But these factors, as bad and cruel as they seem, do not present any theological soundness for leaving one's spouse. Marriage is sacred and should be held sacred.

CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF DIVORCE

The supposed biblical allowability of divorce on the premise of *porneia* with the subsequent freedom to remarry¹ given to the acclaimed innocent party, an opinion adjudged often as the standard Protestant view,² and abandonment by an unbelieving spouse which others call desertion seems to pose some theological conundrum not only in the Seventh-day Adventist Church as buttressed in the previous chapter, but also in other faith groups as opinions vary and scholars fall basically into one of different camps. Others, mainly the laity, seemingly remain somewhat confused and perplexed as they do not know what to believe any longer.

To this effect, therefore, the interpretive principles of some scholars in the Seventh-day Adventist Church need to interact with the understanding and hermeneutics of scholars of other faith groups albeit analytically in order to ascertain the theological soundness of the broad spectrum of views on divorce and their implications. As opinions vary among Bible scholars in Seventh-day Adventism with regards to divorce consequent upon the inclusion of abandonment by an unbelieving partner as another ground for divorce, such also exist in other faith groups.

¹H. Wayne House, ed., *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 9.

² Ibid.

There is disparity of opinions among theologians to that effect. But whose view is biblically tenable, if any? It is worthy of note that even in other faith groups, there are divergent views among scholars pertaining divorce.

While some hold to absolute indissolubility of marriage, others opine that *porneia* is the only ground for divorce with remarriage for the innocent partner, still others maintain that desertion or abandonment qualifies as another biblically legitimate ground for divorce, while a lot more seem to subscribe to many other causes as legitimate for divorce to be effected. These views in conjunction with what the Seventh-day Adventists teach are worth analyzing.

Seventh-day Adventists and Contemporary Discussions on Divorce

In this section, the views of other scholars which are pertinent to the subject matter of divorce will interact with that of the Seventh-day Adventists. As could be observed, it appears that the divorce and remarriage theological imbroglio is as old as the Church. Consequent upon this, divergent views abound which this section will seek to discuss.

These views or schools of thought which will be categorized into three in this section, form an understanding of the speculative masterpiece of the proponents about whether or not the Bible allows divorce, and the premise upon which it is allowed, if at all. The views are categorized thus: “Divorce is not permissible and always sinful;” “Divorce is permissible by *erwat dabar* or unfaithfulness;” “Divorce is permissible for many reasons.” These views that form the contemporary discussions on divorce would seek to interact in the various categories with the position of Seventh-day Adventists.

Divorce is not Permissible and Always Sinful

While it is a fact that Seventh-day Adventists officially understand and believe that the Bible allows divorce only on the ground of marital infidelity³ with remarriage for the innocent partner, together with abandonment but no remarriage unless there is adultery and or fornication in the process, and thus focuses primarily on what forms a legitimate ground or otherwise for divorce perhaps to prevent its abuse, there are others who hold tenaciously to the view that divorce is not biblically allowed. This view is in tandem with the position of those who do not see any justification for divorce, whatever the circumstances.

The proponents of this view contemporarily regard divorce as sin regardless of the prevailing circumstances.⁴ Marriage is seen as a permanent, indissoluble union.⁵ The exceptive clause in Matthew 5:32 and 19:3-9 is understood by some in this first category, as referring to an outrageous incestuous relationship,⁶ so upon annulment the parties involved are thus forbidden to remarry.⁷

³See the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 151.

⁴Brian Jones, "A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage," 10. The advocates of this view are J. Carl Laney and Charles Ryrie

⁵Cyril J. Barber, "Marriage, Divorce or Remarriage: A Review of the Relevant Religious Literature, 1973-1983," 171. This assertion may constitute a leaning towards Augustine's view of marriage as a sacrament and as such indissoluble.

⁶See J. Carl Laney, *The Divorce Myth*, 72. He opines that the exception clause does not refer to divorce but to an annulment of an illegitimate marital relationship because in Israel, close family members were forbidden to marry. See also R. H. Stein, "Divorce," in the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, s.v. 194. That the exception clause refers to incest is a view also espoused by Bacchiocchi. He did not consent to the notion that *porneia* may also refer to adultery.

⁷Paul E. Steele and Charles C. Ryrie, "Are Divorce and Remarriage Ever Permissible? No." *Fundamental Journal* 3 (June 1984): 20.

Again the advocates of this view postulate that because the exception clause is seen only in Matthew's book, it must be applicable to the Jews.⁸ This seems to be the view for the fact that *porneia* in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 can be used when reference is made to incest.⁹ But they seem to forget that the term *porneia* encompasses all forms of illicit sex outside marriage.

The other aspect of the view that "divorce is not biblically permissible"¹⁰ sees *porneia* in Christ's discourses in Matthew 5 and 19 as referring to the Jewish betrothal¹¹ period when a man and a woman are considered husband and wife for one year period prior to the consummation of the marriage proper.¹²

The fact remains that although this view may sound logical, a close exegetical scrutiny renders it somewhat porous,¹³ and notwithstanding the fact that Isaksson¹⁴ and Pentecost¹⁵ held this view, it appears that the betrothal view had fallen into disfavor until John Piper began its advocacy recently.¹⁶

⁸Laney, *The Divorce Myth*, 64.

⁹*Ibid.*, 71-78.

¹⁰The advocates of this view do say that the placement of the word *porneia* governs only the divorce and not the annulment, thus while the partners should sever the tie, they should not remarry; this interpretation as Jones suggests appear to be the most prominent in the recent discussion of the advocates of this view.

¹¹Charles C. Ryrie, "Biblical Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage," 190.

¹²*Ibid.*, 187.

¹³*Ibid.*, 188. Even Ryrie, a proponent of divorce, who sees divorce as always sinful notes that *porneia* is nowhere used in a restricted sense of unchastity during the betrothal period.

¹⁴Abel Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple*, translated by Neil Tomkinson and Jean Gray (Lund, Sweden: Gleerup, 1965), 116-152.

¹⁵J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 357-358. He maintained that it was on this premise that Christ made the exceptive or exception clause.

¹⁶John Piper, "On Divorce and Remarriage in the Event of Adultery," accessed 12 March 2016, http://www.desiringgod.org/Online_Library/OnlineArticles/Subjects/DivorceRemarriage/DivRemAdultery.htm.

Also, when Pentecost's view is properly and sequentially harnessed, it makes one wonder why he would not extend his betrothal view until after the consummation of the wedding.¹⁷ This is because it is possible for a bride not to be a virgin and yet not pregnant.¹⁸ Thus if the first sexual contact the man has with her was after the wedding, her immorality would not be known to him until after the consummation of the marriage proper.¹⁹ And the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy 22, gives the injunction of termination of such marriage by killing the bride.

Thus, as the proponents may want us to believe, it appears according to their elucidation that Christ enjoins for legitimate divorce only in the case of a woman who was not a virgin on her wedding night.²⁰ This view seems not to be exegetically plausible; the immediate context does not favor this suggestion. As Feinberg²¹ rightly notes, it appears that the betrothal view is based on a narrow meaning of the word *porneia*.²²

The fact remains that when all passages that mention *porneia* in the New Testament are put together, the word seems to be a general terminology that connotes all kinds of illicit sexual activity,²³ which invariably makes Jesus statement pertaining

¹⁷Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 357.

¹⁸Jones, "A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage," 46.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple*, 137.

²¹The Feinberg's suggest that in Matthew 19 that Deuteronomy 24 was in discussion, but Deuteronomy does not discuss sex during the betrothal period and does not need to because it had earlier been discussed in chapter 22 of Deuteronomy. See John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 328.

²²This assertion seems plausible even though Mark Geldard seem not to favor it when he suggests that the "great weight of evidence militates against the wider meaning and goes for the narrower meaning," see Mark Geldard, "Jesus Teaching on Divorce: Thoughts on the Meaning of *Porneia* in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9," *Churchman* 92 (1978): 134.

²³Ekkehardt Mueller, "Jesus and Divorce in Matthew 19," 13.

the exceptive clause stricter than the postulation of the school of Shammai,²⁴ and not just pre-marital sex as the advocates of this view may believe.

Again, the view of the proponents of the “divorce is not permissible” who subscribe to the issue of betrothal as what the exception clause refers seem to have become obsolete until it appears to have resonated through the thinking of John Piper, as earlier mentioned.

He assumes that Matthew inserted the clause²⁵ to exonerate Joseph, who was adjudged righteous but in the same passage thought of abandoning Mary, from the seemingly claimed jarring inconsistency between what he had written about Joseph and what Jesus taught about divorce,²⁶ to show what kind of divorce a person might pursue, that is fornication during the betrothal period. But though there may be some human elements in Scripture, it seems unlikely that Matthew in his gospel account could frame the exceptive clause and credit it to Jesus. Thus Piper’s view of Matthew’s fabrication of the exception clause and subsequently credit it to Jesus might elicit more serious theological problems and as such the betrothal view appears not to be tenable.²⁷

²⁴Sigal seems to be in agreement with this assertion when in his intertextual analysis he mentions that the Hebrew word *naaf* translated adultery in Exodus 20:14 is rendered *porneia* in the LXX of Jeremiah 3:8. In this passage Jeremiah 3:8, it could be observed that the Hebrew and Greek use synonyms for adultery; for example: *naifah* and *emoikhato*, and *vatizen* and *eporneuse*, these synonyms are also used interchangeably in the verse. See Philip Sigal, *The Halakah of Jesus of Nazareth According to the Gospel of Matthew*, 84-110. Also in Jones, “A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage,” 47 he suggests that though *moicheia* precedes *porneia* in Matthew 15:19, the use of both terms may not preclude any semantic overlap between them.

²⁵Piper suggests interpolation of the exception clause by Matthew. He reasons that it was not mentioned by Jesus as Mark and Luke did not mention it. See John Piper “On Divorce and Remarriage in the Event of Adultery,” cited 12 March 2016, http://www.desiringgod.org/Online_Library/OnlineArticles/Subjects/DivorceRemarriage/DivRemAdultery.htm.

²⁶John D. Reeper, “Marriage and Divorce in Present day Theology,” *AFER* 16 (1974): 394, accessed 10 July 2015, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.as...>

²⁷See Jones, “A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage,” 48.

On the other hand, while some who hold the notion that “divorce is sinful and not biblically permissible” view the exceptive clause as referring to the betrothal period, some others like Laney²⁸ see it as referring to incest and not divorce as it were. He suggests that since Leviticus 18:6-18 forbids incestuous marriage; the use of *porneia* seems a further elaboration of the concept, which is the termination of the illicit affair and not just divorce.²⁹

The Seventh-day Adventists hold the view that the exception clause is the only ground upon which divorce could be allowed,³⁰ and remarriage for the one considered innocent coupled with the inclusion of abandonment of the unbelieving partner. The only seeming issue borders on the rendering of *porneia* which some scholars like Bacchiocchi suggest refers to incest. To the Adventists, the impasse seems to be semantic and not whether divorce is allowed. The proponents of the view which this section is considering believe that divorce is not allowed by the Bible.

Still on the issue of *porneia*, it is worthy of note that the term while not limited to incest only refers to physical sexual immorality only.³¹ It should not be regarded as any activity which interferes with normal sexual activity or conflicts that may be temperamental and result in a withdrawal from sexual activity by couples.³² This may tantamount to spiritualizing the concept. Jesus seems to have made *porneia* the

²⁸See J. Carl Laney, “No Divorce no Remarriage,” in *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views*, 35-37.

²⁹Ibid. Laney sees his hermeneutics as fitting well with the Jewish audience of Matthew’s gospel. This is the same view expressed by Bacchiocchi of the Seventh-day Adventists as written in the previous chapter where he opines that the exception clause refers to incest.

³⁰See *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (2010), 150.

³¹David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 170.

³²John R. W. Stott, *Marriage and Divorce* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 17.

primary permissible ground for marriage severance because it tends to stand against and even nullify the one flesh bond which God made.

Thus one who engages in outrageous sexual escapades outside of wedlock seems to be dead already. It is death that brings husband and wife relationship to an end.³³

Therefore, in Matthew 5:31-32, Jesus confronted a prevailing misunderstanding of Deuteronomy 24:1 which talks about the issuance of a divorce certificate, an act which had become somewhat rampant.³⁴ It could be construed that Moses³⁵ intended to regulate the seeming excesses which prevailed within the cities that surrounded Israel as it relates to divorce, but the people readily presumed it to be leverage and a right for a man to divorce his wife even if it is not because of promiscuity.³⁶

Thus in his sermon Jesus upheld the sanctity of marriage by inferring that any termination of the one flesh union would lead to remarriage and by this virtue the

³³It appears that Jesus indeed uttered the exceptive clause statements in Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:3-9. Therefore it may be inappropriate to regard these texts as a redaction on the side of Matthew in an effort to remove, as it were, a seeming synoptic problem. The statement in Matthew 5:31-32 was uttered during the popularly called "Sermon on the Mount" which begins in Matthew 5 and extends to 7. Also this statement falls in the section of the sermon being referred to as the "six antithesis." These are Jesus' teachings that have the form "You have heard it said ... but I say to you" statements which may have been uttered by Jesus to correct some or many of the rabbinic misinterpretations, misstatements, and misapplications of the law. Thus in each case he contrasts the people's misunderstanding of the law with the true direction which the law points in accordance with his own authority as one who fulfils the law. See D. A. Carson, "Mathew," in *The Expositor's Commentary*, ed., Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 8:147.

³⁴Ibid., 147

³⁵George Robinson, *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000), 20.

³⁶See Jones, "A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage, 41. Although the certificate given to an ex-wife was protective so that she could not be forced into abject poverty or prostitution, Jesus in his own interpretation made it clear that in divorce the people were not honoring their wives at all but forcing them into adultery. The main point that Jesus seems to have made is that notwithstanding the fact that the divorce certificate tends to give the divorced some sort of protection legally, it does not exonerate from God's displeasure.

woman thus involved is coerced into adultery.³⁷ Another passage that deals with the exceptive clause is Matthew 19:1-9. Whereas Jesus teaching in chapter 5 stemmed from his own homiletically masterpiece, in chapter 19 the issue was raised by the Pharisees albeit as a trap.³⁸

Their question “Is it lawful ... to divorce ... for any and every reason?” was orchestrated for Jesus to weigh in on the Shammai versus Hillel divorce controversy.³⁹ But were these Pharisees not present during his sermon on the mount or conversant with his position already? It seems unlikely, but their desire was perhaps to entrap him in the controversy, knowing full well that his enunciation either for or against any of the schools would be immensely controversial.

Instead of a support on either side or otherwise, Jesus capitalized on the occasion to affirm the sanctity of marriage. His stand was not on laying out grounds for divorce but on the original intent of God in the establishment of marriage.⁴⁰ He thus called their minds back to the creation account where marriage emanated which they may have lost sight of maybe because of their seeming insufferable egotistical prevarications. Jesus seems to say that instead of looking for valid ways to seek

³⁷From this discourse, it could be observed that Jesus teaching on divorce is strict. Divorcing one’s wife to remarry is adjudged by Jesus to be a serious offense against one’s wife; marriage is for life except for *porneia* which Jesus inferred. See also the Feinbergs, *Ethics for a Brave World*, 388.

³⁸Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 479. The legitimate ground for divorce brought about a theological divisiveness in their era. And as has been earlier stated, two schools emerged on this subject in rabbinic Judaism; Shammai and Hillel, and whereas Shammai was more conservative in approach, Hillel was more liberal.

³⁹Fred Lowery, *Covenant Marriage: Staying Together for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Rosen Group, 2010), 135.

⁴⁰Paul E. Steele and Charles C. Ryrie, *Meant to Last: A Christian View of Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1984), 23.

divorce, God's plan is for married people to remain together married throughout their lives.⁴¹

Furthermore, on the analysis of the exception clause of Mathew 19, upon Jesus answer, his detractors were not done with him yet. They posed a follow-up question "Why then did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" While this reference is still to the pericope of Deuteronomy 24, their exegesis and understanding of the passage seem incorrect. In response Jesus made it known to them that Moses did not command divorce or an issuance of a divorce certificate thereof.⁴² Divorce was permitted because of their hard hearts.

In other words, the view under consideration is plausible here by observing that it was a concession not a command. A concession prompted by their hard-heartedness.⁴³ Although the exceptive clause is repeated in verse 9 of chapter 19, Jesus' position was stern, direct, and absolute.

The focus here is the consequence for the man not the wife. The husband who divorces and remarries except on the ground of *porneia* commits adultery instead of forcing the wife into same as in Matthew 5:32.⁴⁴ What this implies therefore seems to

⁴¹Emily M. Brown, "Divorce and Remarriage," *Family Coordinator* 24 (1975): 75.

⁴²Hector A. Gonzalez, "Pastors' Theological Perspective on Divorce and Remarriage: Qualitative Study," *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 31 (1999): 132.

⁴³See Robert J. Plekker, rev, *Divorce and the Christian: What the Bible Teaches* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1983), 43-45. He emphasized that hardened hearts equals turning away from God. So it unequivocally implies that divorce occurs only when a Christian denies, rejects, and finally ignores Christ's lordship in his or her life. Therefore the exceptive clause according to this view serves only to qualify God's intent for marriage and it is not something that Jesus gave as ground for divorce, so believers are not to divorce. It appears that in God's foreknowledge, he saw that consequent upon the entrance of sin, depraved men would seek for ways to nonchalantly extricate themselves from the marriage covenant, thus in order to safeguard a woman's life and dignity, it became a means tolerated by God for marriages to end. But it is abnormal, a misnomer, and little wonder Jesus resorted to the original plan of God in marriage. So under normal circumstances, divorce is not allowable, it is a serious sin because it was not so from the beginning.

⁴⁴See Sigal, *The Halakah of Jesus of Nazareth According to the Gospel of Matthew*, 102.

be that Jesus regards divorce intolerable. Being the creator and initiator of marriage,⁴⁵ the covenant is made before God and cannot be severed without both husband and wife committing adultery,⁴⁶ notwithstanding who could be adjudged the innocent party in the *porneia* issue. It therefore posits that Christ's goal or purpose was to disabuse the mind of his detractors from divorce and instill in them the Christ-like mind that would resort to the Eden model of marriage instead of the various human concessions that tend to eclipse the strait intention of God.

Thus far this study in this section has tried to analyze the speculations of the proponents who assert that the Bible does not allow for divorce. And the various understanding of scholars about the exceptive clause found in Matthew's gospel. There seem to be no consensus as to what *porneia* actually means, while some say it refers to infidelity during the betrothal period, others suggest it refers to incest, and still others seem to regard the clause as an interpolation by Matthew.

In fact, there is no shortage of speculations as to what *porneia* actually refers to. Although there are other variations of the "divorce is not permissible" view such as the "mixed marriage" and 'inclusivist'⁴⁷ variants which have become obsolete and are seldom discussed in contemporary times, yet there is another variation of idea in the divorce speculation which tends to read the exception clause as a refusal to discuss the issue of *porneia*.⁴⁸ Indeed there is no gainsaying the fact that in analyzing divorce,

⁴⁵Keener, *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teachings of the New Testament*, 43-44.

⁴⁶Raymond F. Collins, *Divorce in the New Testament* (Collegeville, PA: Liturgical, 1992), 13-15.

⁴⁷John MacArthur Jr, *On Divorce* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1985), 41.

⁴⁸The Feinbergs summarizes it well by saying "If anyone divorces his wife except for *porneia* about which I shall make no comment and remarries, he commits adultery. So there are the ones who though hold on to the notion that the Bible does not sanction divorce for whatever circumstance but

there is the need to fathom what divorce means to God. It is invariably an antithesis to the divine ideal and the oft-repeated vow “until we are parted by death”⁴⁹ which is mentioned by the couple upon wedlock.

What constitutes a marriage in His design need to be properly harnessed⁵⁰ so as to understand that in His wisdom, God provided guidelines mainly for marriage and not merely for divorce and remarriage.⁵¹ Although there may be marital disharmony, what God advises is forgiveness and reconciliation.⁵² This is noteworthy mainly because of the instruction of Paul on separation of the unbelieving spouse in a mixed marriage found in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16. The proponents of the view that

they do not want to have anything to say about the exceptive clause.” See Feinbergs, *Ethics for a Brave World*, 328.

⁴⁹See David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context*, 55-63.

⁵⁰Robert J. Plekker, rev *Divorce and the Christian: What the Bible Teaches*, 38. He sees marriage as a divinely ordained institution which becomes a life-long bond between one man and one woman who come together to live together as husband and wife. Thus the coming together is characterized by an intimate spiritual and physical bond, sealed indissolubly through a voluntary vow of mutual love and fidelity as required by God. This understanding therefore does not favor the notion that sex before marriage proper establishes a marriage union. Though sexual activity after marriage may consummate the marriage relationship, sex on its own does not establish marriage. And according to Plekker, this understanding does not also allow the speculation that marital unfaithfulness severs the marriage bond. He suggests that sin does not have the capacity to destroy what God has created though it may mar it. Therefore Christians should think vertically to react against the marital course that is contrary to God’s will instead of the supposed horizontal way of thinking that makes governments legalize divorce and make people think that God honors state-sanctioned divorces.

⁵¹Plekker, *Divorce and the Christian: What the Bible Teaches*, 39.

⁵²Ibid. He admonishes that a Christian that seeks divorce denies the lordship of Christ. He opines correctly when he writes that in Matthew 19:3-9, the Pharisees were not followers of Christ but his detractors. Their question was not for them to be taught but ensnare the Christ, but he did not give them a yes or no answer rather he took them to the Eden account of marriage creation. In the discourse also, Jesus the Christ emphasized that the male and female distinctive identities in the marriage issue is predicated on God’s original creation. Eve was from Adam’s body, so if he was to put Eve away, he was putting away part of himself. Again Christ’s answer to the Pharisees made a violation of terminology come to limelight in that they said that Moses commanded but Jesus told them it was a permission as has earlier been stressed, not a command. And the permission was because of their hard hearts which implies a turning away from God.

“divorce is always sinful” affirm that the separation talked about here does not mean divorce.⁵³ That a Christian marries an unbeliever does not make divorce permissible.

Thus the proponents understand that Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:12-14 makes it clear that when one person is a believer or Christian and marries a non Christian, the unbelieving spouse has been sanctified through his or her Christian partner in marriage.⁵⁴ In 1 Corinthians 7:15 the apostle Paul writes that if the unbelieving partner departs, that the believing husband is not bound *dedoulotai* in such matter, and in verse 39 he said a woman is bound *dedetai*⁵⁵

The inclusion of desertion as ground for divorce in other faith groups and abandonment in the Seventh-day Adventist Church may have come about as a result of the rendering of verse 15. But if verse 15 is referring to the marriage covenant, he might seem to be contradicting Christ’s word in Matthew 19:3-9.⁵⁶

It could be perhaps that Paul was referring to the bondage of the believing husband in witnessing to the unbelieving wife since he has done so for the umpteenth time without any positive outcome. It appears the believing husband or wife in verse 15 is exempted from such obligations as it were but not from the marriage.

⁵³See Charles C. Ryrie, “Biblical Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage,” 190.

⁵⁴It is likely that Paul addressed those couples who got married as unbelievers but one later became converted as a Christian. This taken thus limits the application of the text. It seems Christianity was relatively new at Corinth. When the gospel reached Corinth, many repented by responding positively to the gospel. It was to those whose marriages had become a mixed one between one who has got converted and one who has not that the admonition was addressed and seems not to for believers today who have been admonished not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

⁵⁵Plekker, *Divorce and the Christian: What the Bible Teaches*, 39 opines credibly that although the two verbs are from the same root word and are related etymologically, yet they may have different meanings as well. The Scripture will not allow us to assume that a deserted believer is automatically single and free to remarry or that abandonment or desertion is a ground for divorce, verse 39 negates such assumption.

⁵⁶Donald W. Shaner, *A Christian View of Divorce: According to the Teaching of the New Testament* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1969), 44.

Evaluation

In evaluating the concept of “divorce is not permissible;” it could be observed that the suggestions made by the proponents of this view under consideration are enlightening but the view itself that divorce is completely not biblically permissible may not endure under close examination. It is true that *porneia* includes incest but that is not the only meaning of the term. For example in 1 Corinthians 5:1, the apostle Paul uses the term to refer to a scandal between a man and his father’s widow. It is not strictly used to refer to incest alone.

It appears rather that *porneia* is used in this verse in a broader sense to buttress what kind of *porneia* that was going on. Thus while *porneia* may mean incest, in a broader sense it can refer to other kinds or forms of immoral sexual conduct as well.⁵⁷ The only determining factor to know what the term refers to is the context and in Matthew 5 and 19, the contextual qualifiers seem not to favor incest.⁵⁸

Moreover, the proponents of the “divorce is not permissible” view seem to have clung tenaciously to their views because they think it as absurd that Jesus would consent to the teaching of Shammai and elevate it. But it is possible to see Jesus exception clause as stricter than and at variance to that of Shammai. This could be done by noting that Shammai’s school found its exception in the *erwat dabar* which although included adultery but was also interpreted to refer to any nudity which included a woman sitting wrongly. Thus “nakedness of a thing” implies inappropriate

⁵⁷Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and adapted by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed., rev. and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Fredrick W. Danker (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 693, “*Porneia*.”

⁵⁸Carson suggests that Jesus statement on divorce and remarriage can allow for a real exception without an endorsement of Shammai’s interpretation. See D. A. Carson, “Mathew,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 413.

sexual conduct including adultery. To this effect, Jesus could not be said to have bought their idea since they may have arrived at it through wrong exegesis.⁵⁹

Divorce is Permissible by *Erwat Dabar* or Unfaithfulness

This is another position taken by some scholars and or faith groups. The advocates of this view see Jesus as appealing to God's original purpose⁶⁰ as key standard for life as long as being his disciple is concerned, and also the exception clause as permitting divorce only in the case of unfaithfulness of a spouse.

Although they hold on to this view, they do not support remarriage.⁶¹ Thus, while extramarital affair may damage marriage irreparably, and the marriage bond is indissoluble, the husband and wife may divorce but not marry someone else.⁶² This assertion has been disputed and faulted by many who hold that such interpretation of the text is forced.⁶³ Therefore, the Protestant culture in this regard should be maintained which affirms that the exception clause of *porneia* is a veritable ground under which divorce could be granted and remarriage of the innocent partner ensured.

⁵⁹Carson, "Matthew" *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 413-415.

⁶⁰See Craig S. Keener, *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament*, 40.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 40, this line of reasoning may have resonated because some Jewish priests who lived in the Qumran wilderness decided and wrote their understanding that God's injunction in Genesis 2:24 forbade second marriages. This view, however, seems not to have influenced Judaism in its entirety. But the divorce is permissible only by unfaithfulness view sees the clause "except for *porneia*" as allowing for divorce only and not for remarriage. William Heth earlier subscribed to this assertion when he suggests that Matthew 19:9 has two conditional relative clauses with one that is qualified and the other absolute. This therefore implies that putting away one's wife except for immorality is forbidden and remarriage after dissolution of the marriage is also forbidden. See William A. Heth, "The Meaning of Divorce in Matthew 19:3-9," *Churchman* 98 (1984): 12.

⁶²What this view stipulates is that the husband and wife may sever their living arrangement as couple, but remain single or perhaps get reconciled. The solace of the proponents of this view is that it has been the view and stand of some notable Church Fathers. See William A. Heth, "Divorce but no Remarriage," in *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views*, 96.

⁶³For the exegesis of the apodosis "then" clause which seems to qualify the "if" clause, see the Feinbergs, *Ethics for a Brave World*, 331.

In fact this is true for if the Bible allows divorce, it will also allow remarriage. Worthy of note is that the Seventh-day Adventist Church believes in the sanctity of marriage and that only unfaithfulness to the marriage vow can sever the tie, giving the innocent partner the right to remarry. That seems to be the understanding of the proponents of the view under discussion with the exception of the right to remarry.⁶⁴

Again, the advocates of “divorce is permissible but no remarriage” position rightly observe that Christ’s exceptive clause upon which divorce could be allowed is stricter than the view of Shammai.⁶⁵ This is a statement which most scholars agree with. But this notwithstanding, it appears that the exception clause of *porneia* given by Christ, instead of giving rise to divorce was intended by Christ to discourage it. This seemed a proactive measure through which he referred his opponents to the Genesis account of marriage with a view to maintaining its sanctity and avoid the incessant human abuse and severance of a divine institution.⁶⁶ But they differ from most other scholars and the Seventh-day Adventists in that they do not subscribe to remarriage. So there is disparity in opinions here, there are those who hold the view that while the exceptive clause mentioned by Jesus is a legitimate ground for divorce, remarriage is not an option, other scholars and the Seventh-day Adventists are of the view that in as much as the scripture allows for divorce on the premise of the exceptive clause enunciated by Jesus in Matthew’s gospel, remarriage is implied and allowable for the innocent partner.

⁶⁴See H. Wayne House, ed., *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views*, 97-110. There are others who like the Seventh-day Adventists hold the view that divorce and remarriage are biblically permissible.

⁶⁵See Keener, *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament*, 40 where he intimates that Jesus words were more authoritative than that of the Shammaites who did not see it worthwhile to enforce their opinions in a rigorous manner as to invalidate divorces on other grounds, but leveraged it.

⁶⁶Robert J. Plekker rev, *Divorce and the Christian: What the Bible Teaches*, 24-26.

Divorce is Permissible for other Reasons

There is a view which is referred to as the “two exception view” or the Erasmian view.⁶⁷ This view sees divorce as permissible for two reasons namely adultery and desertion. Yet others see a variety of circumstances as worthy of causing divorce.⁶⁸

Whereas the controversy theologically rages in other faith groups, Spicer and Loasby seem to have earlier brought the “two exception view” into the ranks of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. And this view has found its way into the official document of the Church as outlined in chapter two of this study,⁶⁹ even though the Church does not allow remarriage as a result unless one party defaults by committing fornication or adultery in the process.

It is true that *porneia* has been accepted by some scholars and faith groups as the exception clause that forms a legitimate ground for divorce, the Erasmian⁷⁰ view also seems to find exegetical warrant to support their view that desertion by an unbelieving spouse or abandonment as the Seventh-day Adventists render it, should lead to divorce.⁷¹ The Seventh-day Adventist Church seems to officially understand

⁶⁷See Plekker, *Divorce and the Christian: What the Bible Teaches*, 24-26.

⁶⁸Some group them separately, that is the Erasmian view and the variety of reasons view, but this study will discuss desertion together with the other seeming causes of divorce in one section.

⁶⁹General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: 2010), 150-154. This Erasmian or the two exception view has infiltrated the Church as desertion has been inserted in the Church manual as another legitimate ground for divorce but with the term abandonment, but without remarriage unless fornication and or adultery occurs along the line. Some, like Haloviak, have even been agitating for other factors to be recognized as veritable grounds for divorce.

⁷⁰See Craig L. Blomberg, “Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy: An Exegesis of Mathew 19:3-12,” *Trinity Journal* 11 (Fall 1990): 181.

⁷¹Blomberg, “Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy: An Exegesis of Matthew 19:3-12;” writes that since Genesis 2:24 describes the marriage relationship as a covenant that implies “leaving” and “cleaving” and “becoming one flesh,” therefore any alteration of the two aspects of the covenant renders it void and forms a legitimate ground for divorce. William Spicer and Roland Loasby

together with other scholars of other faith groups, Apostle Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 7:15 as tantamount to divorce⁷² but differ somewhat when it comes to remarriage. The Seventh-day Adventists do not subscribe to remarriage upon abandonment unless the unbelieving partner remarries, commits adultery and or fornication or dies, while some other faith groups allow for remarriage upon desertion of the supposed unbelieving partner.

In the same vein, there is another view that suggests multiple reasons as capable of severing the one flesh bond which God instituted in Eden. This view that seems to propose the allowability of divorce for other reasons apart from the ones afore mentioned, presents their view in a way that replicates the Erasmian view.

In addition, the advocates of the multiple reasons suggest that the exception clause appears to be an example which Jesus gave⁷³ concerning the kind of wrong that a spouse could do to another that could elicit an adequate ground for divorce.⁷⁴ But this study sees the exceptive clause as serving a great deal to qualify God's intent for an enduring marital relationship and not just something or a leverage that Jesus gave

brought this speculation into the theology of the Seventh-day Adventists when they asserted that desertion of a spouse should form another ground for divorce hence the abandonment divorce which appears to be a recent and contemporary rendering of the term.

⁷²The proponents of this view suggest that the rendering of the word translated "depart" etymologically connotes divorce. But was the apostle propounding another divorce theory or not? Although it has been opined earlier in this study, this notion would be succinctly evaluated as it were.

⁷³See Donald W. Shaner, *A Christian View of Divorce: According to the Teaching of the New Testament*, 45-48.

⁷⁴See Jones, "A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage," 52. Here, he intimates that this view has been refuted and has suffered so many setbacks as the proponents seem to suggest that polygamy should be made acceptable, yet the view persists.

as ground for divorce⁷⁵ to be hastily embarked upon instead of seeking for reconciliation.⁷⁶

To this effect therefore, what the view that divorce is permissible for myriad of reasons suggests is that divorce is allowable when a husband or wife even though faithful to their marriage vows, becomes violently abusive. Again, when the life of the wife or husband may be threatened, divorce could be the deciding factor. This could be a renaissance of the thoughts of the rabbinic school of Hillel. But it is true that these are real life issues and may be detrimental to the peaceful and joyful atmosphere which should be seen in a home, it may be very difficult to biblically suggest that divorce should be sought because of these anomalies.

Evaluation

This view suggests that desertion or abandonment by an unbelieving spouse forms another ground for divorce. But this study views Apostle Paul's discourse in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 as an admonition on mixed marriages and not just another ground for divorce.

Earlier in Romans 7:2-3, he had written that only death brings to an end the marriage covenant between a man and a woman. Thus a woman is bound to her husband as long as both of them live. In 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, Paul seems to re-echo Christ's injunction in marriage and admonishes the no divorce principle.⁷⁷

⁷⁵Robert J. Plekker, rev, *Divorce and the Christian: What the Bible Teaches*, 44-45.

⁷⁶This opinion is a welcome idea. Reconciliation should be sought as Christians instead of hastily "putting asunder what God has joined together." This assertion stand at variance to the opinion of Blomberg who suggests that what should constitute divorce should not be left to God as it is written in the Bible, but to the discretion of one's supportive Christian community or Church. Thus it behooves the Church to determine when there is no other choice to avoid greater evil than to divorce. See Blomberg, "Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy: An Exegesis of Matthew 19:3-12," 193.

⁷⁷See Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 190-192.

The fact remains that some marriage relationships do not represent God's ideal as some spouses are abusive, nagging, and intolerant among others, traits which might precipitate family squabbles and thus separation becomes inevitable.⁷⁸ But Paul's admonition seems to be that there should be reconciliation. Separation here seems not to imply that divorce is the undergirding principle behind the admonition rather it appears to be a measure to give peace a chance.

The question that may be pondered upon could be who an unbeliever is in these contemporary times compared to who he or she was during the time Paul wrote? What should be regarded as causes for desertion or abandonment? Are these causes exegetically sound to form legitimate biblical grounds for divorce? What about the divorce laws promulgated by States and regulated by courts, do they form legitimate grounds for divorce?

Whereas some unpalatable situations may exist among some husbands and their wives, it may present a diversionary theological trajectory to suggest that such incompatible traits should form the basis for divorce. The Bible is to be our only chart and compass in such situations.

Furthermore, when the Pharisees went to Jesus as has been pointed out earlier, their question was to tempt him. But instead of a yes or no answer, Jesus referred to the Genesis account of marriage creation pointing that divorce was not in God's agenda for marriage. When they asked again about why Moses allowed it, Jesus answered that it was because of their hard heartedness. This implies that divorce is not

⁷⁸John D. Keller, *Jesus' Doctrine of Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage* (Waldoboro, ME: Goose River, 2006), 124-130. See also General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 196. Although the Church has included abandonment as another ground for divorce without remarriage unless adultery and or fornication, or death occurs along the line, it is stated that other forms of legal separations consequent upon the deterioration of marriage relations, even if civil jurisdictions permit such separations by divorce, in as

an option. Therefore the exception clause was meant to carry home the intent of God for marriage as an indissoluble covenant. The commandments of God are still valid and forgiveness is limitless. Thus, instead of counting wrongs, husband and wife should learn to forgive each other.

Also, although alcohol and drug abuse, nagging and violence may be traces of incomplete conversion, they seldom seem to form unbelief in the same context that Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7. The Apostle Paul wrote the book of 1 Corinthians to the Church he had founded.⁷⁹

Apparently, the Church at Corinth was grappling with so many things ranging from hero worship, sectarianism to immorality (1 Cor 1-3, 5-7), to mention but a few.⁸⁰ In chapter 7, the recurring theme in verses 8, 17, 20, and 24 is “remain as you are.” To those who are married in verses 1-7, he advises them not to abstain from sex.

In verses 8-9, he advises the unmarried and widows either to remain as they are or be married or remarried as in the case of widows. From verse 10, the apostle returns to the Christians who are married.

In the first part of this section he reiterates what the Lord had enunciated and said that his command is “from the Lord.”⁸¹ Thus Paul affirms Jesus’ teaching that

much as such did not occur as a result of unfaithfulness to the marriage vow, the Bible does not recognize them and no remarriage should occur as a result.

⁷⁹J. Paul Sampley, ed., *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2003), 411-413. It is inferred that the letter was a response to the one they had written 1 Corinthians 7:1. It is also likely that their letter was preceded by a letter which Paul had earlier written 1 Corinthians 5:9, which was probably lost on transit or lost sight of and therefore disregarded by the people. Therefore the canonical 1 Corinthians appear to be the effort of the apostle to pinpoint some moral decadence which had adversely affected the spirituality of the Church and in so doing reestablish his authority as an apostle.

⁸⁰See Gordon D. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 6-7. The issue of marriage and the things related to it which they had written to him is what Paul seem to address in 1 Corinthians 7.

⁸¹A consensus of scholars connects Paul’s statement here to Jesus’ exposition on the issue of divorce in Matthew chapters 5 and 19. But the exception clause is copiously omitted. And to those who

God intended marriage to be permanent and therefore divorce is unacceptable. So if an unbeliever eventually separates from his or her spouse, such should remain unmarried or get reconciled to his or her spouse.

Subsequently, in 1 Corinthians 7:12, the apostle turns his address to Christians who engaged in mixed marriages. His point seems to be that there is no explicit command from the Lord himself concerning the matter and so he gives his own instruction as an inspired Apostle that the believer should not divorce the unbeliever because consequent upon their marriage, the “unbeliever has been sanctified by the believer.”

This implies that in verse 14, the unbeliever is exposed to God’s grace and goodness in a way that leads to repentance and conversion (Rom 5:1-4).⁸² In verse 15, however, the apostle admonishes that if the unbeliever desires to leave, he or she should leave. This ‘leave’ suggests some kind of separation in the marriage relationship.

The question that readily comes to mind is whether this separation means divorce or something that is not legal?⁸³ Sequel to the assertion that divorce is implied

see divorce as not biblically permitted, they see a reason here to suggest that the exceptive clause *porneia* might be a redaction or an interpolation or at best refers to something uncommon but more peculiar to the Jews. But others seem to suggest that instead of detailing every exception, Paul seeks to present a teaching of marriage and divorce generally. This later point seems plausible because the exceptive clause is Christ’s teaching. See Charles C Ryrie, “Biblical Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage,” 189.

⁸²Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 300; he enjoins that from the perspective of Paul, the maintenance of the marriage engenders the potential for the realization of salvation hence the statement “sanctified by the believing spouse.”

⁸³See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BAGD), trans. And adapted by William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed., rev. and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (1979), s.v. “*korizo*.” This is the root word of *korizetai* and is translated to mean “to be separated of divorce. . .” Even Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 520, supports this view, and so according to this rendering *korizo* means divorce.

in 1 Corinthians 7:15, Davidson adds that the book of Judges 14:20; 15:2; and 1 Samuel 25:44 in the Old Testament allowed for divorce on the ground of abandonment and was unrestricted by God in those times and as such those passages may have influenced Paul to include abandonment as a ground for divorce in 1 Corinthians 7:15.⁸⁴ But these marriages were perhaps among the marriage pervasions prevalent among the people and, for which the Pharisees asked Jesus a question, yet He answered that only *porneia* could sever marriage. Apostle Paul may not have been influenced by these passages as it were. This seems so because he had already set forth the concept of “no divorce” four consecutive times in 1 Corinthians 7:10-13. Thus it may seem unlikely for Paul to sanction in verse 15 what he had earlier advised against in verses 10-13 by drawing from the Old Testament and thus modify Christ’s teaching maybe as an exercise of his privileged ecclesiastical authority.

Apparently, the verb *chorizo* or *korizo* in verse 15 seems to suggest as mentioned earlier in this study that the unbeliever may desire to “leave;” this word seem not to equal the *aphiemi* or even *apoluo* of verse 10-11. The implication is that if the unbeliever departs, the believer is not “enslaved,” this seems to be the literal rendering of the verb *dedoulotai*, which seems to imply “trying to preserve the union through legal maneuvers or pursuing the unwilling partner all over the empire.”⁸⁵ The

⁸⁴Richard M. Davidson, “Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage: Old Testament Foundations and New Testament Implications,” *Biblical Research Institute research reports*. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (1999): 3, accessed 18 May 2016, <https://adventistbiblicalresearchreports.org/...christian.../marriage--divorce--and--remarriage-01>.

⁸⁵W. H. Mare, “First Corinthians,” *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, ed. F. E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 229. In verse 39 of 1 Corinthians 7, Paul uses another word *deo* which means “to tie, bind, and or fasten,” thus the words used by Paul in verses 15 and 39 are not the same and not even related to the same root; *douloo* from where the perfect passive *dedoulotai* comes from is equally from *doulos* (slave) used in the LXX to translate *abad* (to serve), while *deo* is used in the LXX to translate *asar* (to tie up). Thus he uses the word *deo* in Acts 20:22 when referring to his sense of constraint to go to Jerusalem. He applies it further in Romans 7:2, 1 Corinthians 7:26, 39 to describe the “binding” nature of the marriage commitment until death. Thus while the marriage covenant is binding till death, the abandoned believer is not “enslaved” to maintain it against the wishes of the unbeliever, but to always work for reconciliation or remain single. See also J. K. Elliot,

injunction seems to be therefore that Christ's allowability of divorce only on the premise of *porneia* seems not to enslave the believer to maintain the union against the wishes of an unbelieving partner who seems to insist on ending the union. Thus while not enslaved, the believer is to work towards ensuring reconciliation or remains single.

Noteworthy is the fact that while some scholars and commentators seem to agree that Paul was giving another ground for divorce, like Jones, Davidson, and others as discussed above, other commentators and scholars like F. F. Bruce and some Seventh-day Adventists⁸⁶ also seem not to be comfortable with that assertion as it appears to vary with the teaching of Christ. To this effect therefore, the words of Jesus seem sufficient here when He admonishes that "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mark 10:9, KJV), which may imply that reconciliation is golden and forgiveness is limitless. The Genesis model which God initiated and which was also referred to by Jesus seems sufficient and paramount than human concessions.

Whereas the Seventh-day Adventist Church has included abandonment or desertion of an unbelieving partner as another ground legitimate enough to bring about severance of the one flesh bond made by God in Eden but no remarriage unless in the process adultery and or fornication occurs, it is noteworthy that others are clamoring for the inclusion of other factors also as capable of causing divorce, and have resorted to State laws and courts for such to be actualized. It is the submission of this study that Jesus' statement should suffice when he stated plainly during his Sermon on the Mount that there could be no dissolution of the marriage tie except for

"Paul's Teaching on Marriage in 1 Corinthians: Some Problems Considered," *NTS* 19 (1972-1973): 219-223; J. Carl Laney, "Paul and the Permanence of Marriage in 1 Corinthians 7" *JETS* (1992): 4-17.

unfaithfulness to the marriage vow, even though the exact meaning of *porneia* is being debated upon by some, this study submits that Jesus did utter the word because the various forms of illicit sex mentioned in Leviticus 18 are summarized in Acts 15:29 by the term *porneia*. It is in the opinion of this study also that Apostle Paul may not have had in mind to make abandonment or desertion a new ground for divorce as analyzed above.

⁸⁶See for example Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Here We Stand*, 495-510.

CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In concluding this study that centers on the theological evaluation of the Seventh-day Adventists perspective on divorce, it may be worthwhile to summarily go through what has been written so far. And also pinpoint the implications they may have for further study.

Summary

The study elucidates the various views and contexts in which divorce occurs within a legitimately contracted heterosexual marital relationship; that is, between a man and a woman. For Seventh-day Adventism, divorce is an issue that borders on lifestyle and falls under one of the fundamental beliefs of the Church or doctrinal beliefs.

Marriage is viewed as an institution made by God perhaps to replicate the unity which prevails in the Godhead. Also marriage is seen as a covenant made under God which reflects the relationship that exists between Christ and His Church (Eph 5:22-23). It is not a contract that can be broken when one party breaks its terms. To this effect, if Christ ever abandons his Church, it would provide the justification for a man to divorce his wife. But in as much as Christ does not discard or divorce his Church in spite of the wrinkles on her, it would be improper for a man to divorce his wife. When such is done, it means humans are severing a divine institution. Divorce, as generally understood, is unacceptable from a biblical viewpoint because it invalidates the one flesh covenant which the Lord created.

In the Old Testament, a passage that has been a subject of intense debate is Deuteronomy 24:1-4. But in the New Testament, Jesus' explanation of the passage inferred that Moses did not command divorce but permitted it consequent upon the hard-heartedness of the people (Matt 19:8; cf. Mark 10:5). A juxtaposition of the hermeneutics of Jesus in relation to the issue of divorce in the gospels, with Moses' teachings on the same subject with particular reference to Deuteronomy 24:14, shows that Moses' teachings were descriptive and not prescriptive. Thus in his answer to the Pharisees, Jesus intimates that the concession of Moses which is because of their hard heart borders on permission, not a command. Furthermore, Jesus' response not only placed men and women on equal ground implying that women are not property to be dismissed at will; but what was implicit in Deuteronomy 24 Jesus made explicit in the book of Matthew 19:8ff. This seems so because when divorce is flippantly done, which was the case then, the spouse forces the other party into a position of potential adultery.

One of the interpretative schools of thought holds the view that divorce is always sinful and not permitted in the Bible. This view accentuates the absolute indissolubility of marriage and thus regards as sinful any type of divorce and remarriage no matter the circumstance that may have prompted it. This view sees the exceptive clause as an interpolation or redaction on the side of Matthew consequent upon the fact that Mark and Luke did not mention the clause in their own gospels. Also it is adjudged by the proponents of this view that Jesus, being the creator of marriage, could not have consented to the speculations of the school of Shammai.

Another school suggests that divorce is biblically allowable only on the issue of an exception clause of *porneia* or unfaithfulness to the marriage vow. This exception clause, as given by Jesus is found only in Matthew's gospel.

The controversy over why Mark and Luke did not mention it is seen as minor consequent upon the fact of each gospel writer's target audience. Significantly, Jesus' exceptive clause is stricter than the notion of the school of Shammai. The other school of thought, drawing inspiration from Hillel, suggests that divorce could occur for myriad of reasons such as desertion, incompatibility, quarrelsomeness, abusive situations, and other extraneous circumstances which violate the one flesh bond in the creation narratives. This view sees the possibility of divorce for various circumstances even if it is not on scriptural grounds.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has for many years officially held the traditional view that apart from death, only unfaithfulness to the marriage vow could sever husband and wife and the one adjudged innocent gets the right to remarry. This view has been the teaching of the Seventh-day Adventists notwithstanding the various ways that the exceptive clause of Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9 is interpreted by some scholars; but of late, the Church has included abandonment as another ground for divorce but no remarriage except if fornication and or adultery occurs in between, a term referred to as desertion by other scholars.

The assertion that in 1 Corinthians 7, Apostle Paul was propounding another ground for divorce rather than giving admonition on mixed marriages is hardly tenable. While to many theologians the passage is shrouded in ambiguity others view it as polemical. Thus the real thing that Apostle Paul wanted to pass across is only conjectured; therefore, it follows that propounding a theological construct from an ambiguous passage may likely portend more ambiguity.

Conclusions

In light of the study so far, some conclusions may be drawn as follows:

Divorce is not God's ideal. He designed marriage to be a lifelong covenant union between a man and a woman.

Jesus spoke in unique Jewish contexts which should make the balanced interpreter to acknowledge that his teachings on divorce often involved generalizations and overstatements which were not intended to be exception-free absolutes. Divorce and remarriage do not admit positive commands in scripture. Jesus teaching in this regard reiterated the leaving and cleaving injunction of Genesis 2:18-25. Apart from marriage, it is only in following after Christ that leaving of one's parents is enjoined. All these "leaving" and "cleaving" do not transgress the fifth commandment. Yet in Matthew 19:29 where Jesus talks of leaving all for his sake, he mentioned not one's spouse. Thus what God has joined together even following Jesus should not put asunder.

Abandonment, as a basis for divorce, a view couched in 1 Corinthians 7 needs to be viewed from the lens of the author to know if he actually propounded another ground for divorce or not. The reference to the unbelieving partner deserting is not a license to divorce nor does it allow human laws to regulate marriage and legalize separation that may not be in tandem with biblical injunctions.

Finally, Genesis does not give any reason for divorce. Moses' permission of the act was as a result of hard heart of the people. Therefore, consequent upon the exception clause which the book of Matthew credits to Jesus, divorce should be considered only as a last resort after all avenues of repentance and reconciliation have been exhausted. It is supposed not to be used as an easy way out in a seemingly difficult marriage.

Recommendations

There is no gainsaying the fact that marriage is a divinely designed institution between a man and a woman to form a lifelong heterosexual marital relationship. Divorce on the other hand is a humanly orchestrated innovation which erodes the divine ideal and agenda for marriage. Accordingly, it is appropriate to make the following recommendations:

The Seventh-day Adventist Church should see marriage as holy, in a broad sense, in order to curb the postmodernist approach which may infiltrate the teaching of the Church in this regard. To conceive abandonment as a veritable and legitimate biblical ground for divorce, yet no remarriage unless there is the occurrence of fornication or adultery by any of the parties in the process, seems to anticipate a secular culture that tend to vitiate the spirituality of the Church. Thus the Church should look into her official stand again for if the Bible allows divorce because of abandonment, which this study doubts, it will contain an injunction for remarriage also because of same.

Furthermore, it is needful that the Seventh-day Adventist Church should be redemptive in approach, meaning the Church should mediate in marital conflicts on time to bring about reconciliation between a couple without waiting until divorce occurs; it should also be noted that being redemptive does not mean compromise. Again, premarital counseling should be intensified and also post marital counseling; married men and women should be acquainted with the need to seek help early enough from the Church on seeing traces of marital difficulty before a consideration for divorce is nursed. The Church should provide an enabling environment, intensive care and support in the event of any marital difficulty to prevent an eventual dissolution of the marriage.

Significantly, the Church should be proactive. Thus while upholding the biblical standard of marriage and divorce, the Church should try to mediate in marital controversies in the Church before they escalate to the point of divorce.

Also the emphasis on investigating who the innocent and or guilty parties are instead of reconciliation need to be properly looked into with an overarching intention of being redemptive in approach and proactive instead of the seeming reactive position that appear to be prevalent. Again, there should be a clear distinction between State laws and biblical injunctions. Thus when human laws are not in agreement with the teachings of the Bible, believers ought to obey God rather than human concessions.

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