

**THE CHALLENGE OF INTERPRETING JESUS' TEACHING ON
Πορνεία IN MATTHEW 19:9 IN CONTEMPORARY BIBLICAL
SCHOLARSHIP IN AFRICA**

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Abstract

The term πορνεία, which refers to the only biblical reason for divorce, has become a major concern within the ranks of the Church, Mosque and Traditional religion in Africa. Existing studies on the phenomenon of divorce have focused more on its varied causes and consequences than its permissible condition in the biblical texts. The study, therefore, examined Jesus' teaching on πορνεία in Matthew 19:9 with a view to establishing its accurate interpretation for contemporary biblical scholarship in Africa. Using Peter Stuhlmacher's theory of biblical interpretation, the study reveals Jesus' emphasis on the indissolubility of marriage. It also shows that divorce is not desirable but permissible on the absolute biblical ground of πορνεία and ο μοιχεία. Other trivial reasons identified in the work are socio-cultural, demographic and personal. All these reasons result in increased risks of poverty and increased risk of problems for children and divorced parents. Accurate interpretation of biblical texts, as well as improvement and enhancement of couples' relationships in relation to Jesus' teaching on πορνεία in Matthew 19:9 are recommended.

Keywords: *Πορνεία, Μοιχεία, Divorce, Biblical scholarship*

Introduction

Jesus' teaching on πορνεία poses interpretative challenge to biblical scholarship. The point of contention centres upon Matthew 19:9, known as the "exception clause." Hagner opines that the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 had not come from Jesus due to the absolute prohibition of divorce in Mark 10:11 which Matthew used as his source. He added that either Matthew or someone else in the traditional handling of Jesus' teaching must have added it¹. Also Gundry², Stein³ and Bruner⁴ aver that Jesus never actually uttered the exception statement. Rather, Matthew or another editor of the book of Matthew later added this statement because of the Jewish audience to which the document was addressed. This view was part of the decisions of the Jesus' Seminar⁵. This kind of assumption of literary dependence forces those scholars to diminish the historical precision of Matthew's account. However, the inerrancy of the gospel records is a guarantee that they are accurate in every detail and that the prevalence of the divine over the human guarantees the precision of every part of Bible history. Therefore, I contend that Jesus did, in fact, state the "exception

clause” to the Pharisees in their disputation. Matthew has faithfully recorded what Jesus taught.

Furthermore, Greg’s alleged “sequence” of events in Matthew 19:9 because of what cannot be found. His “sequence” argument is fabricated only by adding the words “follow,” “follows,” and “followed by” to the actual text of Matthew 19:9a⁶. No one denies that some things are logically sequenced in Matthew 19:9a. A man must first be married to a woman in order for him to “put” her “away.” And a man must first “put away” his wife before he can marry another.

Harper⁷, in his contextual study of Matthew 19:9, states that some scholars argue that Jesus was making a new law which is applicable only to Christians, while others say Jesus was clarifying the Old Law’s teaching on πορνεία. We could go on and on, but this would serve no purpose. As a corollary to the above varied interpretations of Matthew 19:9 from diverse scholars can one see that challenge in interpretation certainly does arise?

The study adopts Peter Stuhlmacher’s theory of biblical interpretation, which posits that “a biblical theology... must attempt to interpret the Old and New Testament tradition as it wants to be interpreted. For this reason, it cannot read these texts only from a critical distance as historical sources but must, at the same time, take them seriously as testimonies of faith which belong to the Holy Scripture of early Christianity”⁸.

People unknowingly come away from the Holy Scripture with faulty interpretations nowadays. This is because of inadequate attention to the principles involved in understanding the Holy Scripture... studying the Bible in this way, without proper hermeneutical guidelines, can lead to confusion and interpretations that may bring about indirect conflict. Undoubtedly, Bible interpretation is essential for understanding and teaching the Holy Scripture properly. One must know the meaning of the Holy Scripture before having knowledge of its message today. One must understand its sense, for then, before seeing its significance for now. Hence, the need for accurate biblical interpretation in contemporary biblical scholarship in Africa is essential.

In this study, the most crucial issue is not Matthew 19:9 as an exception clause itself, but the question of investigating what Jesus intends to teach about divorce in Matthew 19:9, the actual meaning of πορνεία and its accurate interpretation for contemporary biblical scholarship in Africa.

Background

The most important text relating to divorce in the Old Testament is Deuteronomy 24:1-4. This Mosaic provision was not intended to be a divine endorsement of divorce. It was rather a concession to human sinfulness and “hardness of heart” (Matt. 19:8). The intention was to regulate and mitigate existing practices⁹. The meaning of the term עֲרוֹת דָּבָר, (‘ervat dabar) “some uncleanness or something indecent,” is the subject of much debate. The

expression *עֲרוֹת דָּבָר*, probably, was not restricted just to adultery in its meaning. The Pentateuch prescribed the death penalty rather than divorce for adultery (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22); it is unclear whether the death penalty for divorce was regularly administered. The indecency would also need to be more than just the suspicion of adultery. Others have suggested the term *עֲרוֹת דָּבָר*, might refer to some physical deficiency, such as the inability to bear children. This interpretation, however, lacks support from other Old Testament texts¹⁰. What, then, did Moses have in mind when he wrote these verses? The indecency must surely be shocking; ancient Israel took marriage seriously. Abel Isakkson argues that the term *עֲרוֹת דָּבָר*, refers to a wife voluntarily or involuntarily exposing herself. In Ezekiel 23:18, it is said that a man's soul turns away from the wife who exposes her nakedness. The indecency, probably, was any lewd, immoral behaviour, including but not restricted to, adultery. Any kind of deviant sexual behaviour short of intercourse may have been in view. This interpretation of *עֲרוֹת דָּבָר*, fits in well with the overall Old Testament outlook on human sexuality and personal modesty¹¹.

On the one hand, the school of Hillel basically allowed as a reason for divorce, whatever a husband did not like about his wife. For instance, Hillel believed the phrase *עֲרוֹת דָּבָר*, meant anything displeasing to the husband, including something as trivial as spoiling his food¹². On the other hand, the school of Shammai allowed a husband to divorce his wife only if she had committed some kind of sexual offence. In other words, the conservative school of Shammai took the expression *עֲרוֹת דָּבָר*, to refer to immodest behaviour, sexual impurity or sexual offence. Yet, what was considered a sexual offence? It included a wife, being seen in public with open hair or with bare arms. According to Rabbi Meir, it also included an outgoing attitude toward slaves and neighbours, spinning on the street, drinking eagerly on the street, and bathing with men. It was more or less an offence of the current customs by a wife that allowed the husband to get a divorce¹³.

In addition, divorce was seen as a privilege that God had given to Israel. "According to rabbinic tradition, Yahweh has said: 'In Israel I have given divorce, not have I given divorce among the Gentiles.' Only in Israel 'God has connected His name with divorce'"¹⁴. Instead of following God's plan and accepting the indissolubility of marriage, divorce was regarded as a privilege. "Thus even dissolution of a marriage without any reason was considered valid. . ."¹⁵.

According to Thomas Hale, the Jewish law said that if a man wanted to divorce his wife, he should write out a certificate of divorce (Deut. 24:1-4). This was written in order to protect the rights of the woman, not to justify divorce. The certificate of divorce gave the woman certain legal rights, such as the right to marry again. Moses wrote the divorce law because men were putting away their wives without a good cause. They were separating what

God had joined together. Men's hearts had become hardened against both God and their wives¹⁶.

Divorce was taken lightly in the days of Jesus' earthly ministry. According to Matthew's account, Jesus said, λέγει αὐτοῖς ὅτι Μωσῆς πρὸς τὴν σκληροκαρδίαν ὑμῶν ἐπέτρεψεν ὑμῖν ἀπολῦσαι τὰς γυναῖκας ὑμῶν, ἀπ' ἀρχῆς δὲ οὐ γέγονεν οὕτως. λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι ὃς ἂν ἀπολύσῃ τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, μὴ ἐπὶ πορνείᾳ, καὶ γαμήσῃ ἄλλην, μοιχᾶται· καὶ ὁ ἀπολελυμένην γαμήσας μοιχᾶται. "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery." (Matt. 19:8-9). Deplorably, this biblical text has been interpreted quite differently. Here are some of the views that are maintained:

- Divorce is impossible even in the case of adultery; otherwise Jesus would not differ from Moses and would have taken a position more liberal than the Mosaic Law that—in the case of adultery—required the death penalty. Remarriage is unthinkable¹⁷.
- Divorce is not possible except in the case of adultery. However, even if one partner commits adultery and the spouses are divorced, remarriage is excluded. This is the position of the church fathers, and is found even in our day¹⁸.
- Divorce is not possible except for sexual unfaithfulness during the engagement period. If it is found that one spouse was unfaithful during the time of engagement, divorce is permissible, as well as remarriage¹⁹.
- Divorce is not possible except in the case of adultery. If one spouse commits adultery and the spouses are divorced, the partner who did not commit adultery may remarry. However, reconciliation is preferable. This is the position of Erasmus of Rotterdam, the major Reformers, many evangelicals, and the Adventist Church²⁰.
- The Scripture is opposed to divorce. Yet, it is possible to get a divorce. Reasons are not only adultery but also abandonment by a spouse, abuse, violence, etc. Remarriage is possible. Some suggest that the question of who is guilty should not be discussed. Others suggest that remarriage is always possible, at least, under the condition that the former spouse manifests a spirit of forgiveness²¹.
- It is claimed that Jesus' original words did not contain the exception clause. These original words are found in Mark and Luke. The exception clause occurs in Matthew and is an addition of the early church, which under the influence of the Holy Spirit and the post-Easter Christ has actualised the biblical text. Another application and actualisation is found with Paul (1 Corinthians 7:12-15). Therefore, the Christian church has the right not only to interpret but also to reinterpret the Scripture. There is an openness to deal with other cases not mentioned in Scripture. Why should the Holy Spirit not lead the

modern church in finding other reasons for a legitimate divorce as He has led the church of old?²²

- It is claimed that when Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount dealt with the issue of divorce and remarriage, it was not a commandment. Because verse 30 of Matthew 5 has to be understood figuratively, verse 32 and the entire passage should also be understood figuratively. Although Jesus' intention is clear that marriages should be permanent, divorce and remarriage are possible.
- The exception clause refers to incest only. Divorce is possible only if a "marriage" exists; that, according to Leviticus 18, should never have been instituted, and if a believer and an unbeliever are married, and the unbeliever wants to get a divorce. However, spouses who abuse their partners verbally or physically, who are alcohol or drug addicts, who are blasphemers, who love pleasures more than God, etc., are hardly believers, even if they are baptized Christians. They are to be avoided²³.

Thus, in the time of Jesus, rabbinic opinion on *רַבִּי תַּלְמִיד*, had divided into Hillel and Shammai interpretative traditions. The more permissive interpretation appears to be the prevailing understanding of the first century. This perspective, therefore, provides the background for Matthew 19:9.

Jesus' teaching on *πορνεία* in Matthew 19:9

Matthew 19:9 forms the conclusion and key to the entire debate between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus' teaching in Matthew 19:9 should be considered as what God really had in mind when it comes to divorce: *ὃς ἂν ἀπολύσῃ τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, μὴ ἐπὶ πορνείᾳ, καὶ γαμήσῃ ἄλλην, μοιχᾷται · καὶ ὁ ἀπολελυμένην γαμήσας μοιχᾷται.* "whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery." It is probable that whatever Jesus meant in Matthew 19:9, his reply would harmonise with Moses' teaching in Deuteronomy. The question of the Pharisees "is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all," placed the issue into the context of the liberal Hillel/restrictive Shammai debate on the meaning of Deuteronomy 24:1. The question was an attempt to trap Jesus in a "no-win" situation. By siding with one rabbinic school against the other, Jesus would be cast in a poor light in the arena of public opinion²⁴. Instead of falling into the trap of the Pharisees, Jesus rejected both categories of the debate. He rejected the notion that the Old Testament sanctions escape from marriage. In response to their question, Jesus invokes the creation ordinances and God's original design for marriage (Genesis 2:21-24). After citing God's ideal intent for marriage, Jesus declares that marriage should not be severed (Matthew 19:6). At first glance, it appears that Jesus is contradicting Moses. Moreover, Jesus appears to have made Moses (Genesis 2:21-24—no divorce) contradict Moses (Deut. 24:1-4—granting a bill of divorce). The

Pharisees state that Moses commanded such a thing to occur. In their eyes, Jesus is contradicting Moses²⁵. This apparent contradiction can be answered in two ways. First, Jesus corrects this perception by noting that Moses “permitted” divorce. In other words, Jesus draws a significant distinction between “command” and “permission;” permission is not a command. In speaking of permission, Jesus avoided contradicting Moses and making Moses contradict himself. Indeed, God “ordained” and Jesus “commanded” that marriage be permanent. Moses “permitted” divorce because the hearts of his people were hard. Consequently, however one understands Matthew 19:9, one may say that while divorce is permitted, it is not commanded²⁶. Second, Scripture contains several instances where a universal command is given, and then certain qualifications or refinements on the command follow. For example, the command “you shall not kill” (better rendered “murder”) is universal in scope and applicable to all. Yet, certain exceptions for the taking of human life do exist, such as capital punishment, self-defence, or just wars. These do not violate the scope or the intent of the command. They are legitimate qualifications that do not lessen the “punch” of the command. The command stands even in the face of certain, qualified, God-inspired exceptions. This is the case in Matthew 19:9. Jesus is careful and intentional in reasserting the importance of the permanence of marriage. “What God has joined together, let no one separate.” There can also be God-given exceptions to this universal premise. Marriage is permanent, yet, divorce is permitted within certain parameters. The permanence of marriage is thus preserved (God’s ideal), and Christ’s “exception” is maintained. When viewed this way, the apparent contradiction is resolved, thereby preserving the integrity of God’s ideal standard, the Mosaic permission, and Christ’s “exception.”²⁷

Exegesis of Matthew 19:9

After a brief survey on Jesus’ teaching on divorce in Mathew 19:9, it is imperative to understand the terms πορνεία and μοιχεία in the context of the biblical text under study. This is evident because an analysis of the two key words used in the text—πορνεία and μοιχεία provides greater clarity regarding what Jesus taught and why Jesus used these particular words in His response to the Pharisees’ questions.

Verse 9a: ὃς ἂν ἀπολύσῃ τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, μὴ ἐπὶ πορνείᾳ “whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity”. The word πορνεία is a broad concept, and several uses of it are found in the New Testament. The term πορνεία included adultery, but it could also mean incest, intercourse with prostitutes, premarital sex, homosexual practices, and bestiality²⁸. Πορνεία covered a wide gamut of sexual sins, and thus, “should not be restricted unless the entire context requires it”²⁹. Fitzmyer avers that πορνεία means incest³⁰. Thus, divorce would be acceptable in the case of incestuous marriages and/or relationships. Other scholars believe the term πορνεία refers to premarital sexual unfaithfulness³¹.

Thus, if a man discovers that his bride is not a virgin³², a divorce is permissible on the grounds of adultery during the betrothal period. Some contend that πορνεία means adultery³³. A divorce would, therefore, be permissible on the grounds that the wife is an unrepentant and unrestrained adulterer.

How then should we understand the meaning of πορνεία in Matthew 19:9? Matthew probably used πορνεία as a general term referring to all forms of deviant sexual behaviour. Incest, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, etc. all resulted in the break of the marriage relationship, and thus, precipitate an occasion that could ultimately end in divorce. On the other hand, Fitzner³⁴ contends that πορνεία denotes prostitution, unchastity, fornication, and is used of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse. The context reveals that in Matthew 19:9, πορνεία does not refer to sexual adultery in general, but to sexual relations between a married woman and a man other than her husband, and thus, to adultery.

Verse 9b: καὶ γαμήσῃ ἄλλην, μοιχᾶται · καὶ ὁ ἀπολελυμένην γαμήσας μοιχᾶται (and marries another, commits adultery). Laney³⁵ avers that, “The word πορνεία does not normally mean ‘adultery.’ The usual word for adultery is μοιχεία”. Matthew was well aware of the word for adultery μοιχεία, using both μοιχεία and πορνεία in the same context³⁶. It should be noted that the meaning of the word πορνεία is not nearly as clear-cut as μοιχεία. It has a wider range of connotations throughout the area of sexual sin and impropriety, including the act of adultery³⁷. Many people interpret the words, πορνεία and μοιχεία to be the same, but, if it were the case, then why would Jesus not have used the same word? Either He would have leaned towards adultery or more towards fornication. It is clear that Jesus chose to use these two words specifically to indicate a concrete and valid reason for divorce. The order in which Jesus placed the words ἀπολελυμένην and ἀπολύσῃ within the sentence is important: Fornication would be the cause of divorce. If, however, either of the two parties were to remarry after the divorce, it would be considered as adultery³⁸. Harper³⁹ explains why Jesus called the second marriage adultery: When a man ‘leaves his father and mother’ in order to be joined to his wife, there is a union formed. To marry another after divorcing the first wife substitutes another union for the union that God intended should not be broken. In this regard, Eldredge⁴⁰ explains how engaging in sexual immorality constitutes a *breach of the marriage contract*:

Marriage is also a legally binding contract and is subject by law of secular government. When seen from a purely legal and technical sense, any engagement in extramarital sexual relations is a “breach of contract.” It breaks the once mutually agreed upon terms of the marriage contract. Indeed, many arguments are offered on the notion that marriage is an indissoluble union. For example, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that marriage, because of its sacramental nature, is indissoluble, and thus, can never be broken⁴¹. Some argue that marriage is a covenant and not a contract. Contracts can be broken; covenants cannot be broken. Marriage is, therefore, indissoluble⁴². Others

contend that the teaching of the Bible regarding the nature of the marital bond is that marriage is indissoluble. The language of Genesis 2:24 (leaving, cleaving, one flesh language) is cited as evidence in support of this position⁴³. Another suggestion is that the physical act of sex itself permanently joins the couple together. To engage in sex with a multitude of partners is to join oneself with another in the most intimate of human unions, thus forming a polygamous relationship⁴⁴. Despite these and other arguments, I believe the Bible teaches that, under certain circumstances, marriage is dissoluble⁴⁵. For example, death breaks the marriage bond.

On the other hand, Laney⁴⁶ asserts that, "According to Jesus, mere formal or legal divorce does not dissolve the actual marriage that was made permanent by God." As a corollary to the above arguments, it is noteworthy that *marital unfaithfulness* is the only valid reason for divorce. *Adultery* is, therefore, the consequence of divorce, which has occurred on the grounds of fornication. The act of *marital unfaithfulness* does not necessarily point towards the man or the woman, since either party could be guilty of this act. I, therefore, contend that the final test of truth is the accurate interpretation of the Bible in any area it touches upon. One must find out what God meant by what He said.

Besides *marital unfaithfulness*, multiple interlocking factors have contributed to the rapid rise of divorce in Nigeria and other countries in Africa. These same factors have contributed to the maintenance of relatively high rates of divorce into the 21st century as well as to increasing rates of cohabitation. Socio-cultural and demographic features and personal reasons people give for divorcing are related to these higher rates of divorce in Africa.

Socio-Cultural Features: Socio-Cultural features deal with the liberalisation of norms concerning individual choice, and the lessening of religious influence. For many, marriage has become an individual choice rather than a covenant before God and this change has contributed to the acceptance of its temporal nature⁴⁷. There are socio-cultural trends which later came to influence the passage of more liberal divorce laws. These legal factors have made it easier for people to be less attached to marriage as an *institution*, and consequently, to turn to divorce as a solution.

Abe⁴⁸ argues that among the Yoruba, once divorce is legally granted, either party may remarry. While this is contrary to biblical teaching, it is in accordance with moral standards of the society. It is also in conformity with the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria⁴⁹. This does not mean that Nigeria, as a civilised society, does not consider divorce as a necessary evil. But it must be noted, as indicated above, that in traditional Yoruba marriage, parents, relations, and friends of the couple, in most cases, intervene to save the marriages of their loved ones from collapse in the face of any possible divorce. However, in contemporary Nigeria, the assessment of reports in the Nigerian dailies, radio and television family programmes, and interviews of people, shows that the divorce rate in Nigeria is skyrocketing. Ironically, however, the marriage game remains

very popular. Reasons for this disturbing situation included the changing social values of the modern world. There is not enough family counselling, and many people get married without the idea of staying married for life, but for convenience. According to Arowole⁵⁰, the rate of divorce is higher among educated families than illiterate persons who are predominantly farmers and polygamists. As a consequence of these trends, Nigerians and most Africans have developed a lower threshold of tolerance when their marriage does not meet with their expectations for personal fulfilment.

Demographic Features: Low incomes and poverty are risk features because financial stressors often impact negatively on a marital relationship. On the other side of the equation, a very rapid upward social mobility where the acquisition of money and status is a prime mover is also a risk feature. This may be because such a pursuit of materialism takes time away from relationships or reflects individualistic values that are incompatible with a good conjugal life—which refers us back to the cultural factors mentioned earlier. Also, mothers who have children without a partner are more likely to be young and poor and to cohabit before marrying—thus, combining many risk factors for divorce. In addition, men are more likely to divorce when there is a high proportion of unmarried women with them in the labour force and the same occurs for women who work in domains with a male preponderance⁵¹.

Personal reasons: The personal reasons or explanations that people give for their divorce, such as alcoholism, domestic violence, infidelity, “didn’t get along,” “no longer loved each other” and “money problems” actually flow from the socio-cultural and demographic factors discussed earlier. For instance, without an emphasis on individualism and gratification, people would not divorce as often because they “fell out of love.”

These features namely, marital unfaithfulness, socio-cultural, demographic and personal reasons have resulted in poverty and an increased risk for the development of problems among the children involved. These consequences apply not only to the Yoruba and the Nigerians, but to most countries of Africa. In many countries, divorced women suffer additional consequences, such as discrimination and the loss of their children.

Increased risks of poverty: Divorce also increases the risk of poverty for a large proportion of women and their children⁵². For instance, ex-husbands, compared to ex-wives, are less likely to be poor because their income is generally higher, they do not have full care of their children with all the attendant expenses, and their child support payments are usually not crippling. Nevertheless, in a decade when most families have two breadwinners, men who divorce lose far more economically than in the past, especially those married to a high-earning wife. As child support payments become better enforced, economic factors may contribute in the long run to dissuade some men from ending their marriages.

For families already burdened by poverty, once separation takes place, the mother and child unit often becomes even poorer. The younger the children are at the time of parental divorce or common-law dissolution, the more likely they are to be poor, as they have younger parents who typically earn less.

Increased risk of problems for children and divorced parents: Divorce is, above all, an emotionally painful transition and, as Kelly and Emery⁵³ point out, it can “create lingering feelings of sadness, longing, worry, and regret that coexist with competent psychological and social functioning.” Divorce is often accompanied by poverty or a significant reduction in financial resources. This factor contributes to amplifying the negative effects of divorce on the mother-child family unit, on the father child relationship and on children’s life chances. On the other hand, Abe⁵⁴ avers that like the Jews, descent is traced through male lineage among the Yoruba. Elders did a lot to salvage disillusioned marriages. Divorce was not very common in ancient Yoruba marriages. Usually women suffer more in any broken marriages since they are not allowed to leave with their children, and, this forces them back at times. In order to encourage the stability of marriages, and promote social sanity, the liberal divorce law of the country, which invariably has a remarkable influence over all forms of marriage, should be checked. Citizens ought to derive the fullest possible benefit from the law of the country as it concerns marriage. Agbede⁵⁵ has similarly agitated for a revision of the marriage laws in Nigeria. It is well known that the tremendous effect of liberal divorce does not encourage endurance. Rather, it encourages and promotes sexual crime, immorality, social ills, and juvenile delinquency. Its implications on the children of the marriage are better experienced than expressed.

Conclusion

In the light of the brief biblical overview, I contend that Jesus has reinforced the indissolubility of marriage in Matthew 19:9. Divorce is not God’s ideal intention for creation. It destroys what God has joined together, and is against God’s will. The study reveals, firstly, that if many more people learnt to interpret the Holy Scripture in context, quite a few doctrinal differences could disappear. Thus, biblical interpretation is a potent unifying force in biblical scholarship in Africa. Secondly, that the word *πορνεία* is identified as the intended act. Thirdly, that the only reason for a biblical divorce is *πορνεία* and *ορ μοιχεία*. Other trivial reasons identified for divorce are *socio-cultural*, *demographic* and *personal*. Fourthly, that *increased risks of poverty* and *increased risk of problems for children and divorced parents* are consequences identified in the work.

Divorce, therefore, is never desirable but permissible on the biblical ground of *πορνεία* and *ορ μοιχεία*. Married people should always seek ways to improve and enhance their marital relationships. They should not wonder or conceive of ways in which they can remove themselves from their marriage

without sinning⁵⁶. All divorce includes and results from sin. All discussions of divorce must recognise that sin, in varying degrees, is the reason that divorce occurs. Couples who marry or who live together should be encouraged to face the inevitability of ups and downs in relationships. Finally, all children of God are called to work on their marriages and to set examples, based on Jesus' teaching on πορνεία in Matthew 19:9.

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- A. Schlatter. Cf. Adolf Schlatter, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1947), 73, 74. See also Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1984), 324; Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1990), 163, 428.
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 20. See Wenham and Heth, who discuss this interpretation on 73-99. Cf. Craig S. Keener, . . . *and Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teachings of the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991) and the *Adventist Church Manual* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2000). Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1952), 341, 342: “Nothing but the violation of the marriage bed can either break or annul the marriage vow... God gave only one cause why a wife should leave her husband, or the husband leave his wife, which was adultery:” Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 5 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956), 454: “Here and in Jesus’ parallel discussion in Matthew 5:32 it seems to be implied, even though not specifically stated, that the innocent party to a divorce is at liberty to marry again. This has been the understanding of the great majority of commentators through the years.”
 21. Lothar Wilhelm, “ ‘...das soll der Mensch nicht scheiden?’ Fragen zu den Aussagen der Evangelien über Ehescheidung und Wiederverheiratung”, in *Glauben heute, Jahrespräsident*, Eli Diez, ed., (Lüneburg: Advent- Verlag, 1999), 16-33.
 22. Robert M. Johnston, “Divorce and Remarriage: What the Bible Teaches” (paper prepared for the World Ministers Council of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1990).
 23. Bacchiocchi, 183-189, 215, 216. On p.216 he writes: “How should a Christian relate to a spouse who persists in his or her perverse lifestyle? Paul’s admonition is straightforward, ‘Avoid such people’ (2 Timothy 3:5). Living with and loving a person who blatantly and obstinately violates the moral principles of Christianity, means condoning such an immoral lifestyle.”
 24. George R. Ewald, *Jesus and Divorce*, (Scotsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), 70.
 25. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 2nd ed., (Illinois: Crossway, 2010), 324.
 26. Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave*, 324-25.
 27. Of note here is the point that, although the Bible permits divorce, it neither demands nor requires it. The husband or wife whose mate has

- committed πορνεία may forgive the sinning partner upon their repentance. If the guilty spouse repents, then the other partner is biblically required to forgive them (Luke 17:3ff.). Upon such occasions, we would desire that relational reconciliation would be achieved and hopefully, by the merciful grace of God, the eventual reconciliation of the marriage. See Jay Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub., 1980), 56.
28. Friedrich Hauck and Siegfried Schulz, “πόρνη, πόρνος, πορνεία, πορνεύω, έκπορνεύω,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 6, eds. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Freidrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1968). For examples, see Mark 7:21; John 8:41; Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; Rom. 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:1; 6:13, 18; 7:2; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3; Rev. 2:21; 9:21; 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3, 9.
 29. D. A. Carson, Matthew. *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., vol. 8. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub., 1984), 414.
 30. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Matthean Divorce Texts and Some Palestinian Evidence.” *Theological Studies*, 1976, 37: 208-11.
 31. Mark Geldard, “Jesus' Teaching on Divorce.” *Churchman* 1978, 92: 134-43; Isaksson, 135.
 32. Besides premarital sexual unfaithfulness, a lady can lose her virginity through strenuous exercises, surgical operation, accidents, etc.
 33. Donald A. Shaner, *A Christian View of Divorce* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 107; Thomas V. Fleming, “Christ and Divorce,” *Theological Studies* 54 (1963): 109.
 34. G. Fitzer, πορνεία. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 3. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 137.
 35. J. Laney. 1990. *Divorce and Remarriage, Four Christian Views*. (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity), 34.
 36. Matthew 15:19.
 37. D. Instone-Brewer, *Divorce & Remarriage in the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 156.
 38. The term ἀπολελυμένην is a participle, perfect tense, passive voice, accusative case, feminine gender. A participle basically is a verb used as an adjective. Perfect tense is used to identify actions already completed. The passive voice indicates the action named was taken against the subject in question [here, the woman]. Accusative case points to the subject as the recipient of the action. There may be no need to explain the feminine gender. In sum, ἀπολελυμένην in the context of the study could be rendered as *Jesus addresses a woman who has been divorced by her husband. She was passive in the sense that she did not perform the action, but it was done to her*. It must be noted that the word ἀπολύση, which was

used in verse 9a, is in the subjunctive mood, aorist tense, active voice. A subjunctive verb is one that designates ‘a mood typically used for subjective, doubtful, hypothetical, or grammatically subordinate statements or questions.’ [*Webster’s American Family Dictionary*] The mood of the word indicates Jesus was responding to their ‘hypothetical’ situation and, directly, to their question. Furthermore, since it is in the active voice and that the active voice is ‘a voice, verb form, or construction having a subject represented as forming or causing an action expressed by the verb.’ [*op. cit.*] According to the form of the word ἀπολύσῃ used in Matthew 19:9a, Jesus certainly did identify one having caused the action [here, divorce]. This is in contrast to the form of ἀπολελυμένην used in verse 9b when applied to the woman whom he put away.

39. R. D. Harper, *An Exegetical Analysis of Matthew 19:3-12* [MA Thesis]. (Nashville: David Lipscomb University, 1996), 35.
40. R. Eldredge, *Can Divorced Christians Remarry?* (Camarillo, CA: Choice, 2002), 93.
41. Fleming, “Christ and Divorce,” 119.
42. J. Wenham, “May Divorced Christians Remarry?” *Churchman*, 1981, 95: 153.
43. J. Carl Laney, *The Divorce Myth*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1981), 20-22
44. John Macquarrie, “The Nature of the Marriage Bond.” *Theology*, 1975, 78: 230-31.
45. William F. Luck, *Divorce and Remarriage: Recovering the Biblical View* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Pub., 1987), 6-10, notes that there is nothing inherent within the words of Genesis that demands permanence. The focus is on marriage, not divorce, so the issues of marital termination and/or divorce are not addressed.
46. J. Laney, *Divorce and Remarriage, Four Christian Views*, (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity, 1990), 33.
47. A. J. Cherlin, The deinstitutionalization of American marriage, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 2004, 66, 848-861.
48. G. O. Abe, The Jewish and Yoruba Social Institution of marriage: A Comparative Study. *Orita*, xx1, (01 June, 1989), 14-15, 3-18.
49. *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*, (Lagos: Times Press Ltd., 1978), 22.
50. O. O. Arowole, A re-examination of the relationship between Western and Koranic education and fertility in Nigeria. *Ife Social Sciences Review*, (March 1978), 2, No. 1, 36.
51. S. J. South, Trent, K., and Shen, Y., Changing partners: Toward a macrostructural-opportunity theory of marital dissolution. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 2001, 63, 743-754.

52. D. Galarneau and Sturroch, J., Family income after separation. *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, 1997, 9, 18-28.
53. Kelly, J. B., and Emery, R. E., Children's adjustment following divorce: Risk and resilience perspectives. *Family Relations*, 2003, 52, 359.
54. G. O. Abe, The Jewish and Yoruba Social Institution of marriage.
55. T. A. Agunda and T. Adi, *The Marriage Law of Nigeria*, (Lagos: The Nigerian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1981), 139.
56. Craig L. Blomberg, Matthew, *New American Commentary*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 293.