

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO THE  
CURRENT TREND OF DIVORCE AND  
REMARRIAGE IN THE CHURCH

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**ABSTRACT**

The remarriage of divorcees is the Jezebel of the Church today. As recorded in Revelation 2, the church in Thyatira was commended by the Lord for their fabulous works of love, service, faith, and patience, but they allowed immorality, depicted by Jezebel's activities, to take hold. Even though it is clearly stated that Thyatira's latest deeds were greater than at first, Jesus was more concerned about her state of immorality, and He threatened to kill her children for her non-repentance. Any hint of complacent immorality in any church should be resolved expeditiously.

The world has seen marital failures since the early chapters of Genesis, and marital failures will possibly continue even into the Millennial Kingdom. Divorce, by itself, however, is not a do-or-die issue for the church today. It is the remarriage of divorcees that makes the Church ineffective in its attempts to positively influence an ever-increasing immoral society. The Church cannot even begin to challenge the growing homosexual agenda that is sweeping through all levels of society these days when it condones and even promotes adultery within its own ranks by unashamedly remarrying divorcees? The Church may not be able to escape this reality of life, but it needs to contain it, if not restrict it in some capacity more than what it has over the years.

This paper looks at this issue scripturally and then observationally through the studies of other pastoral individuals, through interviews of local church leaders, and through a survey that has reached across the nation. The purpose of this dissertation is to identify specific steps for churches to begin the process to restore its testimony and effectiveness. This repair process, however, will not be accomplished without considerable time and possibly first paying a hefty price. After all, John the Baptist lost his head over this marriage issue when he challenged two unbelievers (King Herod and Herodias) for their unlawful marriage. How much more seriously should the church take the covenant of marriage amongst its own congregants.

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Note. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture references are taken from the Holy Bible, New American Standard Bible® Copyright © The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the U.S. Supreme Court legalized homosexual marriages nationwide in 2015 Christian churches in America are now faced with two major challenges as never before. First, churches need to assess how they can improve their diminished influence in society to hopefully restore morality to a level that prevents God from having to take drastic actions against the nation as He once did against Noah's generation, against Sodom and Gomorrah, against the ancient Canaanite civilizations, and even against His own people, Israel. Second, churches have to be prepared to provide proper biblical counsel to those within same-sex unions and marriages who see the need to escape that lifestyle after coming to Christ.

Fortunately, the arm of God is not so short that He cannot save those in sin's deepest clutches. Envision, for example, a transgender lesbian in a same-sex marriage who comes to Christ having "her kids" and the other "her kids" and "their kids" embroiled in an alternative lifestyle. A pastor or other Christian counselor would need to properly wield the principles of the Bible in such a way to compassionately show and walk the new believer through the legal and social quagmire which would result from coming to Christ and deciding to follow Christ in every aspect. Just saying, "Go and sin no more" fails to bring hope and comfort and to resolve the varied legal, social, familial, emotional, and physical issues associated with possibly separating from or divorcing a homosexual partner. Tumultuous issues include more than just determining appropriate alimony or palimony payments and resolving custody and visitation rights with any children. Issues could also include forsaking the alternative lifestyle community where they were once warmly received and embraced, and possibly reversing any transgender surgeries before moving on with the rest of one's newly-found Christian life.

The first question to ask is, "How did a person or even a society that once lived within a

God-fearing nation get to the point where they accept transgender and homosexual unions and marriages as normal and legal? Unfortunately, the blame for this dilemma could easily fall at the doorstep of the Christian church. Why? Because the Church, by and large, has lost its testimony and ability to positively influence society since it condones and actually promotes adultery within its own ranks by remarrying divorcees.

The rest of this dissertation looks at how the remarriages of divorcees create adulterous events and relationships, and how churches need to grasp the dilemma this invokes. Eventually, churches need to identify and implement steps in a loving and gracious way to restore its reputation for being the “pillar and support” of sound doctrine and teachings (1 Timothy 3:15) without wrongfully alienating those impacted by divorce and by the remarriage of divorcees. Those Christians who have been through the heartache of a failed marriage have a lot to share to hopefully prevent or circumvent others from incurring similar heartache.

Even God, Himself, is divorced, as recorded in Jeremiah 3:8, when He handed Israel, His betrothed, a bill of divorcement; and Joseph contemplated divorcing his wife, Mary, who was pregnant with his stepchild, Jesus, the Savior of the world (Matthew 1:19). So, God has an affinity for those contemplating or recovering from a divorce. Likewise, the church, needs to have grace without sacrificing its moral fiber while handling divorced people within its midst.

This dissertation also lays out how a survey, which has reached across the United States, provides a snapshot in time of divorce and remarriage within many churches and compares that information to churches within a small, relatively-conservative, county in America, the author's county of residence in Bullitt County, Kentucky. This information will be used to assess the level of urgency for churches to respond, and devise ways to potentially reduce the escalating divorce trend and the more devastating trend of remarrying divorcees.

## 2. HYPOTHESES AND GOALS

This section looks at three hypotheses and associated goals. The first hypothesis addresses the broader issue of marriage, divorce, and the remarriage of divorcees found in the Old Testament. The teachings of the Old Testament on marriage, divorce, and remarriage are foundational and are eventually compared to some of the more restrictive guidelines found in the New Testament. The derived goal from this hypothesis is to consider Ezra's solution as a guiding biblical principle to compassionately resolve tumultuous and broken marriages today.

The second hypothesis looks at divorce and remarriage from the more restrictive New Testament perspective, and considers the detrimental aspect of divorce and remarriage within the Christian church today and its impact on the church's testimony within society. The intended goal of this hypothesis is to show possible and realistic actions churches can take to stop this misstep and to begin repairing its lost reputation. Unfortunately, this will not be a quick fix, and there is a substantial price churches need to be aware of to accomplish this task.

Finally, the third hypothesis addresses the steep price churches might have to pay to challenge this "sin in the camp." Churches must consider whether it is better to obey or to sacrifice. Do they obey the obvious and unequivocal teachings of God on this matter for them to be the Spirit-filled church God wants them to be or do they simply play church and capitulate to keep their attendance and financial numbers from dwindling? The goal of this hypothesis addresses some possibilities to minimize the price to be paid for doing what is right.

Before tackling these hypotheses and goals, adultery needs to be defined both secularly and biblically. From a secular perspective, adultery's root word in English is based on "adulterate." The simple definition of "adulterate" from Merriam-Webster's<sup>1</sup> dictionary is "to corrupt, debase, or make impure by the addition of a foreign or inferior substance." A drop of arsenic in a glass of

clean, pure, water, for example, poisons or “adulterates” the water. From a marriage perspective, to add a new spouse while the original spouse is still alive, though possibly separated, “adulterates” the ideal concept of God’s plan for a marriage.

God’s plan for a permanent, monogamous, heterosexual marriage, as gleaned from Genesis 3 and Matthew 19, is for a man to have only one woman and a woman to have only one man as an emotionally and physically-intimate partner while living on this earth. Any scenario outside of one of the spouses dying adulterates God’s pure intentions for the institution of marriage. Therefore, adultery in its broader term, where a man acquires one or more additional wives or a wife acquires additional husbands, either sequentially or communally, while a previous spouse is still living is the corruption of God’s ideal plan for every marriage.

The Bible, however, more narrowly defines adultery as a spouse who has an intimate relationship with someone else’s spouse, which is punishable by death for both offenders. Leviticus 20:10 specifically states, “If there is a man who commits adultery with another man’s wife, one who commits adultery with his friend’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.” Polygamy in the Bible, where a man has multiple wives at one time, is never considered adulterous and worthy of the death penalty. The one exception deals with King David’s illicit relationship with Bathsheba, which comes to light in 2 Samuel 11. God dealt with David in a unique way by allowing four of his sons to succumb to untimely deaths instead of the adulterous king. These distinctions of adultery need to be realized as this dissertation proceeds to expound on divorce and remarriage within the church today.

## 2.1 Hypothesis #1: Old Testament Approach to Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

### 2.1.1 Marriage within the Old Testament

God instituted marriage and the family in the earliest chapters of Genesis, and God meant it to be a timeless institution for all people groups. Though Scripture does not systematically lay out each and every dogmatic doctrine with enough clarity to meet everyone's satisfaction, marriage is commonly defined as a God-ordained institution of one man and one woman joined by God for a lifetime commitment. This joining by God is a mystical event that occurs during the commitment or covenantal aspect of a marriage. The commitment is often made during a formal ceremony acknowledged by third party witnesses or through an informal process when a man and a woman choose to cohabit together for a lifetime. God's joining together a heterosexual couple in a lifetime commitment while on earth is based not on when the marriage is consummated, but on the willingness of both partners to join in a permanent union. This creates a valid marriage in most cases, but there are exceptions.

**Invalid Marriages.** A one-night stand, where a couple becomes "one flesh" (1 Corinthians 6:16) does not constitute a marriage. A live-in arrangement of a couple to temporarily meet each other's sexual, financial, or other temporal needs also does not constitute a valid marriage. This is seen when Jesus acknowledged the five marriages of the woman at the well as being valid but not the live-in arrangement between the woman and her boyfriend (John 4:18). Marriage between close relatives, is also invalid, even among non-Jews. Herod's marriage to his niece, Herodias, is reminiscent of this. Homosexual marriages would also fall into the category of invalid marriages, marriages where God does not "join" the couple together for a permanent union that should not be dissolved by man. These invalid marriages seem to be alluded to within the exception's clause in Matthew 19:5, "except for immorality (πορνεία porneia)." This will be

addressed in detail in section 2.3.1 – New Testament Restrictions on Divorce and Remarriage.

**Valid but Odd Marriages.** People tend to stretch things beyond having clear and unmistakable black and white scenarios and they often tread into the gray and muddled area of life. Communal marriages, for example, allow a couple to choose to live together permanently without a formal wedding ceremony. This seems on the surface to be a valid marriage where God is willing to join them together spiritually. This is depicted in the Old Testament when Isaac wedded Rebekah. All it took was for Isaac to take his arranged bride, after they initially met, into his mother's tent to consummate the marriage. Genesis 24:67 simply states that "Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her." There was no fanfare, no preacher, no ceremonial witnesses, no service, and no honeymoon apparently. Yet, God presumably joined them together from their simple act of mutually choosing to be husband and wife for life.

**Polygamy.** Another odd but seemingly valid type of marriages are polygamous. Polygamy was quite common in ancient times amongst many people groups, with polygamy among the Jews continuing until the eleventh century<sup>2</sup>. Polygamy is still common among some indigenous tribes throughout the world today, including in some Mormon groups in America. With polygamy being common among the Jews during the Apostolic era, in all probability, the early Christian church had believers in their fellowship who were in polygamous marriages. Hence the need for Paul to stipulate for church leaders, in particular elders and deacons, to be husbands of one wife. The New Testament frequently has tighter restrictions and regulations than those found in the Old Testament, as will be expanded on in section 2.3.1. Christ apparently wants His bride, the Church, to mirror God's earliest intent for marriages – one man and one woman for life.

Polygamy is first seen in Genesis 4:19 where “Lamech took to himself two wives.” Though his polygamous relationship is never called adultery, nor is he condemned for having two wives, but taking a second wife while his first wife was still living adulterates God’s pristine plan for a marriage as defined earlier. This passage could be construed that God has no issues with polygamy, and it does not create an adulterous event, especially since all additional wives were virgins and not taken from another husband who was living at the time. In fact, Moses actually provides instructions how men should treat their additional wives within their expanded family. Deuteronomy 21:15-17 states the following, “If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and both the loved and the unloved have borne him sons, if the firstborn son belongs to the unloved, then it shall be in the day he wills what he has to his sons, he cannot make the son of the loved the firstborn before the son of the unloved, who is the firstborn. But he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; to him belongs the right of the firstborn.”

There is a unique polygamous relationship found in 1 Chronicles where a man divorces his two wives, apparently for failure to give him sons. He marries a third wife, whereby he was able to have sons by her. “Shaharaim fathered sons in the country of Moab after he had sent away Hushim and Baara his wives. He fathered sons by Hodesh his wife: Jobab, Zibia, Mesha, Malcam” (1 Chronicles 8:8-9, ESV). It seems strange why God would provide this type of detail in the lineage of one of the twelve tribes of Israel, in this case, Benjamin, except to continually highlight the marital woes of mankind throughout man’s history.

**Forced or Arranged Marriages.** From an Old Testament perspective, forced or arranged marriages also seem legitimate. In other words, God seemed to honor those marriages as valid, and correspondingly joined those relationships as He would for a typical marriage. From a

modern day Western mindset, many would question if an under aged girl or a female captive, basically a slave, would truly be a willing partner in such a forced or arranged marriage, but Scripture seemingly says otherwise, at least for the Jews. This will be further addressed in section 2.1.2.

**Courting Practices in Genesis and Judges.** Modern courting practices are totally different from what is seen in the Bible. Modern man seems to court to wed, but Bible couples married to court each other. In Genesis, there seemed to be four common ways spouses came together. In Genesis 2, God is seen bringing Adam and Eve together. In Genesis 4:17, Cain finds his own wife, presumably a sister or niece. In Genesis 21:21, Ishmael's mother, Hagar, finds a wife for her son. Finally, in Genesis 24, Isaac's father, Abraham, has his servant find a wife for his son.

Outside of Genesis, there are other bizarre ways to acquire a wife. In the book of Judges, four hundred virgins were taken from one destroyed Israelite clan and given to some of the men of the tribe of Benjamin. When that wasn't enough, the remaining two hundred men of Benjamin were allowed to capture virgins from the "daughters of Shiloh" (Judges 21). These forced marriages were apparently all deemed valid in the eyes of God. Presumably, even the first king of Israel, King Saul, came from one of these forced marital arrangements.

**Marriage Ceremonies and Covenants.** Formal marriage ceremonies, by and large, seem to be a modern contrivance as people groups developed their various traditions over the centuries since Babel. Ceremony or no ceremony, Malachi 2:14 depicts the marriage being a covenant arrangement, "The LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant."

By definition, a covenant, particularly a biblical covenant, could be a unilateral, bilateral, or a trilateral agreement between parties of equal or unequal parity. For example, God seemed to

have formed a unilateral covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15. God, the greater party, stipulated His responsibilities of the covenant and voiced that Abraham, the lesser party, would be the recipient of God's blessings – the inheritance of Israel's Promised Land. An example of a bilateral covenant is seen between Abimelech and Isaac in Genesis 26:26-31 when they decided to settle their land dispute. These men of equal parity made a binding agreement or covenant to live in peace, and their oath confirmed it for them. Another bilateral covenant involved a group of Israelites who chose to put themselves under oath with God to resolve difficult marriages within the land. This occurred in the book of Ezra. Ezra 10:3 states, "So now let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord [Ezra] and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law."

The marriage covenant seems to be the only trilateral covenant, a covenant between one man, one woman, and God, with each having unique responsibilities. As seen in Genesis 2:24, the man and woman are to leave their parents, cleave to one another, become one flesh, and thereby form a lifetime or permanent commitment or covenant with each other. Man's primary responsibility is to be the priest or ultimate leader within the relationship, who is responsible to God for the wellbeing of the marriage and the resultant family. The woman's responsibility within the relationship is to be the supporting companion or "helper", (Genesis 2:20). God's ultimate responsibility in this covenant is to do the bonding or the joining together of the human parties from a spiritual aspect. This spiritual bonding is only applicable to one's time on earth. The partner who dies first cancels the covenant. The covenant of marriage does not carry over into Heaven since everyone will eventually be as the angels who neither "marry nor are given in marriage" (Matthew 22:30), and are assumedly sexless.

### **2.1.2 Divorce and Adultery within the Old Testament**

Nowhere in Scripture is God seen dissolving a marriage – accommodating divorce, yes, but not dissolving a once God-joined relationship. Consider this, even after God granted Israel a bill of divorcement in Jeremiah 3:8, God says later in the same chapter (verse 14), “Return, faithless people,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I am your husband’” (NIV). So, even after divorce, God unequivocally says He is still Israel’s husband. If people are still married in God’s sight, even after a divorce, it is totally reasonable to see that any and every subsequent remarriage of a divorcee is adulterous, assuming their previous spouse is still living and their previous marriage was valid or lawful.

The first mention of adultery in the Bible appears as the seventh commandment within the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:14 simply states, “You shall not commit adultery.” Nowhere in the Bible is a technical definition of adultery provided. The word is simply stated and the definition is presumed. The closest definition available is found in Leviticus 20:10, where a man is able to “commit adultery” with another man’s wife. Presumably, this means a man and another man’s wife engage in sexual activity. If this couple were not married to others, it would be called fornication.

Adultery, however, was most definitely understood long before Moses penned this commandment. Joseph, the son of Jacob was fully aware and voiced the evil of taking another man’s wife when Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him. Joseph, in Genesis 39:9, said to her, “You are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?”

After its first mention in Exodus 20, the Hebrew term for adultery (Strong’s 05003, זָנָה, na’aph) is used another twenty-five times throughout the Old Testament (KJV and NASB). It is

used most frequently in Jeremiah (eight times) where Israel is depicted by God as being very adulterous and worthy of His judgment.

**New Testament Word Usage for Adultery.** In the New Testament, there are five unique Greek words for adultery, and there are twenty-nine occurrences of these terms with a slight variation between English versions of the Bible. Considering the New Testament is about one third the size of the Old Testament, and it mentions three additional adulterous situations as compared to the Old Testament, it seems there is a higher emphasis, by a power of three, on the sanctity of marriage within the new covenant, the Age of Grace. Table 1 depicts how forms of “adultery” within the New Testament are used in the King James and the New American Standard bibles.

**Table 2-1. New Testament Usage of Adultery.**

Strong's No.	Greek Term	English Usage	Count (KJV) Masoretic Text	Count (NASB) Eberhard Nestle's
3428	μοιχαλις moichalis	adulterous, adulteress(es), adultery	6	6
3429	μοιχαω moichao	commits adultery	4	4
3430	μοιχεα moicheia	adultery, adulteries	4	3
3431	μοιχευω moicheuo	commit adultery, in adultery	11	13
3432	μοιχος moichos	adulterer(s)	4	3
<b>TOTALS</b>			<b>29</b>	<b>29</b>

The four differences between the Masoretic Text used by the King James translators and the predominant Eberhard Nestle's New Testament Greek used by the NASB translators are inconsequential to the doctrinal position on adultery. For example, Galatians 5:19 states, “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery <Strong's 3430>, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness” in the King James. The NASB uses “immorality” <Strong's 4202>

in place of adultery as stated in the Kings James. The meaning between adultery and immorality within this context does not shift the interpretation by any large degree. Another example of a miniscule difference is found in James 4:4. The King James version states, “Ye adulterers <3432> and adulteresses <3428>, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?” The NASB states, “You adulteresses <3428>, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?” Again, the doctrinal impact is negligible by this concatenation of terms by the NASB.

In the Gospels, it is the King James Version that concatenates the terms for adultery, again, without impacting doctrine. In Matthew 5:32, for example the NASB version renders it this way, “But I [Jesus] say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery <Strong’s 3431>; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery < Strong’s 3429>.” The NASB translators use two Greek terms for adultery, while the Kings James translators use one, as follows, “But I [Jesus] say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery <Strong’s 3429>: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery <Strong’s 3429>.”

The King James translators do the same for Mark 10:12. The NASB version states the following, “And if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing <Strong’s 3431> adultery <Strong’s 3429>,” while the King James rendition states, “And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery <3429>.” Again, no impact to doctrine, and no additional clarification is provided by these small changes in the Greek to English renderings between the Masoretic Text and the Nestle’s New Testament Greek.

**Death Penalty for Adultery.** The Mosaic Law established one penalty for a convicted adulterer or adulteress – death. Leviticus 20:10 states it this way, “If there is a man who commits adultery with another man’s wife, one who commits adultery with his friend’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.” Deuteronomy 22:22 states, “If a man is found lying with a married woman, then both of them shall die.” There is a special case for a daughter of a priest who commits sexual sins, such as prostituting herself. Adultery would also be included. Leviticus 21:9 states, “Also the daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by harlotry, she profanes her father; she shall be burned with fire.” It should be obvious from these few passages that God takes sexual sins quite seriously.

Stark distinctions, however, are made between certain sexual sins and perverse sexual sins. Perverse sexual sins carried the death penalty. Adultery falls into the perverse category and deserved capital punishment along with sins of homosexuality, bestiality, rape of a betrothed virgin, and not being found a virgin on one’s wedding night. There was no sacrificial redemption for such sins in the Old Testament.

**Non-lethal Penalties for Sexual Misconduct.** Not all cases are treated the same in the Bible. There were different regulations for Hebrew freemen and free women, between Hebrew male and female slaves, and between non-Hebrew male and female slaves. There were no penalties levied against someone, for example, having multiple wives (i.e., polygamy), with the exception being if one of the wives was taken from another man, as what happened when King David incurred wrath from God for taking Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba. David did not die, but he lost four sons during his chastening process. These include his first unnamed illegitimate child, which Bathsheba conceived during their tryst; Amnon, David's firstborn, was killed by Absalom after he raped Absalom's sister, Tamar (2 Samuel 13); Absalom, David’s third son, was killed by Joab

(1 Chronicles 3:1-2) after he mounted a rebellion against his aging father David; and Adonijah, David's fourth son who made a play for the throne after the death of David (1 Kings 2:13-25) and was killed by Solomon, David's legitimate son by Bathsheba.

There were non-lethal penalties for men who had sexual relationships with women who were slaves. Leviticus 19:20-22 states the following, "Now if a man lies carnally with a woman who is a slave acquired for another man, but who has in no way been redeemed nor given her freedom, there shall be punishment; they shall not, however, be put to death, because she was not free. He shall bring his guilt offering to the LORD to the doorway of the tent of meeting, a ram for a guilt offering. The priest shall also make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before the LORD for his sin which he has committed, and the sin which he has committed will be forgiven him." Adultery and remarriage was not the issue with this passage.

A little bit more needs to be said about Israelites having slaves as wives. Scripture seems to have a totally different set of rules for those married to and divorcing slaves. Exodus 21:2-4 states, "If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment. If he comes alone, he shall go out alone; if he is the husband of a wife, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall belong to her master, and he shall go out alone." Exodus 21:7-11 states, "If a [Hebrew] man sells his daughter as a female slave, she is not to go free as the male slaves do. If she is displeasing in the eyes of her master who designated her for himself [i.e., in marriage], then he shall let her be redeemed. He does not have authority to sell her to a foreign people because of his unfairness to her. If he designates her for his son [in marriage], he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters. If he takes to himself another woman [i.e., an additional wife], he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her

conjugal rights. If he will not do these three things for her, then she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.” Again, remarriage is not an issue.

**One more incident.** When God told Moses to take full vengeance on the Midianites in Numbers 31, when it came to sparing the women, Moses gave this instruction to the soldiers, “Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man intimately. But all the girls who have not known man intimately, spare for yourselves” (Numbers 31:17-18). Assuredly, these girls became wives to Hebrew men, and possibly were not treated as well as the female Hebrew slaves were treated. Plus, since a captive wife was an unwilling participant in their marriage, this trilateral covenant is actually a bilateral covenant between the husband and God. Where female Hebrew slaves could be redeemed or treated as a wife or daughter-in-law and could not be sold to a foreign people, a foreign slave would not have the same rights. On the surface these regulations seem out of character for God and more analogous to what is recorded in recent news about Boko Haram, a radical Islamist group that seized more than 300 girls from a school in the town of Chibok, Nigeria in April 2014 and forced them to marry their captors. Again, it should be noted that man does not stay true to God’s ideal plans for mankind, and God accommodates with less restrictive alternatives to maintain some civility, especially as seen with His people, Israel.

Homosexuality, bestiality, and having adulterous relations with another man’s wife all required the death penalty – no questions asked, no atoning sacrifice was available, and no repentance or forgiveness was allowed. This strongly indicates the significant meaning God puts on the sanctity of marriage and who can become one flesh. Other prohibited sexual partners for a man included close relatives as defined in Leviticus 18, mother or step-mother; sister or half-sister; daughter-in-law or grand-daughter; aunt or aunt-in-law; sister-in-law; his step-daughter, or

step-grand-daughters; and his wife's sister (this is about five hundred years after Jacob's marriage to two sisters, Rachel and Leah). The penalty for such sins, defined in Leviticus 18:29, "For whoever does any of these abominations, those persons who do so shall be cut off from among their people." These sins are categorized as "abominable customs" in Leviticus 18:30, which were practiced by the Canaanites, whom the Israelites were to totally annihilate.

To be "cut off from among the people" frequently meant death, especially as used in the Torah, the five books of Moses. This is seen in such passages as Exodus 31:14, "Therefore you are to observe the Sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people."

### **2.1.3 Remarriage within the Old Testament**

Divorce in the Old Testament seemingly brought mercy to a wife's agonizing home situation, especially where the husband accused her of adultery, a crime deserving immediate death, but the husband had no corroborating proof of her unfaithfulness. Even in the New Testament God's people are called to peace, including within a marriage covenant (1 Corinthians 7:15). Divorce also seemed to automatically convey, at least in the Old Testament, that remarriage was not only allowed but encouraged, but only a man could initiate a divorce from his wife. A wife was never seen divorcing her husband. The Gospel of Mark, on the other hand (Mark 10:12), seems to allow for wives to initiate a divorce from their husbands. It is interesting to note that the Old Testament prohibited a man from ever divorcing his wife under the following two conditions, which give credence to the husband knowing full well he was responsible for his wife losing her virginity:

- 1) If a husband falsely accused his new bride of not being a virgin when they got married but the physical evidence proved otherwise (Deuteronomy 22:13-19); and
- 2) If a man had a sexual liaison with a virgin that became public knowledge (Deuteronomy 22:28-29).

The Mosaic Law went so far as to have a lie detector test for wives who were suspected of having an affair. Numbers 5:11-31 records the Law of Jealousy. A special concoction consisting of holy water and dust from off the temple floor was given to the accused wife to drink. If she had no ill effect, she was declared innocent. If she fell ill, then “that woman shall bear her guilt.” This passage does not specify she would be put to death, for there still were no eye witnesses to her alleged adultery, but it does say she would “become a curse among the people” (Numbers 5:27), which probably meant she would be looked down upon wherever she went. So a bill of divorcement allowed a woman to leave her husband who accused her of adultery without enough evidence to convict her of it, and then she would be free to marry another man probably with her dowry intact. It is also interesting that if a Jewish man rapes a virgin and it is discovered, Deuteronomy 22:29 states, “she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled her, he may not put her away (or divorce her) all his days.”

## **2.2 Goal #1: Ezra’s Solution to Resolve Unlawful Marriages in the Old Testament**

Ezra established the process that offers the highest probability to reverse the downward slide of morality. The most prominent question Ezra addresses is, “Were these valid or invalid marriages?” A valid marriage is where God joins the couple together in an indissoluble bond. As John MacArthur notably points out, “Whether [marriage] is between Christians or between atheists or idolaters, whether it is arranged by the parents or by the mutual desire and consent of

the bride and bridegroom, marriage is above all the handiwork of God for the procreation, pleasure, and preservation of the human race. Whether it is entered into wisely or foolishly, sincerely or insincerely, selfishly or unselfishly, with great or little commitment, God's design for every marriage is that it be permanent until the death of one of the spouses."<sup>3</sup>

The marriages that Ezra dealt with clearly fall into the "porneia" category mentioned in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, where Matthew records, "except for immorality <porneia>," and the Jews of Jesus' day that Matthew was addressing would easily have recognized this as so. These marriages in Ezra 10 would be in clear violation to God's direct command for the Jews not to marry the daughters of the land (Deuteronomy 7:3, "Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons"). The only exceptions were women such as Rahab, a Canaanite, and Ruth, a Moabite, who readily accepted the God of the Jews. Therefore, since God would not go against His own clear directives, God would not have "joined together" any Jew who married an idolatrous Hittite, a Gergashite, an Amorite, a Canaanite, a Perizzite, a Hivite, or a Jebusite as identified in Deuteronomy 7:1. So, such marriages would have been immoral, invalid, unlawful, and in this author's mind a porneia-based marriage or relationship, and would have been akin to Herod's unlawful marriage to Herodias, who was his niece and his brother's wife, which was in violation of Leviticus 18:13-16 and 20:21 respectively.

In Ezra 10:18-43, the Israelites were dealing with just a little over 100 families out of a population of slightly more than 50,000 (Ezra 2:64-65) or about 10,000 families, assuming a modest ratio of five members in each family. Most of Israel was in an uproar about these unlawful marriages, which only constituted about one percent of the total number of families. If the Israelites were appallingly concerned about one percent of their families being wrongly

joined together, what does it say about the majority of Christian churches today having between ten and fifty percent of their families in adulterous situations? Should the church likewise panic and begin to fear God more? From this author's perspective, absolutely yes.

For the sake of clarity, the unlawful marriages of Ezra's day are not equivalent to the myriad of lawful adulterous remarriages churches are dealing with today. Ezra was dealing with a situation that could have caused God to nearly wipe out His people one more time for their idolatrous practices. As noted in Deuteronomy 7:4, "For they [the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites] will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you."

The adulterous remarriages of today are deemed lawful based on several teachings in Scripture. The two prime examples are King David and Bathsheba's adulterous relationship, and the woman at the well who had 5 marriages. God eventually acknowledged David's marriage to Bathsheba as valid even after David craftily had Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, killed. This is seen in 2 Samuel 12:24 where it is said, "Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her; and she gave birth to a son, and he named him Solomon. Now the LORD loved him." As for the woman at the well, Jesus acknowledged that she had five legitimate or lawful marriages. John 4:18 states it this way, "For you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband." It was the sixth live-in boyfriend whom Jesus did not acknowledge as being a valid marriage that God would honor by joining them together.

Yet, Ezra's dealings with the unlawful marriages of his day still has strong applicability for churches to begin turning the tide with the high divorce and remarriage rate seen today. The principles to be gleaned include that it takes more than one person, though he might be skilled in

God's word, to positively turn things around. It takes the whole church to come to grips with the problem and the solution. Also, it takes compassion.

**The Ezra Principle.** Ezra's approach to resolve this conflict, which could prompt God to once again devastate the land of Israel and deport His people away one more time, heavily involved the support of most of the people. If Ezra did not have the majority of people behind him, he would not have accomplished the task at hand – either to dissolve the marriages in question, or to seek the conversion of the heathen wives. It must be remembered these were invalid marriages, similar to having homosexual marriages within the land. Since God told them not to marry such spouses, God, in all probability, did not join each of the couples together into indissoluble units. Therefore, these were unlawful marriages, similar to the marriage of King Herod to his niece, Herodias, and was a national crisis – though all of these unlawful marriages only amounted to about one percent of all marriages within the land of Israel. The following elements in Ezra's approach to successfully deal with inappropriate, unlawful, or invalid marriages and relationships seem appropriate for churches to use in dealing with similar porneia-based situations, such as homosexual and incestual marriages and unions:

1. Ezra saw the challenge and sought God out in prayer how to proceed. Ezra 9:3-15 elaborates on Ezra seeing the problem belonging to him as well as to the entire nation. In essence, Ezra voiced that this was not “their problem” but it was “our problem.” Ezra took ownership as if he was personally part of the problem though he was caught by surprise to hear and learn of Israel's unlawful marriages.
2. The majority of the returning exiles also saw the challenge and rallied behind Ezra, their spiritual leader, and the man who seemed most qualified in God's word. It is seen in Ezra 10:1-2 that “a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him,” and

they were led by a man named, Shecaniah. He was the son of Jehiel who was the son of Elam. He apparently was a son in one of these forbidden marriages (10:26), but he saw Ezra, a skilled scribe in God's word, as the right man who could take charge and help fix the problem "according to the law." Whether Shecaniah was born into one of these unlawful marriages, or whether his father, Jehiel divorced his mother, or possibly just acquired as an additional wife one of these forbidden women is up for speculation. Shecaniah told Ezra "this is your job" and "we will be with you." He loved God's word more than his own reputation. Through this possibly illegitimate son – who, theoretically, should not have been born (like Solomon and Jephthah), a nation was saved from another dispersion and possible annihilation. It is amazing who God can raise up to deliver His people. Whether a child is born in wedlock, out of wedlock, or even in a test tube, God determines the soul of that person. As Deuteronomy 4:37 alludes to, God determines who each descendant will be.

3. If Ezra acted alone he was not going to be effective. Ezra needed the majority of the people behind him, and the people had to properly tremble at God's word to effect true change (9:4; 10:3) and to have God's support behind them. This is one of only two positive situations where mob rule was effective for godly change. The other incident occurred a few years after this incident when Nehemiah came on the scene. Nehemiah had to set up a great assembly against the rulers of his day to effect positive change as well (Nehemiah 5:6-13). In Nehemiah's case, wealthy landowners had to be convinced by mob rule (verse 5:7) to free their Hebrew bond slaves.
4. Ezra's work was done compassionately. It took ninety days to resolve 113 cases, about one per day. Assuredly, some were easier to resolve than others. Ezra probably presented

several options for each unlawfully married couple: 1) For the wife to repent and accept the God of the Jews as Rahab and Ruth did; 2) Separate and send the wife back to her family, possibly with financial support, as in the return of the wife's dowry; 3) Pack up and leave Israel; or 4) The family was ostracized or excommunicated with the loss of any inherited land if the couple stayed within the land of Israel.

5. Formal acknowledgement and commitment from everyone cements the required actions. Since these were invalid or unlawful marriages in God's sight, dissolution of the marriage was most appropriate, especially if there was no conversion of the heathen spouse. Unlike valid or lawful adulterous remarriages, where dissolution of such a marriage is not the objective, for homosexual or incestual marriages, dissolution is the only true remedy, and having compassion, even in dissolving invalid or porneia-based relationships and marriages, such as between homosexuals, is still paramount.
6. A game plan must be in place to handle dissenters. The leaders of Ezra's day were also guilty and there was plenty of opposition. There were sixteen Levitical priests, six other Levites, one choir member, and three gatekeepers who constituted about twenty five percent of the invalid marriages. Levites, however, only made up about ten percent of the population. As the leaders go, so goes the nation or congregation.

Another point of clarity between the unlawful marriages of Ezra's day and the lawful, but adulterous remarriages of today, especially in regards to having unsaved or heathen spouses, is to acknowledge the uniqueness of Israel's tie to the Promised Land. God made specific promises of blessings and curses directed solely toward Israel during their tenure in the Promised Land, and which may not be appropriate for gentile people groups. As seen early, Israel was to avoid intermarrying people within or even surrounding the Land of Israel. Deuteronomy 7:4

specifically identifies the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, and Ezra 9:1 adds the Ammonites, the Moabites, and the Egyptians to this list of people groups Israelites were to avoid marrying.

The Apostle Paul highlighted in 1 Corinthians 7:13-16 how Christian spouses should seek to stay with their unbelieving spouses if the unbelieving spouses are amicable to it. So, Ezra's separation of unbelieving spouses from Jewish believers has no applicability to gentile believers other than the compassionate process Ezra followed to seek reconciliation with God's word.

### **2.3 Hypothesis #2: New Testament Approach to Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage**

There should be some empathy shown to the Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus' day for having questions regarding marriage, divorce, adultery, and remarriage. After all, as seen in section 2.1, the Mosaic Law had a different judgment stick depending if one was male or female, Jew or Gentile, free or slave, married or single. The death penalty was levied against some sexual sins but not against others. When Jesus came on the scene, He said the Jews, when they divorced their wives, forced their wives to commit adultery (Matthew 5:32), for they had to get remarried, presumably, just to survive. To start this section, several assumptions need stating:

1. There are no contradictions in Scripture;
2. God's plan for marriage is to be monogamous, intimate, hetero-sexual, and a permanent indissoluble covenantal union while both parties are physically alive on the earth;
3. What God has joined together, man is not to separate; and
4. Anything outside of God's ideal plan for marriage is adulterous.

Today in the New Testament era there are predominantly four typical views surrounding divorce and remarriage as depicted in Table 2-2, and none of them render the death penalty. The

most conservative view is no divorce and no remarriage for any reason. The next view is that divorce is biblically allowable but remarriage is not allowable under any condition when it causes an adulterous event, and this is the position of this dissertation. Third, divorce and remarriage are allowed for certain reasons, to include abuse, abandonment, and infidelity. Fourth, divorce and remarriage is allowed for any and all reasons to show grace and mercy. Each of these viewpoints have their staunch proponents. Some are leading pastors, teachers, and theologians such as Tony Evans, John MacArthur, Charles Swindoll, David Jeremiah, John Piper, Jay Adams, Wayne House, Mark Straus, Gordon Wenham, William Heth, Craig Keener, Carl Laney, Thomas Edgar, Larry Richards, and David Instone-Brewer.

**Table 2-2. Common Views on Divorce and Remarriage.**

Common Views on D&R	Who Holds to Which View	Modern Day Proponents
1.No Divorce or Remarriage for any reason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Church Fathers up to the Reformation (~1500 AD)</li> <li>• Most Catholic churches</li> </ul>	G. Wenham, C. Laney, J. Piper;
2.Divorce allowed but no Remarriage except for Jewish-defined porneia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most legalistic-type churches such as Independent Baptists</li> </ul>	W. Heth (initially, but he eventually migrated to positions 3 and 4 below) R. O'Neil (this author)
3.Divorce and Remarriage allowed for certain reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calvin, Luther &amp; other Reformed-era leaders after 1500 AD</li> </ul>	T. Evans, J. MacArthur, C. Swindoll, J. Adams, W. House, M. Strauss,
4.Divorce and Remarriage allowed for any reason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most liberal leaning churches, including major denominations</li> </ul>	T. Edgar, L. Richards D. Jeremiah, W. Heth D. Instone-Brewer

Key passages dealing with marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the New Testament include the following:

1. **Mark 10:2-12.** “‘What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.’ And He said to them, ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.’” There is no exception clause with this passage. Mark’s initial

audience was to gentiles, in particular, Roman Christians. Carl Laney states, “Mark and Luke omit any mention of the exception to the permanence of marriage in the case of porneia. They clearly understood that the exception would relate only to the Jews living under the Mosaic regulations of Leviticus 18:6-18.”<sup>4</sup> David Instone-Brewer [Senior research fellow in rabbinics and the New Testament at Tyndale House, in Cambridge, MA] makes this statement, “The two Gospel accounts, in Mark 10 and Matthew 19, both show signs of editing, and both originate from an abbreviated account of a debate between some Pharisees and Jesus about the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1, [and] The rabbinical accounts of the Hillelite-Shammaite debate provide an insight into the debate in which Jesus was asked to take part, and into the ways in which such debates were abbreviated.”<sup>5</sup> Instone-Brewer also states, “If divorce does happen, remarriage is permitted. All this would be obvious to a first-century believer, but the meaning of the text was obscured at a very early date due to ignorance about the Jewish background after 70 C.E.”<sup>6</sup> In essence, Instone-Brewer basically makes Scripture subservient to other historical artifacts such as the Jewish Mishnah, the Code of Hammurabi, Josephus’ Antiquities, the Jewish and Babylonian Talmuds.

2. **Matthew 14:3-4; Mark 6:17-18; Luke 3:19-20.** John the Baptist lost his head over challenging Herod, a non-believer, for his unlawful marriage to Herodias. Should Christians today put their neck out and challenge believers and non-believers on this volatile social issue? John the Baptist had no qualms about doing so. Herod’s marriage to Herodias was unlawful since she was both his niece and his brother Philip’s wife, which violated the Mosaic commands specifically found in Leviticus 18:13-16 and 20:21, respectively. Though the Herod’s were of Idumaeen or Edomite descent, from the lineage

of Esau, Jacob's brother, who were cousins of the Jews, there are transcending moral laws of God such as murder, adultery, thievery, and idolatry, which are applicable to Jews and non-Jews, believers and non-believers throughout all generations. If Herod Antipas, Herodias, and her first husband, Herod II (Philip), were all unsaved and non-Jews, why does it matter who is married to whom? Did John the Baptist lose his head for nothing, or is marriage so vital to a culture it warrants such attention? John the Baptist saw the seriousness of Herod's situation, which could provoke another possible God-invoked national annihilation. This would have been the same concern Ezra had of the unlawful marriages of his day. Would it have been biblical for Herodias to go back to her original husband, Philip? No, it would not. Deuteronomy 24:4 states that it would be an abomination and it would somehow pollute the land of Israel for a divorced spouse to go back to her first or previous husband. This law seemed to be more appropriate for the Jews living in the Promised Land than for gentiles. For a divorced and remarried wife to go back to a previous husband creates a "who's your daddy syndrome" for lack of a better term. The Jews were always particular with knowing their ancestry, so if a wife went back to a previous husband, there is always a chance she could have left her most recent husband being pregnant and not knowing it. In Herodias' case, she was not a Jew, but of Idumaeen or Edomite descent. Still, if Herodias went back to Philip, her uncle, it would have been in violation of Leviticus 18:13-14, which is part of God's timeless moral prohibitions on marrying a close relative, such as an aunt or uncle.

3. **Luke 16:18.** "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery." Again, there are no exception clause presented as Luke addressed his initial audience of Greek Christians.

Laney says, “Neither Mark nor Luke saw the exception [stated in Matthew 19:9] as applicable to their Roman or Greek readers.”<sup>7</sup>

4. **John 4:16-42.** Jesus deals with the woman at the well who had apparently five valid marriages, which Jesus acknowledged, and one live-in boyfriend arrangement, which Jesus did not voice approval of. In fact, Jesus does not even make an attempt to resolve this woman’s rather complicated life. If John had perhaps recorded the instructions from Jesus how this woman could positively turn her life around, church counselors would be trying to force fit every situation and scenario into this mold, which could be inappropriate for many. When Jesus said, “You have correctly said, ‘I have no husband,’ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly” (verses 17-18), He seemed to have emphasized twice the fact that she spoke truthfully about her status of not being currently married. Being a Samaritan, it can only be surmised what her five marriage ceremonies were like, but since Jesus acknowledged her five husbands but not the sixth, it can be logically assumed that God validated each of her marriages by joining her together with each of her husbands, presumably in a sequential (widow or divorce/remarriage) fashion and not in a polyandry relationship (one wife with many concurrent husbands). Therefore, there were five valid marriages in God’s eyes as well as in man’s eyes. Whether one or more of her previous husbands were still alive by this encounter with Jesus is speculative, but it can be assumed that most, if not all of her marriages ended in divorce rather than widowhood. This is based on the time of day this woman met Jesus at the well, since it was “about the sixth hour” (verse 6) or about noon, which was approaching the hotter part of the day. If she was more of a respectable woman it would have been more practical to join other

women during the early morning hours to collect potable water for the family. Being after the morning rush hour, so to speak, it can be logically assumed she was probably labeled as an adulterous, if not as a prostitute since she had a live-in boyfriend. Yet, Jesus' compassion reaches out to the unreachable, the adulterers and adulteresses. Also of interest, Jesus' priority was not on the woman's marital situation, but on the salvation aspect of the whole Samaritan township. Jesus ended up staying in that town for two days, and it is recorded in verses 39-41 that many believed because of the woman's testimony and because of the words or teachings of Christ, Himself. This woman's marital woes were a springboard to reaching and saving her along with many others.

5. **John 8:3-11.** Jesus confronts the Pharisees and a woman taken in adultery. What a teaching moment Jesus had in front of Him. The most interesting aspect of this passage is what did Jesus write in the dirt? There is a lot of speculation what Jesus possibly wrote on the ground. It could have been the sins of those standing around Him. This author surmises that Jesus wrote two things. When He first bent down to write, He possibly wrote out all or a portion of Leviticus 20:10, where it is said, "The adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death." When Jesus stooped down the second time, He possibly wrote out, "Where is the man? Either take God's word seriously or go home." Naturally, the older ones in the group began to leave first, because they got the message loud and clear. Judicially, the woman could not be put to death without her partner in crime being there with her. Hence, even Jesus could not and did not condemn her for this crime. That is how serious Jesus took the Mosaic Law that He came to fulfil, and that is probably how Jesus got the woman's accusers to see the seriousness of these charges – it is all or none – either both culprits are present and properly charged and stoned, or the

single culprit, though guilty, must be released. If the man happened to be apprehended along with the woman, the outcome may have ended quite differently. From an adulterous perspective, assuredly Jesus would want all parties – the guilty culprits and the accusers, to take God's word seriously, including the part of knowing how to render true justice, and possibly mercy, grace, and even reconciliation and forgiveness from the injured victims' perspective. His last command to her, "Go and sin no more," spoke volumes. This woman was to get her life together and live righteously. If she was a prostitute trying to put food on the table for her and her children, she would need to stop that and trust in God more to provide her daily needs. If she was a single woman looking for a fling or a wife looking for something her husband could not provide, again, she would need to stop her sinful desires and start to live righteously.

6. **Romans 7:1-3.** A woman who has a living husband is bound by the law. Paul is speaking to predominantly Gentile believers and to some believing Jews who were familiar with the Mosaic law (verse 1). Paul, however, uses a certain aspect of the timeless and transcending moral law of God, which addresses such issues as murder, idolatry, thievery, and in this case, adultery, and which is applicable to Jews and non-Jews, to believers and non-believers throughout all generations. Paul's claim about a woman being bound by the law while her husband is physically alive makes any other marriage scenario adulterous. Albert Barnes (1798-1870) Bible commentary says this about Chapter 7: "Few chapters in the Bible have been the subject of more decidedly different interpretations than this." The essence of Chapter 7 shows that since Christians are spiritually dead to the Law (their first spouse) because of what Christ did on the cross (He freed them from the Law), they can now be legally married to Christ (their new spouse)

without it being labeled as adulterous. Paul presents a simple but contentious analogy regarding divorce and remarriage. According to God's perfect law a spouse creates an adulterous event if they marry someone while their previous spouse is still physically alive – there are no exceptions! Even if one's spouse has Alzheimer's (according to Pat Robertson, in a televised broadcast on September 16, 2011), or if they are unfaithful, or they abandoned the marriage, or even if they are unsaved – there are no exceptions! God's ideal plan for a marriage between one man and one woman for life was to emulate our special relationship with Him. Anything that deviates from or pollutes God's pristine plan is considered adulterous. Fortunately, God does not throw anybody away for failing in this area. If He worked with adulterous King David and the woman at the well who had five husbands and a live-in boyfriend, He can work with anyone.

7. **1 Corinthians 6:16.** One night stands create a “one flesh” occurrence. The Apostle Paul, similar to what Jesus did, took his audience back to the beginning by quoting Genesis 2:24, “The two shall become one flesh.” Paul then gives the reason why Christians should flee immorality because “Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18). Sexual immorality is treated differently from all other sins. When sexual promiscuity is rampant on a national scale, the only remedy God has used has been total or near total annihilation of a people group. God always had to wipe the slate clean as seen with Noah's generation, with Sodom and Gomorrah, and with the Canaanites, and even with God's own people, the Israelites. Since God made the rules and believers are bought by Him, Christians need to follow His rules to best position them for His blessings. One night stands or even many-night stands do not create a marriage, nor, in an adulterous event, does it dissolve a

marriage. As Carl Laney says, “If adultery ends a marriage, then there are a lot of people whose marriages have terminated (due to illicit activity), and they do not even know it.”<sup>8</sup> A couple may be joined as one flesh by their act or acts of fornication or adultery, but they are not joined together by God through such immoral behavior. Though, Scripture does not explicitly state when God “joins together” a couple in marriage, be it a Christian or a non-Christian couple, or even a mixed marriage, according to Genesis 2:24, a God-joined marriage covenant occurs when the following seemingly happens: 1) The couple are mature enough to leave their parents and start their own life; 2) The couple cleave to each other in a permanent relationship, which seemingly establishes a covenantal bond that God honors; and 3) they eventually consummate the marriage and “become one flesh.” Carl Laney, who holds a very conservative view of marriage, states, “The concept of one flesh seems to imply that the marriage bond is indissoluble. Certainly, Genesis 2:24 makes no provision for divorce.”<sup>9</sup> Laney also states that, “The Bible calls marriage a ‘covenant’ (Malachi 2:14; Proverbs 2:17), and God is not in the business of breaking covenant relationships.”<sup>10</sup> Laney finally admits that, “Perhaps promise-keeping is the key issue for the doctrine of the permanence of marriage.”<sup>11</sup> From an Old Testament perspective it is bewildering to see the types of marriages God apparently acknowledges as valid. These include arranged marriages where one wonders if the young wife was even a willing participant (e.g., Hagar finds a wife for her son, Ishmael (Genesis 21:21)); slaves and war captives who are acquired as legitimate wives (e.g., Exodus 21:2-11 and Numbers 31:17-18, respectively); polygamous and concubinage relationships (e.g., King David and King Solomon); and with divorced and remarriage relationships (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

8. **1 Corinthians 7:1-40.** This passage addresses varied principles regarding never been married before singles, spouses contemplating divorce, and widows. The Apostle Paul's stated reason for marriage is to help prevent immorality. When Paul said in verse 1 that it is good for a man not to touch a woman, this gives strong credibility that premarital and adulterous sex is wrong. Paul then proceeds to show the principle of conjugal rights confirming that sex is a good thing within the confines of marriage. Paul seems to bounce around between addressing never-been-married-before single individuals and married individuals, spouses contemplating divorce, and widows. Paul actually spends considerable real estate on the benefits of singleness, twelve verses out of forty, which is more than one third of this chapter. Being married, according to Paul, has no spiritual advantages over singleness. Rather, singleness has some distinct advantages when the focus is devoted service to the Lord. The best way to interpret these forty verses is to first recognize Paul is addressing never-been-married-before singles unless specifically stated otherwise. For example, in verses 9 and 28, respectively, Paul states, "It is better to marry than to burn, ... But if you marry, you have not sinned." Interpreters must see these verses addressing never-been-married-before singles so there is no contradiction with adultery even within this same chapter. If an interpreter, however, assumes these verses should accommodate divorcees as well, then there is an immediate contradiction with verse 39, which states, "A wife is bound as long as her husband lives: but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." Stated another way, if an interpreter sees verse 8 being applicable to divorcees, then this creates a host of contradictory problems. First of all, if a divorcee is not able to have self-control, then they should marry, for it is better to marry (or to commit adultery) than to burn with

passion. Look at the problems this creates by including divorcees in this passage.

Basically, sin is justified. Paul puts it this way in verse 19, “What matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.” In other words, does God want holy people or married people? And does God want obedience or sacrifice. The rhetorical answer is that God wants holy, obedient people and not people who sacrifice their morals and the church’s reputation to satisfy their lusts, which they are commanded to control. Even God told Cain that “sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it” (Genesis 4:7). So, every believer has the responsibility to control their burning lusts.

Even Paul says, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts” (Romans 6:12). Nowhere in these forty verses does Paul condone remarriage of divorcees. In fact, according to Paul, a divorcee only has two options – either reconcile with the previous spouse or remain single (1 Corinthians 7:11). No other options are open till the previous spouse dies. Only then are they free to remarry without it being adulterous. Another passage that seems cumbersome is verse 15, where some take it to mean that a spouse is not bound to remain single but free to remarry after a divorce. Carl Laney puts it this way: “Paul is simply saying that if the unbelieving partner demands separation, then the believer is not “under bondage” (dedoulotai, literally “enslaved”) to preserve the union.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, this does not mean the Christian has the liberty to remarry without becoming an adulterer. It means the spouse is not obligated to try keeping a tumultuous marriage together. Christians are called to peace, which is an overriding principle. Laney goes on to say, “If the unbeliever demands divorce, it should be granted for the sake of peace.”<sup>13</sup> Likewise, for verse 28, “But if you marry you have not sinned” refers to those who have never been married before or widows. This passage

does not condone remarriage of divorcees, else there is an overt contradiction with verse 39. As Laney states it, "According to Paul, a marriage is binding even if one of the partners is an unbeliever,"<sup>14</sup> and "This perspective on marriage as permanent until death is consistently reflected throughout the Hebrew and New Testament Scriptures"<sup>15</sup>

9. **1 Timothy 3:2, 12 and Titus 1:6.** Elders and deacons were to be husbands of one wife. Polygamous marriages along with divorced and remarried couples were probably most prevalent within the Early Church. John MacArthur states that, "Juvenal, the Roman poet (AD 60-140), wrote satires of women who wore out their bridal veils with so many marriages. It was not unheard of for women and men to have been married twenty times or more."<sup>16</sup> This is probably what the Early Church had to contend with, and these polygamous and remarried believers were in all practicality indispensable and vital to the life of the young church. Neither Scripture nor historical records stipulate that polygamous and divorced and remarried relationships in the Early Church were to dissolve or split apart. The early church apparently accommodated these new converts with open arms. The only avenue taken to try to migrate marriage back to the Genesis model (one man and one woman for life) was for the elders and deacons to lead by example in this area. David Instone-Brewer, a very liberal theologian when it comes to divorce and remarriage acknowledges that, "The New Testament is completely different to the Old Testament or Judaism. The Old Testament allowed divorce, and Jesus appears (when read without the social context) to forbid divorce. His teaching on divorce appears therefore to provide the strongest possible contrast to the Old Testament. This is the view of the Early Church Fathers, as well as many interpreters since, especially those who think that marriage is indissoluble."<sup>17</sup> William Heth, a professor of New Testament and

Greek at Taylor University, who changed his conservative stance on divorce and remarriage to now accommodate remarriage of divorcees,<sup>18</sup> stated that, “The most comprehensive study of the earliest Christian writers’ understanding of the New Testament teaching on divorce and remarriage was written by Henri Crouzel and published in 1971. Crouzel contends that in the first five centuries all Greek and Latin writers except one agree that remarriage following divorce for any reason is adulterous. The patristic or early Christian writers’ interpretation of the divorce texts remained the standard view of the church in the West until the early sixteenth century when Erasmus suggested a different interpretation that was adopted by Luther and other Protestants.”<sup>19</sup> So, it seems obvious from the first century till the start of the Reformation era, why the Early Church prohibited marrying additional wives to polygamous husbands and also refused to remarry divorcees, which is nothing more than sequential polygamy and polyandry. Jay Adams cites that “polygamy among the Jews continued until the eleventh century.”<sup>20</sup> Apparently, the practice of the Early Church to cease marrying additional wives to polygamous husbands finally had an effect, but it took over 1,000 years. The modern church will probably never see an end to divorce and remarriage this side of Glory since divorce and remarriage is so common place throughout society and within the church. Conservative voices, however, should still ring out to champion God’s ideal plan for marriage to somehow contain the ever-growing trend to defile the marriage bed (Hebrews 13:4).

10. **Hebrews 11.** Many of the men and women listed in the Hall of Faith had issues with monogamy and sexual purity, but they still accomplished great things for God. God’s people may have shortcomings, but that does not shortchange God’s ability to still

accomplish His sovereign will throughout His kingdom by using imperfect people. Abraham (verse 8) always seemed to take the path of least resistance. When Sarah enticed him to take her maid, Hagar, to father a child, Abraham voiced no opposition. Sarah (verse 11) is marked for her faith to receive the ability to conceive, yet she sought to take matters into her own hands by giving Hagar to her husband instead of waiting for God's more perfect timing. Jacob is listed as a man of faith (verse 21), yet, he married two sisters (Genesis 29), which God later had to forbid (Leviticus 18:18), and Jacob also married their handmaidens. Gideon (verse 32) had seventy sons begotten from "many wives" (Judges 8:30); Samson (verse 32) married for looks (Judges 14:1-4), he later went into a prostitute (Judges 16:1), then he fell in love with Delilah (Judges 14:4) who betrayed him to the Philistines. Finally, King David is mentioned as a man of faith (verse 32), but his exploits with Bathsheba and many other women were not a good example to his son, Solomon, who eventually acquired 700 wives and 300 concubines, who led his heart away from God (1 Kings 11:3). What is amazing, even with all of their sexual and marital shortcomings, "God is not ashamed to be called their God" (Hebrews 11:17). This profound statement, however, should not minimize the sins of fornication and adultery. Imagine how much more effective these men and women could have been for God's kingdom if they took the higher moral road.

11. **Matthew 5:31-32.** Everyone who divorces his wife, **except for the reason of unchastity** <Strong's 4202 πορνεία porneia>, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Matthew's initial audience were Jews, not Gentiles as Mark and Luke addressed in their Gospels and as Paul did in Romans 7 and 1 Corinthians 7, so this exclusion clause is applicable to the Jewish mindset and their approach to the

Mosaic Law. The law probably in the forefront of a Jewish mind is Leviticus 18, where it deals with the forbiddance of homosexuality and the marriage of close relatives, i.e., invalid marriages that God does not honor by joining together in the first place. The exclusion clause for porneia is only found here and in Matthew 19:9. It is these two passages that so many doctrinal positions are built upon to either justify divorce and remarriage without it causing an adulterous event, or at least allowing for divorce and remarriage. This particular passage (Matthew 5:32) is short and seems to allude to two positions. First, whoever divorces his wife causes her to commit adultery (assuming she hasn't already committed adultery) because she has to have a means to survive, especially if she has children to support and if her dowry is nonexistent. Second, whoever marries a divorced woman for any reason, whether or not she has committed adultery herself, also commits adultery. Jay Adams states that, "The terminology, 'still married in God's sight,' is extrabiblical, unbiblical and harmful. It finds no support or counterpart anywhere in the Bible." Adams is quite wrong in this regard. Clearly, this passage strongly and succinctly conveys that marriage is indissoluble in God's sight since whoever marries a divorced woman, no matter what the reason is, commits adultery. One can only commit adultery with a married person. Even after God granted Israel "a writ of divorce" in Jeremiah 3:8, God still claimed in verse 14 to be married to her (NKJV), that He is her "master" (NASB) or "husband" (NIV). The Hebrew word is <Strong's 01166, בעל ba'al> which often conveys husband, master, married, or to rule over. Jeremiah 31:32 even conveys that after Israel broke God's covenant with them, God still declared, "I was a husband <Strong's 01166, בעל ba'al> to them." For whatever reason, Jay Adams totally is out of line to surmise that divorced couples are no longer married in God's sight, for they

clearly are. Otherwise, adultery would not be the issue. It would be fornication. Adultery is a violation of the ongoing covenantal relationship between a husband and wife for as long as they are both physically alive. Another unfortunate position goes so far as to declare one of the spouses spiritually dead when they commit “porneia”, thereby granting the innocent spouse the freedom to remarry. Tony Evans makes this statement, “The church has the authority to declare the husband covenantally dead and to give the wife permission for divorce.”<sup>21</sup> To conjure up this type of a position is nothing short of scriptural gymnastics and violates every conceivable hermeneutic principle to properly interpret Scripture. A proponent of this position basically makes Scripture say what they want it to say. Plus, a Pandora’s box is opened with this type of reasoning. What is a church or a divorced/remarried spouse to do when the “covenantally dead” person repents and becomes a new creature in Christ, or spiritually resurrected, basically, covenantally alive again? There are no principles to leverage. The divorced/remarried spouse is now in an adulterous position themselves and is committing the exact same adulterous sins as their previous spouse was accused of doing. Dr. David Jeremiah’s position on this passages does not help either in clarifying the simple meaning of this passage. Jeremiah’s position is that Jesus was making a short hyperbole statement, and just as other hyperboles by Jesus they should not be taken literally. He goes on to say about this passage in Matthew 5:32, “Obviously, we cannot apply Jesus’ words in a literal manner because then the apostle Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 7 would contradict Jesus. We should also be cautioned that not everything Jesus commanded people are timeless laws. For example, during his earthly ministry Jesus told the disciples to preach only to ‘the lost sheep of Israel,’ and not the Gentiles or Samaritans (Matthew 10:6; 15:24).”<sup>22</sup> These

types of reasoning advocated by Jay Adams, Tony Evans, and David Jeremiah are unbiblical and nonsensical to put it politely, and muddles an already ugly situation. The simple words of Jesus in Matthew 5:32 need to be echoed over and over again to challenge an immoral society inside and outside the church walls, “Whoever marries a divorced [person] commits adultery.”

12. **Matthew 19:6-12.** What God has joined together, let not man put asunder. Whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality <Strong's 4202 πορνεία porneia>, and marries another woman commits adultery. This is the coup de grace passage used by every conservative and liberal position to define and justify their theology on divorce and remarriage. There is a hermeneutic principle called the Hermeneutic Principle of Added Clarification, which states, “If a parallel passage provides more details, the proper interpretation is based on that clarification.” This passage in Matthew 19 cleanly and clearly fits this principle. Where all the other passages related to divorce and remarriage (Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7:1-40) simply declare that to marry a divorced individual while their previous spouse was still physically living is adulterous, this passage, similar to Matthew 5:32, adds an exception clause - except for immorality <porneia>. So it begs the question, “What is porneia?” This word, however, needs to be looked at from a Jewish perspective, especially within the context of Matthew's Gospel. Matthew does not leave his Jewish readers with any open-ended issues. Matthew's Jewish audience would have quickly grasped what he was trying to convey. In fact, even the slow-witted Apostles got what Jesus was talking about in this passage. When the Apostles made their statement to the Lord about how there seems to be no way out of a bad marriage, and “it is better not to marry” (verse 10), the Lord

responds, in essence, marriage is not for everyone, or as verse 11 states it, “Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given.” From Matthew’s perspective, several unlawful porneia-based or invalid types of marriages would have quickly come to the mind of his Jewish audience. Back a few chapters in Matthew 14, for example, it is seen that John the Baptist became a martyr over Herod’s “unlawful” marriage to his niece, Herodias, who was also his brother’s wife. This unlawful or porneia relationship would have violated the incestuous and adulterous restrictions found in Leviticus 18 as well as Leviticus 20:21. Herod’s marriage to Herodias was akin to two homosexuals being married. God would not have “joined together” this couple in a marriage covenant since it clearly violated His regulations on who could not and should not marry whom. Matthew’s initial Jewish audience may also have thought about those unlawful marriages of Ezra’s day which violated Deuteronomy 7:3, where the Israelites were not to marry the heathen women found in the land. God would not have “joined together” these types of couples in an indissoluble union since they clearly violated His stated commands. Adultery, therefore, would not be an issue since there was not a valid God-joined marriage to violate. Now it becomes relatively easy to determine the porneia activities that causes the exceptions clause, and it would apply both to Jews and non-Jews. Hence the added-clarification hermeneutic principle is very applicable. For example, if Herod had put away or divorced Herodias, not for her porneia activity, but for their porneia activity, Herod could remarry (assuming there were no other unlawful marriages or adulterous situations with him) without it being adulterous, since his marriage with Herodias was not a valid marriage in God’s sight.

All the New Testament passages dealing with divorce and remarriage thoroughly indicate that the remarriage of a divorcee constitutes an adulterous event, with no exceptions, even for the Jews. The two exclusion clauses found only in Matthew deal with invalid marriages most likely identified in Leviticus 18, such as for incestual and homosexual marriages. Since God does not join such couples in an invalid marriage, there is no marriage to dissolve in His sight. Therefore, it is conceivable and probable that a homosexual partner, for example, who divorces and then marries a heterosexual partner, would not constitute an adulterous remarriage. Catholics with their annulment practices for such marriages would not be too far off base, if such annulments were against these invalid marriages. So, what is this Exception Clause, “Except it be for immorality?”

According to Carl Laney, “An increasing number of scholars are interpreting Matthew’s “except for porneia” to refer to marriage within the prohibited relationships of Leviticus 18:6-18. This view fits well within the historical, geographical and cultural context of Matthew’s Gospel – a book clearly designed to benefit Jewish readers.”<sup>23</sup> Laney also adds, “This would account for the inclusion of the exception clause in Matthew, and its absence in Mark and Luke, which are addressed to Roman and Greek readers respectively.”<sup>24</sup> Thomas Edgar’s position, however, is just the opposite of Laney’s. Edgar says, “A view which seems to be popular among modern interpreters is that the exception in Matthew 19:9 refers to incestuous marriages prohibited in Leviticus chapter 18. Despite its popularity, this is, however, the least probable of all views.”<sup>25</sup> This author is in full agreement with Laney’s position since Matthew addressed King Herod’s “unlawful” or incestuous, and by implication, porneia-based relationship with Herodias back in Matthew 14. The only way to make it clearer for some was for Matthew to include porneia in his description of Herod’s “unlawful” marriage to Herodias. Still, this would not quiet some critics

who are on a constant lookout for contradictions, inconsistencies, and loopholes in Scripture.

John MacArthur put it this way, “They [the Pharisees] are classic examples of people looking for moral and spiritual loopholes to accommodate their vices.”

As stated earlier, scripture gymnastics are required with some divorce and remarriage views.

1. “The church has the authority to declare the husband covenantally dead and to give the wife permission for divorce”<sup>26</sup> – Tony Evans. According to Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12, Luke 16:18, Romans 7:2-3, and 1 Corinthians 7:39, the spouse must be physically dead, not spiritually or covenantally dead, before the church declares the spouse free to remarry without the remarriage being labeled adulterous.
2. “Remarriage is permitted in the case of marital failure prior to conversion”<sup>27</sup>  
– Chuck Swindoll. According to Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12, Luke 16:18, Romans 7:2-3, and 1 Corinthians 7:39, however, any remarriage while a previous spouse is still physically alive is adulterous. Remarriage may occur, but Scripture does not explicitly permit it, nor does Scripture ever claim that a remarriage is non-adulterous unless the previous marriage was invalid due to porneia activity, such as in incestual or homosexual marriage.
3. “You can divorce and remarry if your spouse has Alzheimer’s” – Pat Robertson, TV broadcast, Sept. 16, 2011. In contrast, Romans 7 says if a man divorces his wife and marries another while his first wife is still physically breathing, he becomes an adulterer.

**Test Cases for Consideration:**

- A. Jane marries Jill; both are lesbians who got married in a Christian church but they later divorce. If Jill later marries Jim, would this be adulterous? The answer is an unequivocal “NO.” Jill’s previous homosexual marriage was not a valid, God-joined, marriage, but an

unlawful porneia-type relationship.

- B. Jeff married Sally in a Hindu wedding. Sally accepts Christ, and Jeff becomes abusive and unfaithful. If Sally and Jeff divorce and each remarry, would their new marriages be adulterous? The answer is “YES” in this case. Jeff and Sally’s initial marriage was valid, though non-Christian. What about Jeff’s unlawful infidelity <porneia>? Again, from a Jewish perspective, his infidelity would not fit what is meant by porneia where both husband and wife were in an unlawful or invalid marriage. Else there would be a contradiction in Scripture.
- C. Lizzy, a school girl in Nigeria, captured by Boko Haram, a radical Islamist group, was forced to wed her captor. If she later escapes and remarries, would she be called an adulteress? The answer to this situation is “NO” since her forced and underage marriage would seemingly fall into the unlawful porneia category. Some could argue that Jews had valid marriages with their virgin captives. In this case, this young lady was not captured by a Jew within the Promised Land. Such considerations do have to be factored into this equation though there is no hard fast rule or command to base it against. It would need to be principle-driven.
- D. Josephine, a transgender male, marries Chrissy, a transgender female in an atheistic ceremony. One or both eventually and truly accept Christ as Lord and Savior. Was their marriage initially honored by God joining them together since they were, in essence, a heterosexual couple, or was their marriage invalid and unlawful as a porneia-based homosexual or incestual marriage? It is quite feasible for God to have joined them together since they were a heterosexual couple who left their parents, they cleaved to each other, and they could presumably consummate their marriage in some form or

fashion. Their atheistic beliefs would not have prevented God from joining them together. After all, God even acknowledged the marriage of wicked, heathenistic, and idolatrous people such as King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, as noted in 1 Kings 16:30-31.

### **2.3.1 New Testament Restrictions on Divorce and Remarriage**

The New Testament is often more restrictive with many of its regulations dealing with life issues including with the exclusion clauses found in Matthew 5 and 19. Many pastors and theologians who have a liberal bent on Scripture see Jesus siding with the more conservative position by accommodating remarriages of divorcees without it being called adulterous for those who had an unfaithful spouse. David Jeremiah says this, "However, when a person repents and is converted, all his or her past sins and mistakes are forgiven (Acts 2:38; Psalm 103:1-3, 10-12). Any past sins that led to the divorce and the divorce itself would be included. The person would then be free to marry again. There is no sin in the new marriage and the sin of a past divorce is not a continuing one."<sup>28</sup> John MacArthur basically has the same position, "As long as all the sins that led to the dissolution of the marriage have been abandoned and forgiven, I see no reason to forbid the repentant person from remarriage."<sup>29</sup> Such liberal positions, however, cause other biblical issues. For example, the faithful and wronged spouse who divorces and marries another person actually commits the same sin of adultery as their former spouse was accused of doing. Also, the remarriage of a wronged spouse, while calling it non-adulterous, makes the Bible contradictor itself. According to Mark 10:11-12, Luke 16:18, Romans 7:2-3, and 1 Corinthians 7:39 the remarriage of any divorcee while their previous spouse is still physically alive is adulterous in God's sight, which is the right perspective to have. Even Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, when taken from the Jewish perspective highlighted in the previous section, strongly and clearly

indicate when a man or woman divorce and remarry, they have created an adulterous event if their previous marriage was valid before God's sight. In other words, if their previous marriage was not homosexual or incestual as identified in Leviticus 18 then they had a valid marriage where God was able to join them together in a permanent, indissoluble union.

Jesus, while walking on this earth, always took the higher conservative position when He challenged those who questioned His motives and actions. When it comes to the exclusion passages in Matthew 5 and 19, Jesus did not side with either the more conservative position, frequently called the House of Hillel, or the more liberal viewpoints of the House of Shammai. Instead, Jesus' position was even more conservative and restrictive than that of Hillel by saying marriage should be based on what is found in Genesis. Marriages are permanent and valid as God joins them together in an indissoluble covenantal bond.

Theoretically, the dire state of immorality within today's society may not be the church's direct fault. There could be a myriad of reasons for a society's downfall. Variables could include factors outside of the church's control, such as it is just the sign of the times, the divine-appointment initiated by God for his imminent return. History even shows the ancient Roman Empire was in a state of moral decline prior to its demise, and it did it without any help from the fledgling new Christian church. Most protestant churches today, however, have not helped improve the morals of society because of their willingness to promote and condone adultery by remarrying divorcees, almost at will.

Churches today also seem to succumb to the expedient instead of being obedient to Scripture. This is seen so readily in churches remarrying divorcees at the same rate as they marry first timers at the altar for the simple reason to sustain church growth. The passage in 1 Corinthians 7:11, where it states a spouse who is separated should either remain single or be reconciled,

seems to be readily ignored. Granted, there are many interpretations of this passage, and some interpretations easily allow exceptions for divorce and remarriage, but the plain reading of this passage within its wider context leaves no doubt. There is no biblical reason for remarriage of a divorcee whose spouse is still living without it causing an adulterous event.

In regards to divorce and remarriage, the New Testament also has much harsher restrictions than the Old Testament. In the Old Testament divorce and remarriage was accommodated, almost too readily. The Jewish Mishnah, which is a compilation of Jewish oral tradition from the 4th-5th century A.D, states that a husband could divorce his wife on the grounds of any “matter” [Mishnah Gittin 9:10]. In the Gospels, however, as seen in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, and in Mark 10:11-12 and Luke 16:18, Jesus made very restrictive guidelines – all remarriages of divorcees who came out of a valid marriage (non-porneia relationship) constitutes adultery. And the Apostle Paul removed all loopholes when he wrote Romans 7:2-3 and 1 Corinthians 7:1-40.

Remarriage was readily accommodated in the Old Testament era, as seen with the woman at the well, who was a Samaritan with a Jewish foundation (John 4:7-26). On a side note, Jesus never explained how this woman could straighten out her life. Should she go back to her fifth husband or to her first? New Testament guidance defined in 1 Corinthians 7:11 specifies separating from her live-in boyfriend and remaining single if she could not reconcile with her latest (fifth) husband. Does this mean remaining single for life? Presumably, yes, if she wanted to be obedient to Scripture and desire God’s best for her, and not God’s second best.

### **2.3.2 The Remarriage of Divorcees Is the Jezebel of the Church Today**

Without a doubt, churches are relatively powerless to effect positive moral change in society because it mirrors society’s morals all too well. Many statistics reflect that the divorce rate

within the church is just as high if not higher than society at large. Even the Southern Baptist Convention acknowledges they “often have higher divorce rates than areas we would define as “unchurched” and in need of evangelical witness.”<sup>30</sup>

Tony Evans makes the claim that roughly one million divorces happen in America each year.<sup>31</sup> Gordon Wenham states, “In western societies, about half of marriages end in divorce. A large percentage of children are born out of wedlock. One in five pregnancies is aborted.”<sup>32</sup> Wenham also claims that, “Children of divorced parents are very upset by divorce, but even more by remarriage; it destroys their last hope that their parents will be reconciled.”<sup>33</sup> John MacArthur states, “Divorce has become pandemic, to the point that hardly a person can be found who has not been affected by it either directly or indirectly.”<sup>34</sup> A kindergarten school teacher in the author’s town of Mount Washington, Kentucky told this author that in one recent year, eighty percent of her students came from blended families.

Swindoll was very articulate in his book, “Getting Through the Tough Stuff,” about the destructiveness of divorce within the church and society. Swindoll claims that, “Statistics reveal an epidemic. If the trend continues, more than half of all American marriages will end in divorce in their first decade. Today, less than three-quarters of all American children live in two-parent homes. And the scene isn’t much better in many other countries. Divorce is crippling the emerging generations. [And] Divorce in the church is nothing short of an epidemic.”<sup>35</sup> Swindoll continues with, “History tells the sad tale that once a nation’s homes are permanently fractured, the nation will crumble at its foundation.”<sup>36</sup> And, “Fifty percent of all marriages end in divorce. Sixty-five percent of all second marriages end in the same traumatic sadness.”<sup>37</sup> In brief, the divorce and remarriage situation has not improved, but has only gotten worse, especially in America, since 1 January 1970, when California, with Ronald Reagan as the Governor, became

the first state to institute no-fault divorce, meaning spouses no longer had to acknowledge or contrive something scandalous about their mates to get divorced.

Again, divorce is not the issue as much as remarriage is. Divorce does allow mercy into a horrendous home situation. Peace and often the safety of the wife and children must prevail, and divorce provides for that. Remarriage of a divorcee, on the other hand, creates an adulterous event, which propels the church and society down that slippery slope of ever-worsening immorality that few nations have ever recovered from without being nearly or totally annihilated.

The church's powerlessness to impact society is as if God is not answering the prayers of His people. This is very possible due to the sin of adultery being so flagrantly rampant throughout the church. Isaiah recorded that God voiced his displeasure at His people for their sins, and said that He "had enough of their burnt offerings" and "multiplied sacrifices" (Isaiah 1:11), and emphatically stated that He "cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly" (1:13). In effect, God said that their worship of Him was futile while they flaunted their sins, and even though they multiplied their prayers to Him, He would refuse to hear them (1:15). God said that His own people have revolted against Him and they do not understand the predicament they are in (Isaiah 1:2-3). Neither does the church today understand how their cavalier position on the remarriage of divorcees is making them powerless before a dying world.

Fortunately, God's higher will is not circumvented because of man's shortcomings or even the church's shortcomings. God can easily use His people in mighty ways even if they violate His design for marriage. But, in the New Testament era the church is charged ever so strongly and clearly to maintain marriage in its purest state – before, during and after – for the purpose of promoting and safeguarding the church, its testimony, and for God's glory. Because the church at large has succumbed to divorce and remarriage, it has lost its saltiness to influence and

preserve society against immorality. The church, in essence, not only condones adultery, it promotes it whenever they marry divorced individuals while a previous spouse is still living.

As stated previously, there may be reasons to justify divorce or marital separation for unrepentant infidelity, abandonment, and unruly or abusive behavior, but there seems to be no valid biblical justification for remarriage while a divorcee's spouse is still living – even to be merciful so a single mom is not left destitute or forced into prostitution. Clearly, remarriage of a divorcee for any reason while their previous spouse is still alive is adulterous. If a remarriage of a divorcee can be justified as being pure and unadulterated, then it is quite appropriate to have the husband as a pastor/elder or as a deacon. This ability to declare a remarriage unadulterated while a divorcee's previous spouse is living places the church above the Bible and is similar to how Catholics declare a marriage null and void as they proclaim what is bound or unbound on earth as bound or unbound in Heaven. Therefore, whenever a church justifies and condones remarrying of divorcees it does not encourage and promote sexual purity but instead condones and promotes adultery. Through the remarriage of a divorcee, churches also allow a spouse to commit the exact same sin of infidelity and adultery as their previous spouse had done to them in many cases. An adulterous remarriage, though it might provide a destitute spouse some financial relief, fails to allow the divorced spouse to develop their faith in God and to trust in Him for all their needs on a daily basis as they seek God's best for them as they "remain single."

It is the remarriage of divorcees that is the Jezebel of the church today. This claim simply states that every time a church remarries a divorcee and bypasses God's clear teachings that divorcees either need to reconcile with their previous spouse or to remain single, they are creating, promoting, and condoning an adulterous event reminiscent of the immoralities of Jezebel within the Church of Thyatira, recorded in Revelation 2:18-29.



**Revelation 2:18-29 [NASB]:** *And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: (v19) I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. (v20) But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. (v21) I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. (v22) Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. (v23) And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. (v24) But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them — place no other burden on you. (v25) Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. (v26) He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, **TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS;** (v27) **AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES,** as I also have received authority from My Father; (v28) and I will give him the morning star. (v29) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*



Jesus spends the most words on this church (12 verses) than He did for each of the other six churches highlighted in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, twenty-five to fifty percent more, which is quite substantial and worth noting. Jesus proclaims quickly in verse 18 that being the “Son of God” He sees everything that is going on since He has “eyes like a flame of fire,” and He is able to use His feet of hardened bronze (metaphorically speaking) either for judgment purposes or to bring things under His submission. Barnes’ commentary highlights this fact about how this passage on Thyatira leads off with describing who Jesus is, “This is the first time, in these epistles, that the name of the speaker [“the Son of God”] is referred to. In each other instance, there is merely some attribute of the Savior mentioned. Perhaps the severity of the rebuke contemplated here made it proper that there should be a more impressive reference to the authority of the speaker; and hence he is introduced as the "Son of God."

Jesus extols Thyatira’s virtues in verse 19 before addressing the deficient areas which need dire fixing, else judgment is looming. The virtues worthy of the Lord’s attention included having

solid works or deeds that the Lord was fully aware of (“I know your deeds”). Next Jesus highlighted their love, faith, service, and perseverance in their activities. One would think this church was going in the right direction in the right way having the right motives and vision to accomplish great things for God’s kingdom – and they did. Jesus even declares very strongly that the church’s most recent works were even more impressive or “greater” than what was done previously. This church was apparently a shaker and a mover in their community. Then verse 20 highlights the severe deficiencies of this church. The deficiencies were severe enough to warrant Jesus having to state in verse 23 He would “kill her children” unless “they repent.”

The best way to address the applications and implications of this passage is by identifying the major players in this church. The first set of characters is found in verse 19. The term “your” in “your love” and “your deeds” alludes to the church in its entirety. This would include the faithful believers, nominal believers, whoever Jezebel is, the ones caught up in her wicked practices, and finally the children. The next character to highlight is Jezebel. In verse 20, Jezebel is identified as a particular woman or prophetess who has considerable influence within the church. From a preterist perspective, this was a unique individual within this specific church in Asia Minor at this particular time during the first century who the “Son of God” gave her a label of “Jezebel.” The Jezebel label alludes to the wicked queen who was married to King Ahab of the northern tribe of Israel and highlighted in 1 Kings 16, 18, 19, 21, and in 2 Kings 9.

The next set of characters is depicted in “they” mentioned in verse 22. “They” refer to “those who commit adultery” with Jezebel. If this passage is taken literally or from a preterist’ perspective, most of the people within this church, and possibly many of the faithful saints as well, were tolerating open immorality by allowing this church prophetess to seduce weak believers. This would be similar to the situation the Apostle Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 5:1-

7, where Paul is seen lambasting the believers in this church for their arrogant boasting and lack of mournful repentance in tolerating a man within their fellowship who was having a sexual relationship with his father's wife, who would have been his step-mother. This was in clear violation of the types of incestual relationships found in Leviticus 18, which is obvious to realize that such behavior is inappropriate even in the New Testament era. Again, the incestuous and homosexual relationships identified in Leviticus 18 convey the timeless moral laws of God that transcends all generations and people groups. Apparently, the Corinthian and Thyatira churches, if given the benefit of the doubt that they were not intentionally doing evil, were trying to extend love, mercy, and grace way beyond what God intended, and they were tolerant and even arrogantly proud about their approach to such immoral behavior within their churches. Love, mercy, and grace are indeed high quality characteristics to be exemplified in every believer, but not at the expense of holy and righteous living. God wants obedience, not sacrifice, and He wants holy people, not people who tolerate and promote immorality and other unbiblical behavior (e.g. to "eat things sacrificed to idols" verse 20). This immoral behavior exemplified in the Thyatira church applies directly to the promotion and condoning of adultery in churches today by the simple act of churches remarrying divorcees.

The next set of characters to be highlighted in the Thyatira church are the faithful saints identified in verse 24 "who do not hold" to the teachings or practices of Jezebel. Jesus says in this verse, "I place no other burden on you." And in verse 25, Jesus states, "Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come." These simple statements by the Son of God allude to the faithful saints within this church having one priority or one burden to be concerned about, and that is to challenge Jezebel and "those who commit adultery with her" and all others who tolerate such open and blatant sin to wholeheartedly repent of such immorality and to gravitate toward

the truth of God's word – that which every believer needs to “hold fast” until Christ comes.

The repercussions the Son of God threatens upon the final set of characters, the children, are dire unless there is honest and true repentance. Jesus threatens to kill them in verse 23 with pestilence – then all the churches will know that God means business. Jesus, according to verse 23, “searches the minds and hearts,” and also promises or threatens to “give to each one of you according to your deeds.” What was sure to happen to the church in Thyatira is also a sure warning to churches today if they do not take such threats, warnings, and promises by the Son of God seriously.

Just as seen in Thyatira, immorality is running rampant in churches today with all the remarriages of divorcees causing ever increasing adulterous situations. Fortunately, there are still the faithful few who are holding fast to God's word and are trumpeting the truth to “reconcile or remain single.” Immorality is definitely the Jezebel of the church today. How can the world know what a good marriage should look like if God's people are flippant about marriage, and a divorced spouse's happiness or financial wellbeing is more critical than being obedient to Scripture?

The church is already seeing the aftermath of her tolerance with immorality in the death of her children. As noted earlier in this section, Wenhan states a large percentage of children are born out of wedlock and one in five pregnancies are aborted. MacArthur says divorce has become pandemic, and Swindoll says divorce in the church is nothing short of an epidemic. This immoral entrenchment within the church walls also makes God's word non-relevant, especially to the youngest members of the church – the children, the teenagers and college students.

Jay Adams, however, summed up the church's position best, “We are biblically illiterate about family, marriage, divorce, and remarriage.”<sup>38</sup> So what is the church to do about this and fix

this epidemic of divorce starting with itself, since judgment must first begin in the house of God (1 Peter 4:17)? The church must take some concrete steps in its march toward biblical relevance and moral integrity. As seen with the Church of Thyatira, God is more concerned about a church's holy and moral character than He is about their great deeds and their "love and faith and service and perseverance," even if their current works are greater than their previous works. The next section provides some of the concrete steps churches need to start invoking to be the holy and moral institution God intended for them to be.

#### **2.4 Goal #2: To Reverse the Trend, Churches Must First Acknowledge the Problem and Begin Adhering to Biblical Mandates and Principles**

William Heth made a remarkable statement about how recent the church has been dealing with divorce and remarriage within its four walls. Heth said, "Prior to the publication of Geoffrey Bromiley's "God and Marriage" in 1980 and Carl Laney's "The Divorce Myth" in 1981, evangelicals in this country had few, if any scholarly alternatives to the view of Matthew 19:9 that permitted and sanctioned remarriage after divorce for adultery."<sup>39</sup> Even Jay Adams quipped back in 1980, "The Christian church still awaits a comprehensive, lucid, accurate study presented in a readable and practical style that, nevertheless, expounds and does justice to the biblical data."<sup>40</sup> Personally, this author feels that David Instone-Brewer did a phenomenal job in his seminal book, "Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible," in 2002, where he delved deeply into ancient artifacts and antiquities, to see how the Bible compares against divorce and remarriage in Old and New Testament era cultures. Unfortunately, Instone-Brewer's position on divorce and remarriage is very ultra-liberal (divorce and remarriage for almost any cause) and offers little satisfaction to the more conservative positions. Instone-Brewer's liberal slant is seen in this

statement he made regarding a church having divorced and remarried elders and deacons and in having female elders and deacons, “Should any church employ a divorcee’ as a minister? There is no biblical prohibition of divorce or remarriage for church leaders. The description of a church leader as “man of one woman” or “woman of one man” (1Tim 3:2; 5:9) is sometimes regarded as a prohibition of remarriage, though we have found that it meant someone who was faithful to one partner (i.e., had high sexual morals, in contrast to the norm of the Greco-Roman empire).”<sup>41</sup> It is short of astounding to see a theologian of his stature to use a passage such as 1 Timothy 5:9, where it addresses that only specific widows who have a stellar testimony, including being “woman of one man,” should be on the list for full time church support and twist that clause “woman of one man” to substantiate women elders and deacons or ministers as he calls them. So, Adams may still be correct with his assessment the church still waits for a comprehensive, lucid, accurate study on divorce and remarriage in modern times.

The modern church seemingly does not take the Bible seriously as it once apparently did in generations past. Today, many churches basically play church. Too many pastors marry divorcees when the Bible says to reconcile or remain single. Elder boards and church committees comprised of well-meaning people select their new pastors based on a check list of academic credentials, preaching abilities, and personal accomplishments instead of being skilled and tactful in the Word of God, as Ezra was, to compassionately wield its many and varied principles.

Only when a church is bent on pleasing God first and foremost through obeying His clear commands and principles is it ripe to have a positive moral influence within its society regardless of the era it resides in. Other churches who have a hardened mindset from years of having fixed traditions and man-made rules and regulations and who are more concerned with attendance and

financial stability and growth will not be open to accepting scriptural guidance that would or could possibly disrupt their perceived equilibrium of prestige, power, and growth. Other churches who are on the fence in regards to strengthening their biblical posture stand to benefit the most for changing course toward being more obedient to Bible directives.

Wenham's position on reversing the divorce and remarriage trend within the church today begins with education. He states, "The first priority is education; second priority is caring; third is church discipline; fourth is politics – We need sex education programs in schools that do not just teach about sexual techniques and condoms, but encourage abstinence before marriage and lifelong fidelity within marriage."<sup>42</sup> Wenham also states, "Unless principles are enforced, we may as well give up the attempt to teach the permanency of marriage; but we cannot expect changes of attitude or practice overnight,"<sup>43</sup> and, "Somehow we have to move our churches and our society to accept the standards Jesus insisted on. It will be a very difficult and slow process. I fear it will take decades, not years."<sup>44</sup> Actually, it could take centuries as the early church probably did not see polygamy leave most of its doors until the eleventh century,<sup>45</sup> Missionary churches are still dealing with polygamous marriages in Africa today,<sup>46</sup> not to mention Mormons in America who come to accept Christ after being in a polygamous marriage.<sup>47</sup> The next trend the church will soon encounter and needs to be adequately prepared to handle is helping those looking to biblically come out of homosexual and transgender marriages and relationships.

Before listing some definitive steps and principles churches need to consider invoking to help them improve their tarnished testimony, some basic assumptions need to be identified first.

These include the following:

1. Churches need to take seriously their God-given roll in being the "pillar and support of the truth" in sound doctrines and teachings (1 Timothy 3:15);

2. Churches must also realize judgment begins with the household of God (1 Peter 4:17);
3. Church Elders, must protect the sheep, the congregants, from those who would do physical and spiritual harm to them.

If God's ideal plan for each marriage is to be a permanent heterosexual monogamous bonding, then to have the most positive impact in an immoral society, the church needs to subscribe to the following minimal principles from Scripture:

1. Churches need to immediately stop remarrying divorcees since such remarriages create an adulterous event, which the church should not be promoting or condoning – “But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints” (Ephesians 5:3). Divorcees who want to get remarried should do so outside of the church, possibly the justice of the peace. If the divorced and remarried couple desire fellowship at a church, they should acknowledge their remarriage was outside of God's perfect and desired will for a marriage and to strive to live in a godly marriage.
2. Encourage members within the church who are living together to get married, assuming they are not divorcees, or to separate and remain single. Church visitors, on the other hand, who might be living together will not be able to serve in many capacities, if at all. Please note that Scripture does have different standards when dealing with believers and non-believers, and it is all based on repentance. Churches are to have an open-door policy with unbelievers who may be investigating what the church beliefs are all about. If everything is done decently and in order, a sinful unbeliever may eventually see the need to “fall on his face and worship God” (1 Corinthians 14:24-25). For sinful or unrepentant believers, church discipline may need to be invoked to some degree, to include removal from fellowship (1 Corinthians 5:1-7).

3. Encourage divorcees to remain single or to be reconciled to their previous spouse.
4. For those who are divorced and remarried, to stay together with their current marriage partner and acknowledge their remarriage was outside of God's perfect and desired will.
5. For any invalid marriages, such as homosexual or incestuous relationships, separate or withdraw from church fellowship, which is in line with 1 Corinthians 5:1-7.
6. For all others, show support and compassion for those divorced and remarried and who are seeking to live for God, and to support the church going forward with these mandates.

If most churches who call themselves Bible-believing were known throughout their communities as churches that do not marry divorcees this will have a tremendous impact on both society and the churches. There may be name calling, hate, and discontent from many inside and outside the churches, but many will take notice that the churches are finally taking the Bible seriously. When God's people begin to seriously obey His word God then gets involved. Yes, there may be persecution to contend with, but the main impact will be changed hearts toward God. Churches cannot afford not to obey God's word in this area of ceasing to remarry divorcees if it wants to positively impact society and the world for the benefit and growth of God's kingdom.

## **2.5 Hypothesis #3: Expect to Pay a Steep Price for Challenging Sin in the Camp**

The minimal price a church will pay for adhering to the clear teachings of Scripture will be immediately felt in the attendance and financial numbers. Many people who feel slighted or unfairly singled out or disciplined will opt to leave. Churches today live in a fast-food

environment. If someone does not receive what they think they should receive at church A, they will move to church B.

This author wrote a book on church benevolence principles back in 2009<sup>48</sup> and was contacted by an associate pastor at a very large megachurch in excess of 20,000 members. This associate pastor expressed how useful the benevolence book was and when they implemented the principles expounded in the book, along with principles from other benevolence books, the church was able to prevent many church scams and they saved themselves from losing hundreds of thousands of dollars in charitable goods over a few short years as they targeted more biblically-qualified poor. Where before they were giving away nearly one million dollars per year in charitable goods to the same people every year with no fruit to show for their generosity – no one saved and no family moving out of poverty, now by targeting fewer people with a more biblical and intentional focus they began to see people getting saved and moving out of poverty. When this author went back to this associate pastor for him to write the forward to a new book, this book dealing with the cessation of supernatural miracles<sup>49</sup>, the pastor kindly refused to do so. This associate pastor stated, in essence, though he fully believed in this author's cessationist approach and viewpoint, for him to put his name to such a book would alienate many, if not most people within his church – which would greatly impact their bottom line.

It is an unfortunate reality that churches today function more as a business than a family. Churches are more concerned about surviving than thriving under the hand of God. Yes, God is very much interested in numbers. In a biblically sound church, growth is the norm to be expected. Jesus said His Kingdom would grow like a mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32), which equates to exponential or phenomenal growth over a relatively short period of time. Historically, the Church has grown exponentially. Proverbs 14:28 states, “In a multitude of people is a king's

glory, but in the dearth of people is a prince's ruin." Put another way, "A pastor is honored by a large congregation, but a small congregation is his demise."

There are many variables which could impact church growth. Even if a church does everything biblically correct, God could allow outside persecution to impact its numerical growth over a period of time. Revelation 13:7 states, "And it was given unto him [the dragon, the antichrist] to make war with the saints, and to overcome them." In the long run, however, God's Kingdom, as typified by His church, will prevail, for "upon this rock [Jesus] I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Matthew 16:18).

When a church deals with issues, especially with any sin in the camp, and sides are taken, it is inevitable for people, the sheep, to disburse elsewhere. The focus should not be on financial numbers and attendance figures when sin is dealt with, but on adhering to the laws, commands, and principles of God's word. That is what God honors. Churches need to seek after God and mirror His holiness first and foremost. Yes, the church needs to do things decently and in order, and with gentleness and love, but God's truth must ring out. Remember Thyatira – they seemed to be a growing church doing great deeds for the Kingdom with fabulous works of love, service, faith, and patience, but the immorality in their camp made them odious in God's sight, and God was willing to kill their children for it. As seen with the saints in Thyatira, Jesus gave them one burden to focus on – to fix the sin in the camp. Just as seen with Moses and Israel, who could not move one foot forward toward their Promised Land until they dealt with the sin in their camp (Numbers 12:10-15), churches may be stymied from growing until they deal with critical issues they may have. Often times, God expects His people, be it individuals or a church, to deal with sin, especially adultery and other immoralities, before being able to move forward with accomplishing great things for His kingdom.

## 2.6 Goal #3: Options to Lessen the Price to be Paid

What is the worst that can happen when divorcees remarry? Assuming divorcees still want to live for God, impacts are living with all the issues of a “blended” family, being flagged as an adulterer, and possibly being prevented from holding various church positions, such as Pastor, Elder, Deacon, or in some cases, Sunday School teacher, usher, church clerk, or other paid or volunteer positions. Yet if King David was labeled a “man after God’s own heart” after having multiple wives, committing adultery with Bathsheba, killing her husband, then God can still use others who have a challenging past.

God is willing to work with a person’s current marital situation and so should everyone within the church. God does not throw anyone away unless they are willfully unrepentant. All past, present, and future sins of each and every believer, including adultery, is already paid for by the atoning blood of Christ. Divorce and especially remarriage of divorcees are not trivial issues in the slightest. God always prefers obedience to sacrifice, and He prefers holy people, not necessary married people. Christians also need to realize God is ultimately responsible for the growth of His Church and of each believer, while His people are responsible for faithful obedience. Yes, there is often a hefty price to pay to be obedient, to live holy and righteously, and to address painful sin in the camp. There are, however, biblical ways to lessen the pain of loss.

**Praying Has Priority.** Not before Ezra prostrated himself before God (Ezra 10:1) did a large assembly eventually gather around him to have the same broken heart and steadfastness to work through the issues. Then they could strategize how to best address the serious situation Israel found themselves in.

**Deal with Sin Sooner Rather Than Later.** When it comes to sinful behavior, Christians should not have a slow pace about resolving sin, but immediately flip the switch off and stop sinning. From that aspect once a church is convicted of the truth of God's word they should immediately stop marrying divorcees, which will immediately stop the spread of adulterous relationships within that body of believers. Any adulterous relationships will then come from the outside as remarried couples get saved and begin to come to church. This is how it should be.

**Yet, Go Slow and Be Methodical.** God's people perish for the lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6). Before people can handle calculus, they need to grasp the concepts of algebra. As Wenham said, "The first priority, of course, is education."<sup>50</sup> So, God's people have to receive accurate and timely information, education, and training. It could take each church at least one generation to fix their divorce and remarriage problem in house. Just as in the first century when polygamy was probably quite prevalent in many churches, people had to wait for the aging polygamous marriages to naturally die out, and hopefully the younger generations would be influenced by the church elders and deacons being husbands of one wife. Hence the need for many churches today to change their bylaws forbidding elders and deacons to be divorced and remarried or even married to a divorcee. Since divorce and remarriage is rampant in society, churches will continuously see a stream of sinners coming through their doors as the Gospel spreads throughout the world, so it could take multiple generations before a church sees a turnaround in broken marriages. But, change must first happen within the church before it envelops a society.

**Mob Rule Can Work.** As stated in section 2.2, Ezra needed the majority of the people behind him, and the people had to properly tremble at God's word to effect true change (Ezra 9:4; 10:3). Nehemiah also had to set up a great assembly against the rulers of his day to effect positive change (Nehemiah 5:6-13). In Nehemiah's case, wealthy landowners had to be

convinced by mob rule (verse 7) to free their Hebrew bond slaves. Yes, sometimes the masses need to be moved appropriately to see the need to make necessary changes to acquire God's blessings and anointing for further service. This is not a political ploy to control people or a situation for unbiblical or selfish purposes, but to properly expose deadly sin that could invoke wrath from God, and to devise ways to move the Church in God's direction, which would bring Him the most glory while producing holiness in His people.

If only a few church leaders, for example, see the need to change certain church policies to cease remarrying of divorcees, this could provoke serious outrage from many. The majority of the church needs to be biblically convinced of the need to change such a policy to better align themselves with God's perfect will, where previously, God's perceived permissive will was touted.

**Be Compassionate and Gentle.** As stated in section 2.2, Ezra took ninety days to resolve one hundred thirteen cases of unlawful marriages. This conveys he took his time, about one family per day, and probably did his best to convey to each family how to seek God's best for their unique situation and for all of God's people. When a church, for example, ceases marrying divorcees, it will take time and compassion to convey to many why this change was needed. Those divorcees seeking to be remarried will need to hear why policies have changed, and not in their favor, and what, if any work-arounds or options exist for them.

**Rightly Divide and Accurately Articulate the Word of Truth.** Christians have bought into several lies for so long it will take many generations, God willing, to positively turn the situation around. Pastors and theologians alike have bought into the following lies since Erasmus' liberal stance on divorce and remarriage took hold throughout the Christian church:

1. Divorce allows for adultery-free remarriage;

2. Adultery or other acts of porneia allow a couple to divorce and remarry;
3. God's permissive will allows for remarriage, even though it may create an adulterous event; and
4. Churches must show love, mercy, and grace and accommodate the remarriage of divorcees.

Pastors and theologians will need to retool their defense of the truth of God's word by accurately articulating how the remarriage of divorcees from a previous valid marriage always creates an adulterous event, and the only biblical recourse, which God desires, is to reconcile or to remain single (1 Corinthians 7:11). Any other scenario is outside of God's perfect will and bears inherent consequences. God's permissive will does allow remarriage of divorcees, but the consequences are more disastrous than remaining single.

John Piper has this to say about the earthly marriage covenant, "Death is the decisive and eternal end of marriage. The spouse who has died has moved out of the earthly sphere where marriage happens and is no longer married. And therefore, the spouse on earth is no longer married. Therefore, remarriage after the death of a spouse is not only legitimate, but it speaks a clear biblical truth – after death there is no marriage."<sup>51</sup> Piper alluded to Matthew 22:30, where Jesus clears up a misunderstanding the Sadducees had of the resurrection, "For in the resurrection [humans] neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven." Piper also addressed the higher purpose of marriage every Christian should realize, "I pray that we will all recognize the deepest and highest meaning of marriage – not sexual intimacy, as good as that is, not friendship, or mutual helpfulness, or childbearing, or child-rearing, but the flesh-and-blood display in the world of the covenant-keeping love between Christ and his church."<sup>52</sup>

### 3. METHODS

This dissertation proffers three approaches to substantiate its hypotheses in section 2. The first is the use of a nationwide survey. Second, this survey was provided to fifty targeted protestant churches in the author's county of residence, Bullitt County of Kentucky. Last, a more focused list of about a dozen churches within Bullitt County were targeted for personal interviews with either the senior pastor or other knowledgeable church official. Together, these survey and interview results should coincide with the author's objective to assess biblical mandates and principles on divorce and remarriage depicted in section 2 with where churches predominantly are at today, and if there is a need to expedite action and what kind of action is needed to improve the testimony of churches for the purpose of positively impacting the morals of today's society.

#### 3.1 Research Question Synopsis (Includes problem, purpose, and research questions)

**Research Synopsis, Problem, and Purpose.** As mentioned in this dissertation's Abstract section, the remarriage of divorcees is the Jezebel of the Church today. Divorce, by itself, however, is not the anathema of the church today. It is the remarriage of divorcees that makes the Church ineffective in its attempt to positively influence an ever-increasing immoral society. The Church cannot even begin to challenge the growing homosexual agenda that is sweeping through all levels of society these days or attempt to reverse the high divorce rate when it condones and even promotes adultery within its own ranks by unashamedly remarrying divorcees. To help assess where churches are at these days this author posted a link (<https://tinyurl.com/z94f2ta>) on his website, which directs responders to a simple web-based survey on divorce and remarriage. The intent of this survey was to capture the doctrinal positions of the responders or of the responders' church, to assess how serious the responders see this topic of divorce and

remarriage, and to gauge if churches are able to improve over time the devastating effects of divorce and remarriage – in particular the affects adultery has on the testimony of the church.

**Research Questions.** The survey questions and possible responses are provided in Attachment A. There is a total of sixteen questions in this survey, and they are grouped according to the following criteria:

- **Positional/Personal (P) Questions.** There are seven questions seeking the position of the church or the personal position of the responder on divorce and remarriage. These questions include the following:
  1. What is your position on divorce and remarriage within the Church? This question determines if the responder sees divorce and remarriage as a serious problem, or a minor problem, or a non-problem.
  2. What is your church's position on the remarriage of divorcees? This question determines if the remarriage of divorcees is allowed and for what reasons.
  3. Do you avoid preaching and/or teaching on divorce and remarriage? The question determines if the topic of divorce and remarriage is a taboo topic within the church.
  4. Do you believe divorce and/or remarriage is more justifiable following the salvation of one or both of the spouses? This is a simple Yes | No | No Opinion response to determine if a church takes a compromising or non-compromising stance to Scripture.
  5. Does your church allow Pastors/Elders/Ministers to be divorced and remarried or allow to be married to a divorcee? This is a simple Yes | No response to determine if a church takes a compromising or non-compromising stance to Scripture.
  6. Does your church allow Deacons to be divorced and remarried or allow them to marry a divorcee? Again, this is a simple Yes | No response to determine if a church

- takes a compromising or non-compromising stance to Scripture.
7. Do you perceive your church is able to reverse the current high divorce rate? This question determines if the responder foresees hope for the future.
  - **Observational (O) Questions.** There are seven questions seeking the observations of the responder to various aspects of divorce and remarriage. These questions include the following:
    8. What do you see as the predominant reason for divorce? This question determines whether infidelity, abuse, abandonment or other factors lead to divorce.
    9. What do you see as the predominant reason to justify remarrying a divorcee? This question determines whether it is love, finances, or other reasons to justify remarriage following a divorce.
    10. About how many couples in your church are divorced and remarried (Percentage)? This question determines how prevalent remarriage of divorcees is within a church, and when aggregated with all other responses, it provides a general sense of how churches compare with society.
    11. Have you or other ministers in your church within the past 12 months performed a marriage for a couple where at least one of the spouses was divorced with their previous spouse still living? This question determines if churches are promoting and condoning adultery within its walls.
    12. Within your church, do you see second marriages being better than the first marriage? This question determines and confirms if subsequent remarriages of Christian divorcees are better than society at large.
    13. How many times have you preached or heard someone preach on divorce and

- remarriage within the past 12 months? This question determines how prevalent the church is addressing divorce and remarriage, if at all.
14. If you were to preach or teach on divorce and remarriage would you incur pressure from church members to desist? This question determines if divorce and remarriage is a hostile topic.
- **Scriptural (S) Questions.** There are two questions that determine if a church is violating Scripture mandates on divorce and remarriage. These questions include the following:

15. Do you acknowledge that remarriage of a divorcee while their previous spouse is still living makes their new marriage adulterous in God's eyes? This questions determines if the responder is aware of the ramifications of the remarriage of a divorcee.

16. Do you see the remarriage of divorcees violating 1 Corinthians 7:11 (“...remain single or be reconciled”)? Again, this question determines if the responder is aware of the teachings of Scripture.

### 3.2 Research Design Overview

This dissertation uses three approaches to substantiate its hypotheses. The first was the use of a nationwide survey. Second, this survey was provided to fifty protestant churches in the author's county of residence, Bullitt County of Kentucky. Last, a more focused list of about a dozen churches Bullitt County, Kentucky, were targeted for personal interviews. Together, the survey and interview results should coincide with the author's projected goals to define ways to improve the testimony of churches within society.

### **3.3 Population(s)**

#### **3.3.1 Theoretical Population – Nationwide Survey**

This author maintains a website (<http://rodoneil.com>) consisting predominately of expository Sunday School lesson plans going back to 2009. Almost four hundred lesson plans addressing nearly every book and chapter within the Bible are available for pull down. This website is easily found when a search is made on one of the books of the Bible or on topics such as, “Bible study,” “Lifeway,” and “Sunday school.” More than 20,000 pulldowns come from virtually every state in the union, and from more than 70 foreign countries just in calendar year 2016. Foreign countries include China, Russia, and middle eastern countries.

On average, at least 400 unique site visitors, with peaks of over 1,000, pull down a typical Sunday School lesson plan each week. The weekly site visitors were greeted on the main page with a request to take the survey or to provide the survey to their church pastor or other church leader for completion. This link was available for 40 days, and takes about five minutes to complete. Respondents were provided with the option to receive the results of this survey as an enticement for them to complete the survey.

It was projected that out of at least 400 regular site visitors about five to forty percent could positively respond. The high end of forty percent is based on online survey results from [Fluidsurveys.com](http://Fluidsurveys.com)<sup>53</sup>. That means about twenty to one hundred sixty responses could be received within a month's time. This should be an ample size to meet the designs of this dissertation. As of the closing date of the survey, a total of thirty-six responses were received and assessed, which was within the anticipated range.

### **3.3.2 Accessible Population – Survey of Local Church Leaders**

The same 16-question survey was also provided to fifty churches in the author's county of residence, Bullitt County, KY, having a population of about 75,000. The local responses give a snapshot in time where many churches in small town America stand on divorce and remarriage. It was expected the number of respondents between those in this small town and those responding to the website survey will reflect about the same within a standard deviation. Since these sixty churches were contacted personally via direct email, it was anticipated that about five to forty percent would participate in this survey. Churches are in protestant denominations. Catholics, Mormons, and Jehovah Witnesses are excluded from participation since these denominations do not typically look for protestant Bible studies as found in the author's website. As of the closing date of the survey, a total of 9 responses from the sixty churches were received and assessed. This represents fifteen percent response, which was within the anticipated range.

### **3.3.3 Personal Interviews of Local Church Leaders**

This author targeted about a dozen church leaders in Bullitt County, Kentucky to interview personally. A smaller set of common questions were addressed along with ad-hoc questions and observations that the interviewees and the author discussed in a free forum. The interview process was expected to result in at least 50% participation or about six interviews of senior pastors or other church leaders. As of the closing date of the survey, a total of ten interviews were conducted, which was in the eightieth percentile anticipated, and well within the expected range.

### 3.4 Sample and Delimitations

**Delimitations.** This survey was not meant to include every possible scenario which could be conjured up for survey responders to address. For example, church denomination, church size, pastoral education and tenure, and other church demographics such as racial and community profile, and the average income and educational levels of the congregants were not factored into this survey. Those factors were considered outside of the scope of this dissertation survey and would be more appropriate for Barna Group, or America's Research Group, or other professional survey institutions to conduct.

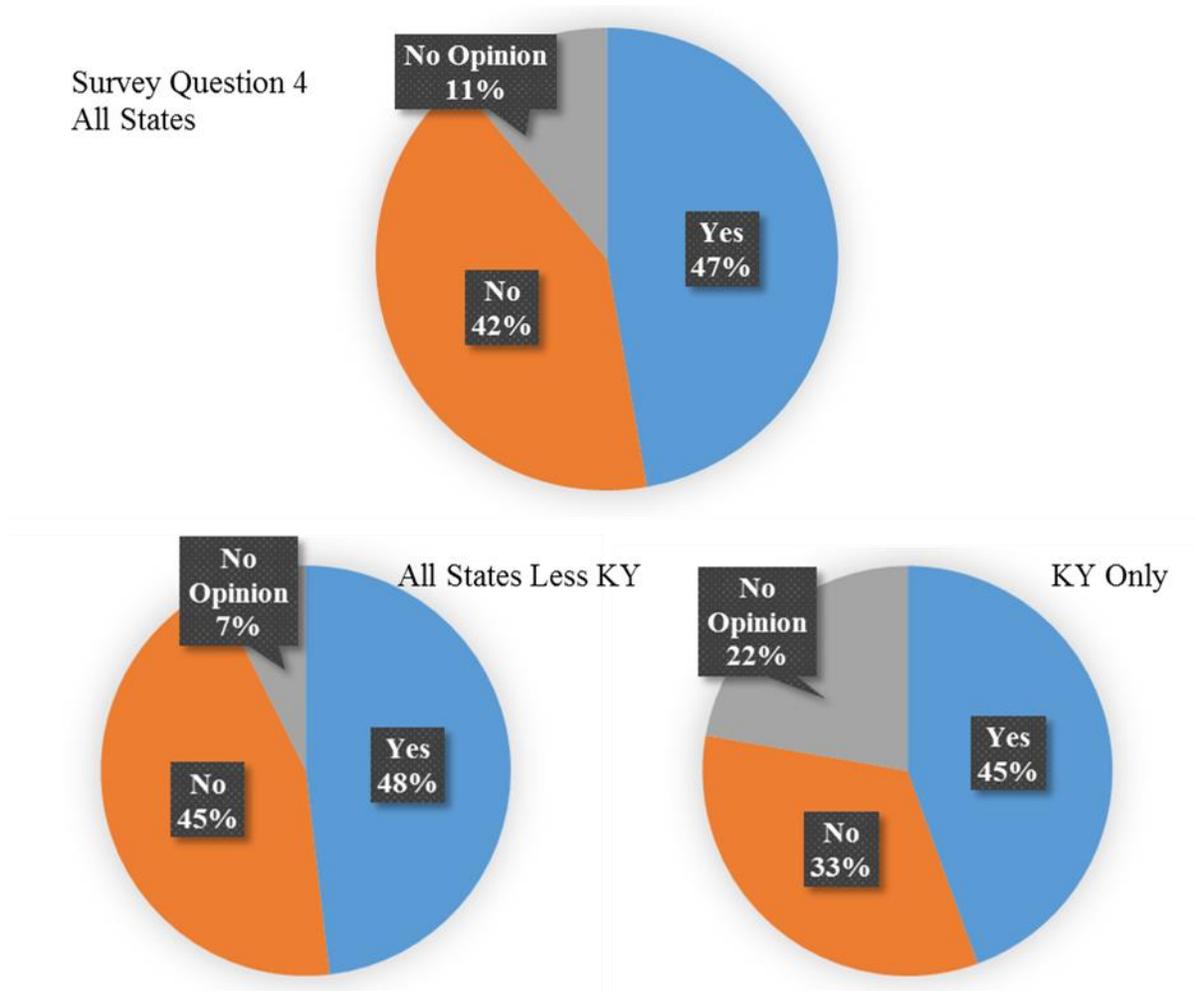
Survey data, for graphical display purposes, depicted in figures 4-1 through 4-16 were aggregated into one or three categories, depending on what the survey question was conveying: 1) Nationwide data, which includes all the states represented in this survey; 2) Kentucky (KY) only data is representative of the author's county of residence, Bullitt County, Kentucky, and from which most of the Kentucky responders were from; 3) All other states less Kentucky.

Eleven out of sixteen survey questions reflect nationwide data from all represented states. The data reflected solely by the state of Kentucky responders were not of sufficient difference in these eleven questions to warrant breaking them out separately. Kentucky-only responses to these eleven questions fluctuated barely three to eight percent from the nationwide results, which conveys Kentucky was very much in line with the rest of the nation in regards to these eleven questions.

Five of the sixteen questions, however, reflect a considerable difference of more than ten percentage points between responders from Kentucky and from all other states. In essence, the responses from Kentucky churches, in particular, Bullitt County, Kentucky were more conservative than those from the rest of the nation, and are worth highlighting. These five survey

questions include #4, #5, #7, #15, and #16. Survey Question #4 is depicted below as the sample profile of all the survey questions.

**Sample.** A sample response using survey question #4 is depicted in Figure 3-1. The data is presented in a graphical pie chart representation. The actual responses for each of the sixteen survey questions are presented in section 4. Fourteen out of sixteen of the survey questions are graphically representations as pie charts, and two of the survey questions are represented as bar charts because of the additional fields the responders could choose from. An assessment of what this sample survey question #4 represents is provided below the figure.



**Figure 3-1. Sample of Survey Question 4 – Do you believe divorce and/or remarriage is more justifiable following the salvation of one or both of the spouses?**

**Assessment of Sample Survey Question 4.** Looking at the “All States” and the “All States Less KY) charts in Figure 3-1 above, reflect a split down the middle, with more than forty percent acknowledging that a spouse’s salvation justifies divorce and remarriage and another forty plus percent saying not so. This conveys a dire problem that a large percentage of the church, to include the pastors, do not know the Scriptures well enough to know the right answer. Since this dissertation clearly demonstrates that the remarriage of a divorcee who came from a valid or a non-porneia marriage causes an adulterous event, it does not matter if a spouse is saved before the divorce or after the divorce – it is still adulterous for a divorcee in such a situation to remarry while a previous spouse is still alive. If the majority of pastors or other church leaders who responded were cognizant of scripture, the proper response should have been approaching one hundred percent “NO – a spouse’s salvation does not justify divorce and/or remarriage.”

The “KY Only” charts paints a slightly different picture for those responders representing a more conservative leaning. The “Yes” category is in line with the rest of the nation, which, as noted above, conveys a dire problem that a large percentage of the church, to include the pastors, do not know the Scriptures well enough to know the right answer, but the “No” and the “No Opinion” categories are noticeably different. Fewer pastors or other church leaders in Kentucky recognize that salvation has no affect justifying the divorce and/or remarriage. This response seems to contradict the conservativeness of some of those in the Bible Belt. The larger response of “No Opinion” seems to convey a marketable percentage of those in KY have not given this issue much thought. Even if those in the “No Opinion” column were to eventually side with those in the “No” column, this chart still reflects many churches across the nation are not as cognizant with Scripture as they should be on this very sensitive social and moral issue.

### **3.5 Limitations of Generalization**

To prevent the over-generalization of the anticipated results of this survey, where it would be difficult to assess the results into meaningful and useful information, each of the questions was thoughtfully vetted and peer-reviewed. The number of survey questions also had to be limited so the survey did not present a time constraint problem for the preponderance of the responders. A time of five minutes was selected for most responders to be able to complete the survey. Another consideration was the questions were not to be so complex as to prevent the responders from quickly and accurately providing the best answer. If the responders had to deeply ponder each question, they might over-analyze or second guess themselves away from an appropriate answer.

One senior pastor contacted this author to let it be known that he deleted his survey since he felt “the questions seemed leading and bent toward a particular worldview without room for dialogue or explanation.” This pastor also confessed he had been divorced and remarried, so that would have an effect on his personal perception of this survey. To allow for dialogue or explanation would have been over-taxing to assess the survey results, and might have prompted fewer responses because of the increased time it would take to adequately provide dialogue and explanations. Admittedly, since the author is not an expert on survey generation, there is room for error and amateurization of this survey product and process. The number of responses and assessment results, however, from this survey seems to convey the author came up with an adequate methodology to properly substantiate his stated hypotheses.

### **3.6 Research Method**

As stated in Section 3.2 – Research Design Overview, this dissertation proffers three approaches to substantiate the author’s hypotheses. The first is the use of a nationwide survey.

Second, this survey was provided to fifty protestant churches in the author's county of residence, Bullitt County of Kentucky. Last, a more focused list of about a dozen churches Bullitt County, Kentucky, were targeted for personal interviews. Together, these survey results coincide with the author's projected goals to define ways to improve the testimony of churches within society.

As stated in Section 3.5 – Limitations of Generalization, to prevent the over-generalization of the anticipated results of this survey, where it would be difficult to assess the results into meaningful and useful information, each of the survey questions was thoughtfully vetted and peer-reviewed. The number of survey questions also had to be limited so the survey did not present a time constraint problem for the preponderance of the responders. A time of five minutes was selected for most responders to be able to complete the survey. Another consideration was the questions were not to be so complex as to prevent the responders from quickly and accurately providing the best answer. If the responders had to deeply ponder each question, they might over-analyze or second guess themselves away from an appropriate answer.

The set of sixteen survey questions was establish after doing web searches for questions typical of divorce and remarriage surveys, from the author's thirty plus years of study on this topic developing various topical studies and lesson plans, from providing marital counseling involving this topic with numerous counselees, and from assimilating information from the source literature identified in the bibliography section of this dissertation. The web searches actually offered the least amount of help on this topic. Predominantly, the questions came from the author's inquisitive drive to figure out how did the church get into this predicament of promoting and condoning adultery through the remarriage of divorcees, and how best to resolve this predicament to restore the church's testimony before a dying world.

### 3.7 Instrumentation

The instrumentation for this effort is quite simple and consists of three elements – 1) the authors personal website; 2) the web-based survey; and 3) manual logging of the interviews:

1. This author maintains a website (<http://rodoneil.com>) hosted on GoDaddy (<https://www.godaddy.com/>) consisting predominately of expository Sunday School lesson plans going back to 2009. Most of these lesson plans are based on Lifeway's Explore the Bible Sunday School curriculum, which are most often used by Southern Baptist churches. Almost four hundred lesson plans addressing nearly every book and chapter within the Bible are available for pull down free of charge. In calendar year 2016, more than 20,000 pulldowns came from virtually every state in the union and from more than 70 foreign countries. On average, at least 400 unique site visitors, with peaks of over 1,000, pull down a typical Sunday School lesson plan each week. The author uses Google Analytics (<https://analytics.google.com>) to track the web site's statistics.
2. The web-based survey was acquired free of charge from IgniteFeedback (<http://www.ignitefeedback.com/>) and was used to post the sixteen questions identified in Attachment A – Divorce and Remarriage Survey Questionnaire. IgniteFeedback provided the author with portal access to the responses. The responses were then downloaded into a CSV file for later transfer to Microsoft Excel for easier plotting. The results are seen in Section 4 – Analysis of Findings.
3. The author captured the highlights from personal interviews of pastors or other church leaders using a simple log book. The pertinent information was then manually typed into a Microsoft Excel file for historical purposes and for inclusion into this dissertation. Pertinent information from the interviews is in Attachment C – Interview Results.

### 3.8 Research Procedures

The author uses relatively simple, but manually-intensive procedures to retrieve and assess the survey results. First, the site visitors to the author's website are greeted on the main page with a request to take the Divorce and Remarriage survey or to provide the survey to their church pastor or other church leader for completion. The greeting is seen below:

**...I am working on my doctorate dissertation on Divorce and Remarriage, and I need your help.** Please fill out this survey on divorce and remarriage within your church (<https://tinyurl.com/z94f2ta>) or send this paragraph to your church pastor or other church leader for them to fill it out. It won't take more than five minutes. Those who fill it out will receive the results in a few months. Thank you so much.

The author then accessed the IgniteFeedback portal to download the survey results into a CSV file, which is a simple file format used to store tabular data, such as a spreadsheet or database. CSV stands for "comma-separated values." The author then imported the CSV data to Microsoft Excel for easier plotting. All the Excel-generated graphics (pie charts and bar charts) are derived by using the pivot table and pivot chart features of Excel. These graphics are then copied into the dissertation for final assessment of each chart individually and holistically.

## 4. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

### 4.1 Compilation Protocol and Measures

Since the nationwide and local (Kentucky) survey data are easily imported into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet from IgniteFeedback's raw survey portal, compilation of the data is relatively simple using Excel's pivot table and pivot chart features. From Excel, the graphical representations are then simply copied into the dissertation document for final assessment. Each survey question is first assessed individually, then holistically.

### 4.2 Demographic and Sample Data

**Nationwide and Local Surveys.** Responses have been received from fifteen states, from Maryland to California. Local surveys within the state of Kentucky totaled nine. Attachment B – Survey Responses provides a tabular presentation of the responses received. Church demographics only asked for the state and city of location. Church denomination and church size and other church demographic information were outside of the scope of this paper.

**Personal Interviews.** A dozen churches were targeted in Bullitt County, Kentucky for the author to personally interview either the senior pastor or other knowledgeable church leader. A smaller set of questions were addressed along with unscripted ad-hoc questions and observations that the interviewees and the author discussed in a free forum. The interview process was expected to result in at least 50% participation or about six interviews of senior pastors or other church leaders. As of the closing date of the survey, 31 March 2017, a total of ten interviews were conducted, which was within the expected projections.

**Sample Data.** Using Survey Question #4 for sample data is presented in Table 4-1.

**Table 4-1. Survey Question #4 – Sample Data.**

Question 4: Do you believe divorce and/or remarriage is more justifiable following the salvation of one or both of the spouses?				
Responses	All States	Less KY	KY Only	Delta
Yes	47%	48%	45%	3%
No	42%	45%	33%	12%
No Opinion	11%	7%	22%	15%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	

### 4.3 Data Analysis and Findings

This section details the findings of the sixteen questions of the posted web-based survey. In brief, the survey assessment gives full credence to the hypotheses presented in this dissertation in section 2. The survey also highlights and confirms the Christian/Protestant church is in a dire state caused by its cavalier position and approach on divorce and the remarriage of divorcees. It is past time for the church to seriously consider taking definitive steps to not only slow the trend but possibly reverse the trend of ever increasing divorces and remarriages of divorcees within its domain.

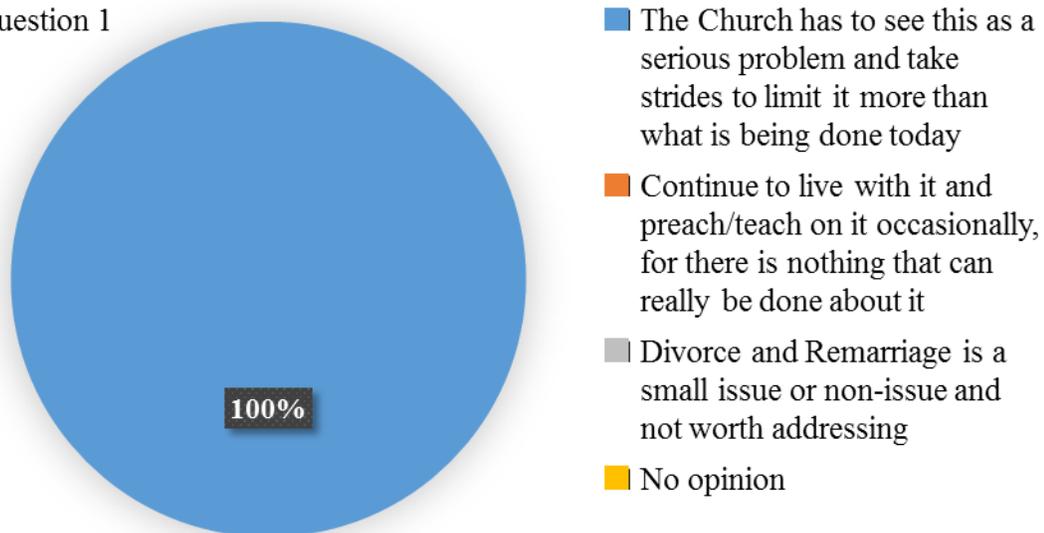
This section has two subsections, each dealing with a specific element of the survey process. Section 4.3.1 – Nationwide and Local (Kentucky) Survey Results addresses the survey assessment gathered from around the nation. Section 4.3.2 – Local Interview Results addresses the findings from interviewing local pastors and church leaders on this critical topic.

#### 4.3.1 Nationwide and Local (Kentucky) Survey Results

The results of the survey have lined up with what was initially anticipated. The web-based survey may have been contrived by this author, who, admittedly, is an amateur in the field of population surveys, but any knowledgeable Christian who is cognizant of Scripture and is

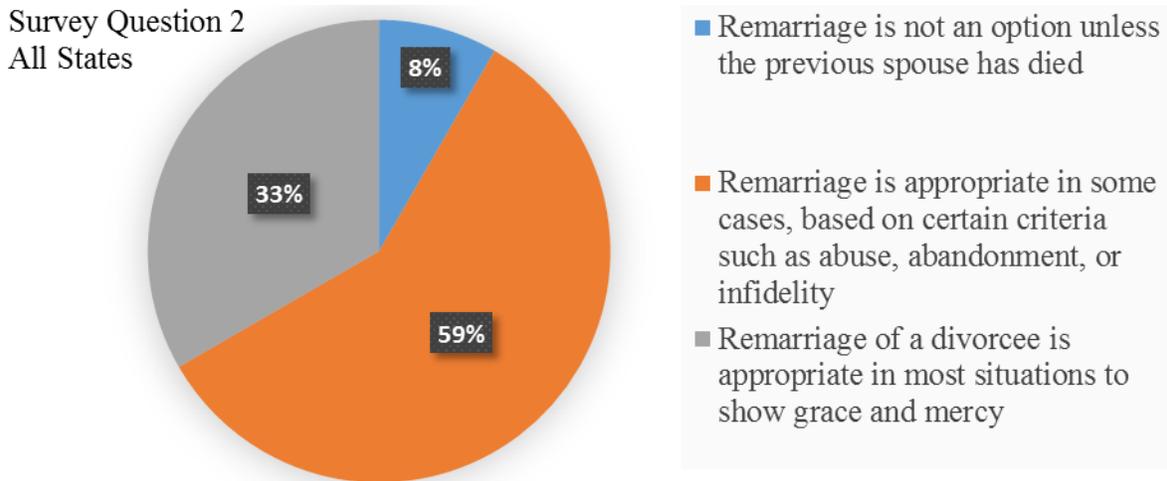
observant of the sins of the land and trends of the time within and outside of the church over the past forty years should be like the men of Issachar, who, during the time of King David's rise to the throne, understood the times they were in, and had knowledge of what Israel should do (1 Chronicles 12:32). The results of this survey strongly convey the urgency the church needs to wake up to. The first question this survey asks of its responders is, "What is your church's position on Divorce and Remarriage." The responses to this question, alone, provides reasonable hope for the future of the church and society.

Survey Question 1  
All States



**Figure 4-1. Survey Question 1 – What is your church's position on Divorce/Remarriage?**

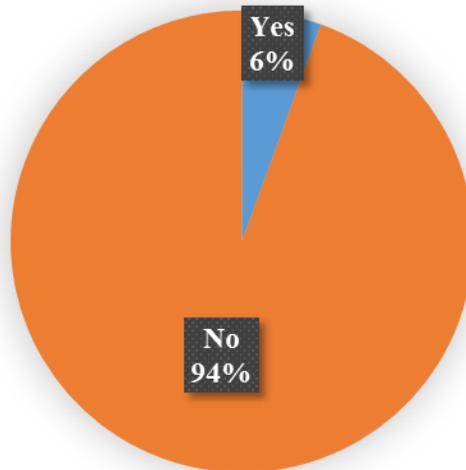
**Survey Question 1.** One of the most encouraging signs, depicted in Figure 4-1, is that all responders in every state fully acknowledge that divorce and remarriage is a serious problem within the church today, and churches need to start defining and implementing steps to curb the current escalating trend. Presumably, the time to define those steps is now and not later.



**Figure 4-2. Survey Question 2 – What is your church’s position on the remarriage of divorcees?**

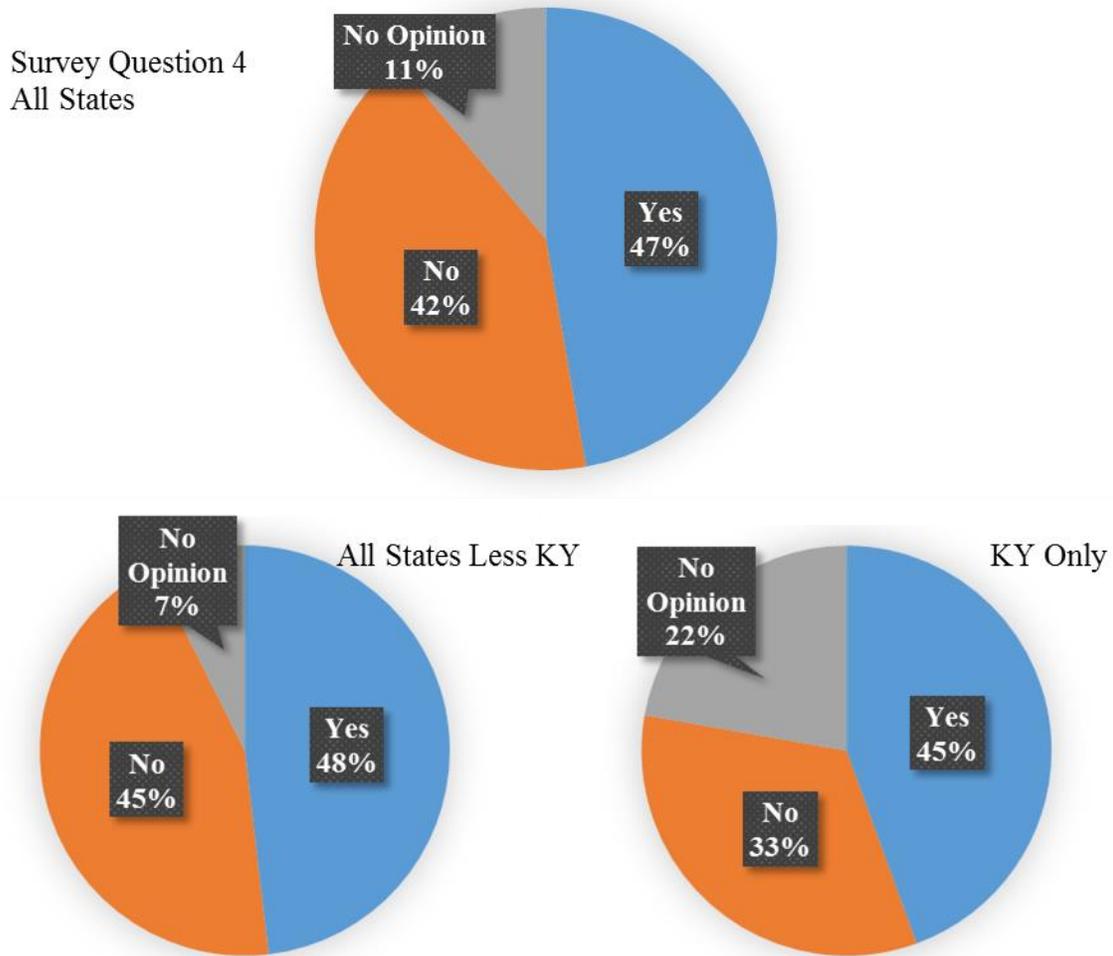
**Survey Question 2.** This figure depicts the crux of the problem for the church today better than all others. Only a very small percentage of church leaders, less than ten percent, acknowledge that remarriage of a divorcee is not an option while a previous spouse is still living. As the church leaders go, so goes the church. Another interesting aspect of this figure is that one third of all responders accommodate the remarriage of divorcees to show grace and mercy to a situation. In other words, instead of being obedient to Scripture, “be reconciled or remain single” (1 Corinthians 7:11), a large percentage of the church is sacrificing her morals to satisfy a spouse’s lust for comfort, be it for sex or financial well-being. The question Christians need to ask is, “Does God want holy people or married people?” Christians can only be a holy people if they are an obedient people. Obedience needs to trump grace and mercy when it comes to overt sin, otherwise, as Laney says, “This smacks of license [to sin], not grace.”<sup>54</sup> Also, with almost sixty percent of the responders believing that abandonment, abuse, or infidelity grants a spouse the right to remarry only confirms that most Christians do not know Scripture as well as they should. In such cases, the remarried spouse commits the same sin as the spouse they divorced.

Survey Question 3  
All States



**Figure 4-3. Survey Question 3 – Do you avoid preaching and/or teaching on divorce and remarriage?**

**Survey Question 3.** The responses to this question were quite encouraging. Over ninety percent of responders reflect they do not avoid preaching and/or teaching on divorce and remarriage. Though a large percentage of preachers, also over ninety percent as noted in Figure 4-2, may be preaching that divorce and remarriage are easily accommodated in the church, only a few were afraid to preach and teach on the subject. Now, the challenge is to get the majority of preachers to acknowledge with Scripture that divorced spouses need to reconcile or remain single (1 Corinthians 7:11). If that message can be preached boldly, the church will progress to be the lighthouse God intended for it to be in these last days. If preachers fail to preach the right message to reconcile or to remain single, but continue to promote immorality within its midst, then the church will end up as Thyatira – its children slain, maybe not physically, but spiritually and emotionally. As John MacArthur says, “Divorce causes not only the multiplication of sin, but also confusion, resentment, hatred, bitterness, despair, conflict, and hardships of every sort.”<sup>55</sup> And as Wenham says, “Children of divorced parents are very upset by divorce, but even more by remarriage; it destroys their last hope that their parents will be reconciled.”<sup>56</sup>

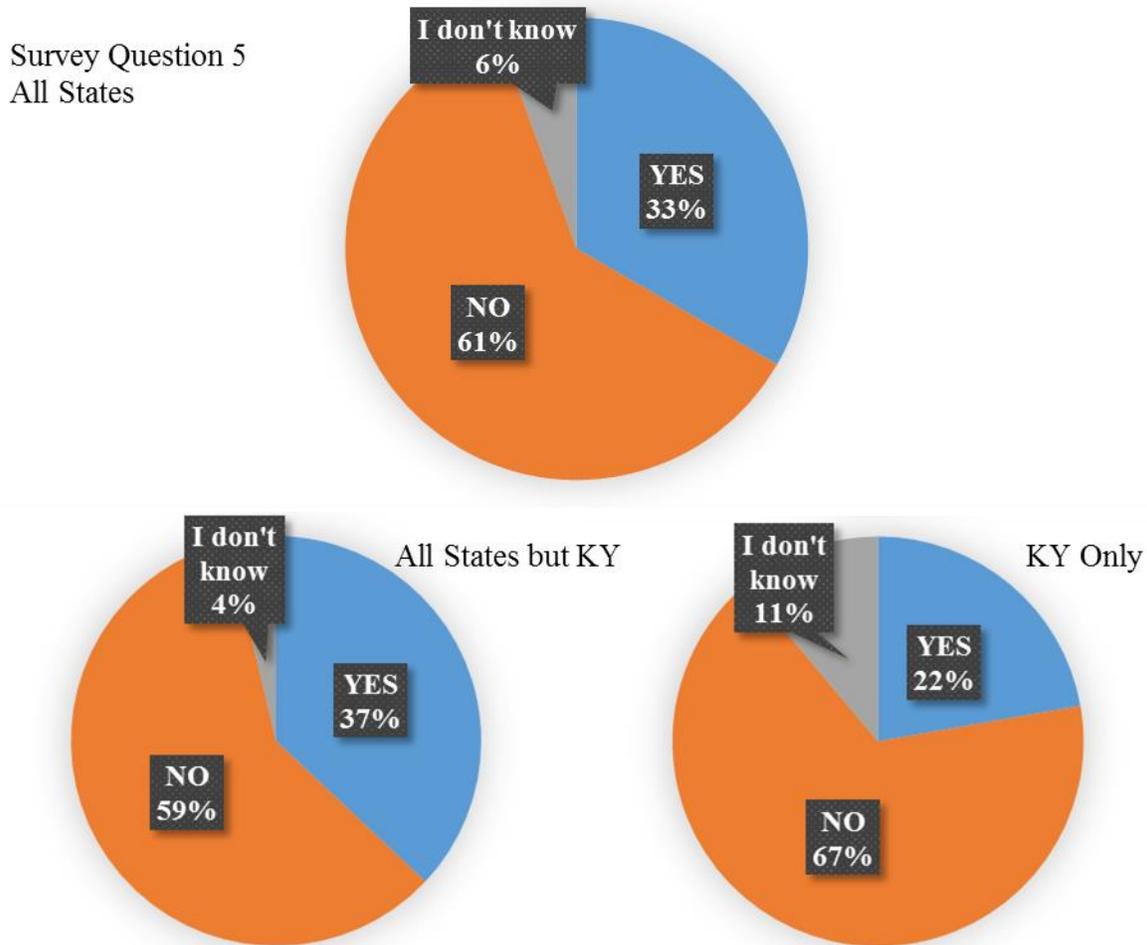


**Figure 4-4. Survey Question 4 – Do you believe divorce and/or remarriage is more justifiable following the salvation of one or both of the spouses?**

**Assessment of Survey Question 4.** Looking at the “All States” and the “All States Less KY” charts in Figure 4-4 above, reflect, in all practicality, a split down the middle, with more than forty percent acknowledging that a spouse’s salvation justifies divorce and remarriage and another forty plus percent saying not so. This conveys a dire problem that a large percentage of the church, to include the pastors, do not know the Scriptures well enough to know the right answer. Since this dissertation clearly demonstrates that the remarriage of a divorcee who came from a valid or a non-porneia marriage causes an adulterous event, it does not matter if a spouse is saved before the divorce or after the divorce – it is still adulterous for a divorcee in such a

situation to remarry while a previous spouse is still alive. If the majority of pastors or other church leaders who responded were cognizant of scripture, the proper response should have been approaching one hundred percent “NO – a spouse’s salvation does not justify divorce and/or remarriage.”

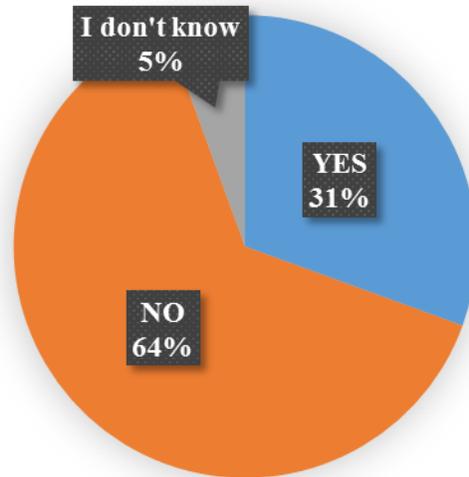
The “KY Only” charts paints a slightly different picture for those responders representing a conservative leaning. The “Yes” category is in line with the rest of the nation, which, as noted above, conveys a dire problem that a large percentage of the church, to include the pastors, do not know the Scriptures well enough to know the right answer, but the “No” and the “No Opinion” categories are noticeably different. Fewer pastors or other church leaders in Kentucky recognize that salvation has no affect justifying the divorce and/or remarriage. This response seems to contradict the conservativeness of some of those in the Bible Belt. The larger response of “No Opinion” seems to convey a marketable percentage of those in KY have not given this issue much thought. Even if those in the “No Opinion” column were to eventually side with those in the “No” column, this chart still reflects many churches across the nation are not as cognizant with Scripture as they should be on this very sensitive social and moral issue.



**Figure 4-5. Survey Question 5 – Does your church allow Pastors/Elders/Ministers to be divorced and remarried?**

**Assessment of Survey Question 5.** Ideally, it would be most advantageous to the church's testimony before the world if all responders could have said "No" to this question. Most states outside of Kentucky reflect a third or more who allow their pastors, elders, and other ministers to be divorced and remarried. Kentucky came in at more than twenty percent, which still seems high. Fifty or more years ago, this figure was probably less than ten percent. The church needs to consider adopting the practices of the early church, which prohibited their pastors, elders, and other ministers from being divorced and remarried to regain their testimony before an ever-increasing immoral society.

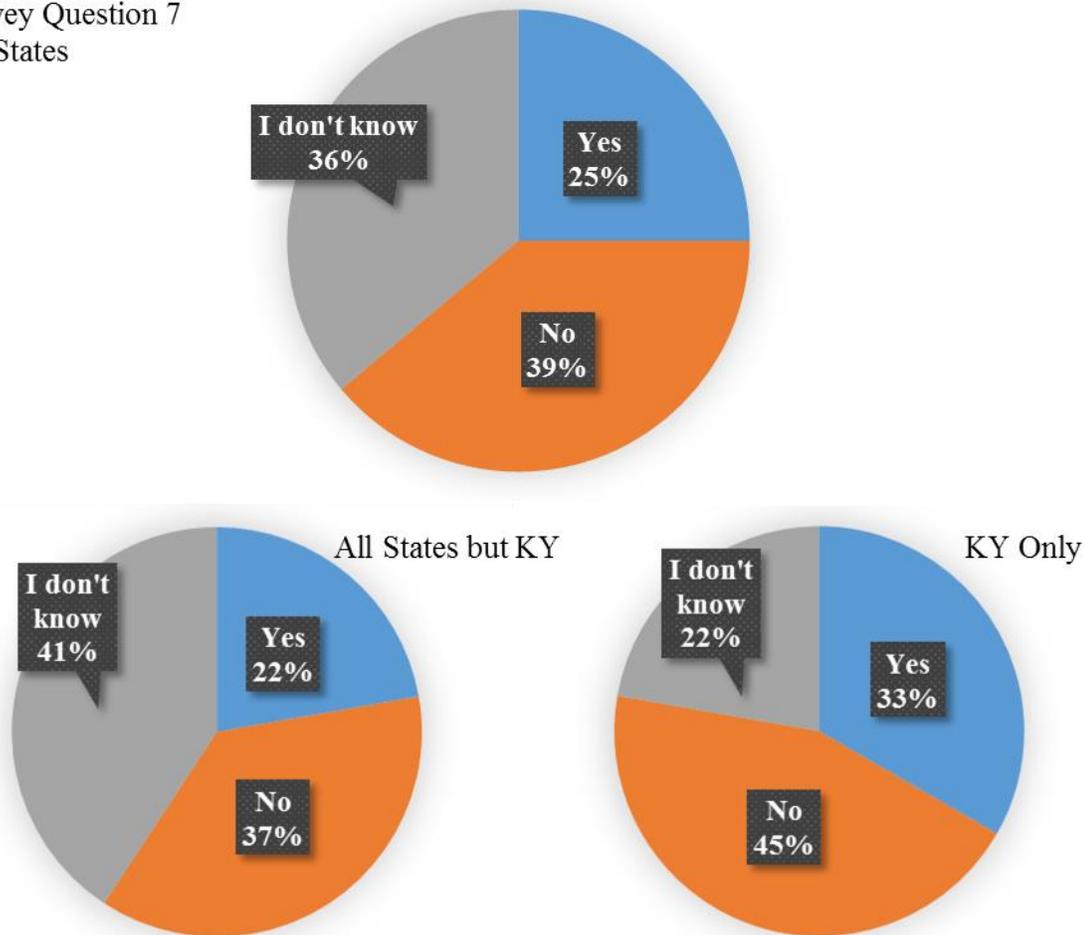
Survey Question 6  
All States



**Figure 4-6. Survey Question 6 – Does your church allow Deacons to be divorced and remarried?**

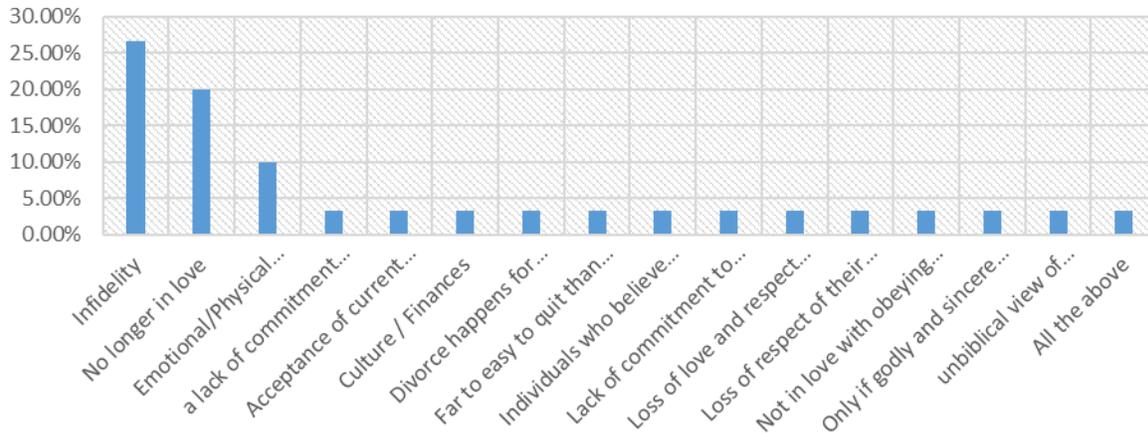
**Assessment of Survey Question 6.** This question is very much in line with the previous survey question 5. Ideally, it would be most advantageous to the church's testimony before the world if all responders could have said "No" to this question as well. Most states, including Kentucky and other Bible Belt states reflect almost a third of their churches allow their deacons to be divorced and remarried. The bar for excellence or holiness continues to drop lower and lower over the years. Again, the church needs to consider adopting the practices of the early church, which prohibited not only their elders but also their deacons from being divorced and remarried, and probably from even marrying a divorcee. If the church does not begin with this simple step, they will never regain their testimony for moral purity before an ever-increasing immoral society.

Survey Question 7  
All States



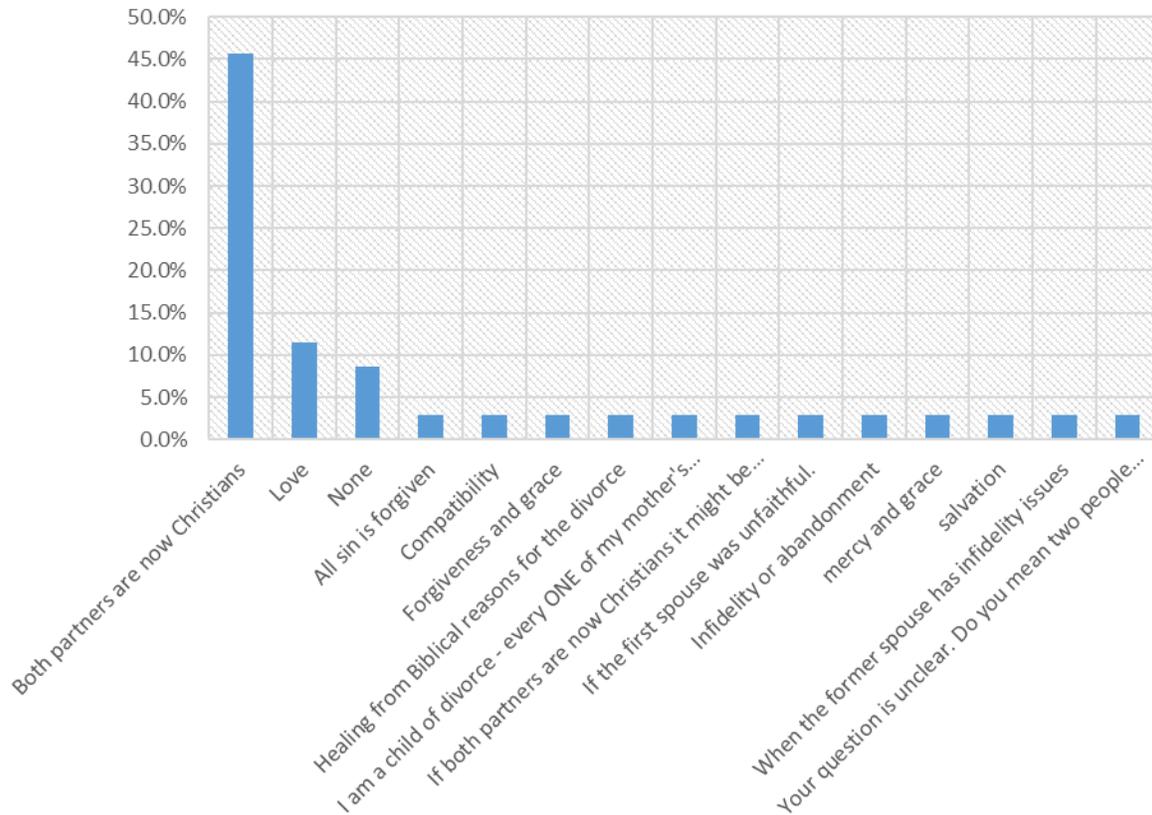
**Figure 4-7. Survey Question 7 – Do you perceive your church being able to reverse the current high divorce rate?**

**Assessment of Survey Question 7.** The results from this survey question reflects some encouragement and some despair. The encouraging side of these results is one third of the churches, at least in Kentucky, perceive they are able to reverse the current high divorce rate. Presumably, to reverse the high divorce rate, churches would simply need to implement the principle found in 1 Corinthians 7:11 – be reconciled or remain single, and to make it a policy for their elders and deacons to be above reproach when it comes to divorce and remarriage. The disheartening aspect of this particular question for those churches outside of Kentucky is more than forty percent have no clue how to fix the problem of the remarriage of divorcees.



**Figure 4-8. Survey Question 8 – What do you see as the predominant reason for divorce?**

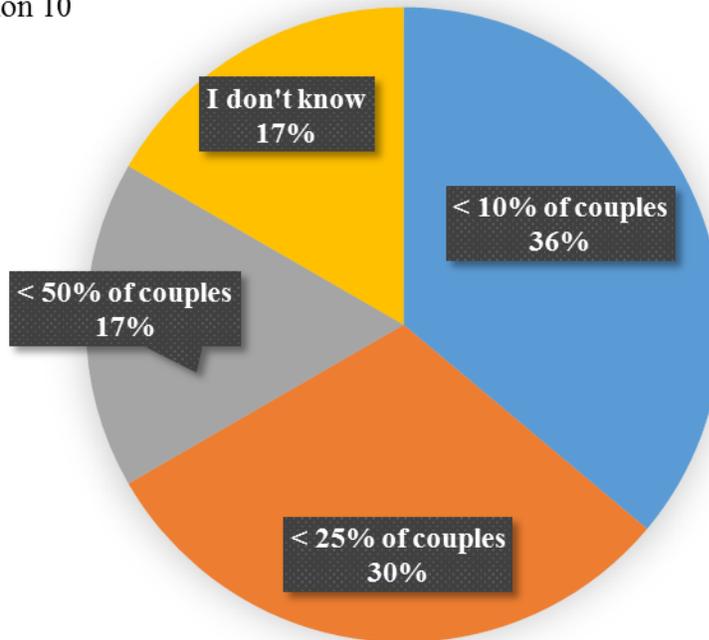
**Assessment of Survey Question 8.** No surprise here. Infidelity is the premier cause of divorce. Emotional and physical abuse comes behind the “No Longer in Love” reason for divorce, which is nothing more than “no fault” divorce or divorce for any reason. Again, to impact society, the church needs to lead the way. If infidelity is the main reason for divorce, remarriage of a divorcee actually causes the same problem – the remarried spouse is committing infidelity against the spouse they accused of being unfaithful. The church only complicates the matter by continuing to remarry divorcees. Once the church wakes up to this realization, great strides can then be made to restore its lost testimony. By first having their elders and deacons lead by example in this area, additional progress can be made by churches ceasing to remarry divorcees. Yes, if a divorcee gets remarried at a Justice-of-the-Peace, the church needs to accept the remarried divorcee as being within a valid marriage that God reluctantly joined together (assuming it is not a porneia relationship as in an incestual or homosexual marriage). The word will soon get out that the church has taken a stand to promote morality by being obedient to Scripture – “Reconcile or remain single” (1 Corinthians 7:11).



**Figure 4-9. Survey Question 9 – What do you see as the predominant reason to justify remarriage of a divorcee?**

**Assessment of Survey Question 9.** No surprises here, either. As noted with survey question #4, Figure 4-4, over forty percent of the church, including churches in Kentucky, see one's salvation being a core factor and reason to justify remarriage. This conveys an ignorance of Scripture more than anything else. A simple look at Romans 7:1-3 and 1 Corinthians 7:1-40 clearly convey that it does not matter if a person is saved or not saved, or when they got saved – either after a divorce or before a remarriage, for a divorcee to remarry while a previous spouse is still living causes an adulterous event and puts a stain on the church's testimony if the church condoned or performed the marriage. More education on this matter may help, but it seems to be more of a heart issue for taking the path of least resistance rather than having a lack of knowledge.

Survey Question 10  
All States



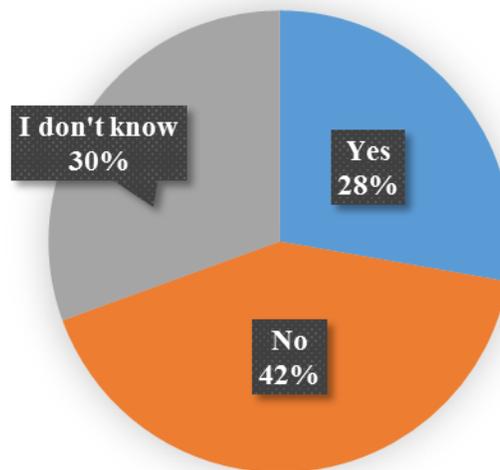
**Figure 4-10. Survey Question 10 – About how many couples in your church are divorced and remarried (Percentage)?**

**Assessment of Survey Question 10.** The discouraging aspect of Figure 4-10 is that nearly fifty percent of the respondents reflect they have between ten and fifty percent of their families divorced and remarried. When compared to Ezra 10:18-43, where the Israelites were dealing with just a little over one hundred families out of a population of slightly more than 50,000 (Ezra 2:64-65) or about 10,000 families, it is seen that all of Israel was in an uproar about these wrongful marriages, which only constituted about one percent of the total number of families. If the Israelites were overwhelmingly concerned about one percent of their families being wrongly joined together, and John the Baptist lost his life over one couple being within an “unlawful” marriage, what does it say about the majority of Christian churches today having more than ten percent of their families in adulterous situations? Should the church likewise panic and begin to tremble at God’s word more?

Granted, the unlawful marriages of Ezra’s day are more akin to porneia-type homosexual

marriages seen today than to those living in lawful, God-joined divorced/remarried relationships. The church at large should still be alarmed with the number of divorced/remarried relationships exceeding even five percent of normal marriages.

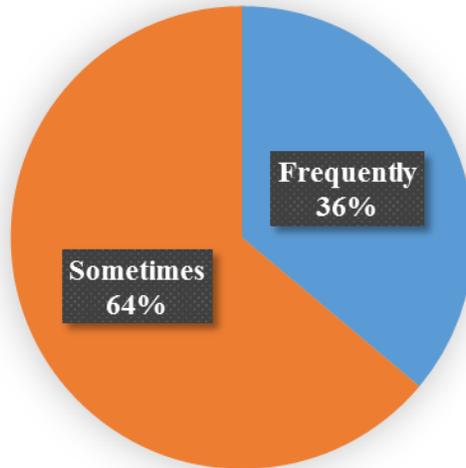
Survey Question 11  
All States



**Figure 4-11. Survey Question 11 – Have you or other ministers in your church within the past 12 months performed a marriage for a couple where at least one of the spouses was divorced with their previous spouse still living?**

**Assessment of Survey Question 11.** This survey result is alarming when it is holistically considered with all the other survey results. The large percentage of “I Don’t Know” (30%) is possibly do to responders not being in an elder or pastoral role of their church or not knowing what the other elders or pastors within their church did in the past year. Still, there is almost another thirty percent who readily remarry divorcees, thereby causing, promoting, and condoning adulterous events, further tarnishing the church’s soiled reputation. Again, this reflects a heart problem within the church, more so than an educational problem of being ignorant of Scripture. Too many churches have opted to take the path of least resistance. Churches within Kentucky are just as guilty as all other states. As found in the Thyatira church, may the faithful ones continue to faithfully contend with this sin in the camp, and may God lay no other burden on them.

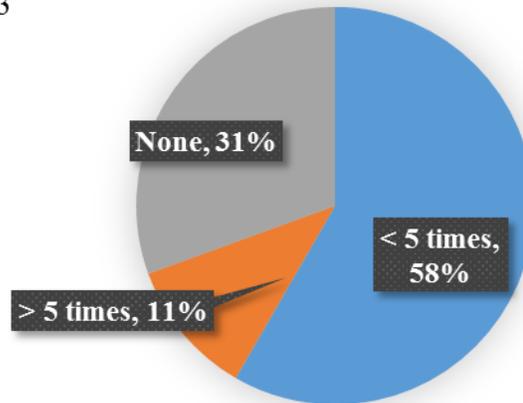
Survey Question 12  
All States



**Figure 4-12. Survey Question 12 – Within your church, do you see second marriages being better than the first marriage?**

**Assessment of Survey Question 12.** One interesting aspect of the results from this survey question is no responder selected “Never” do they see a second marriage being better than the first. Swindoll claims that, “Fifty percent of all marriages end in divorce. [And] Sixty-five percent of all second marriages end in the same traumatic sadness.” This survey response possibly conveys that, at least within the church, divorced Christians, who might have been saved during or after their first divorce, are succeeding at their second marriages as compared to the unchurched.

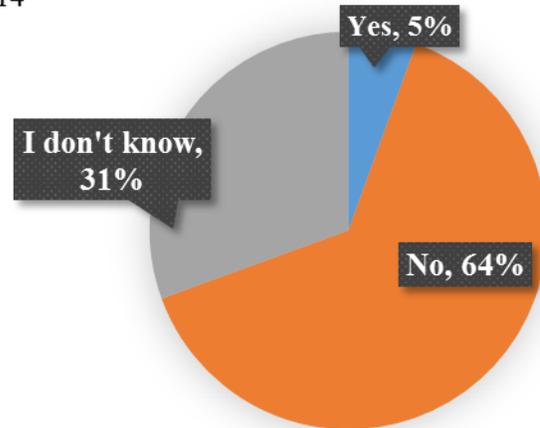
Survey Question 13  
All States



**Figure 4-13. Survey Question 13 – How many times have you preached or heard someone preach on divorce and remarriage within the past 12 months?**

**Assessment of Survey Question 13.** This survey response could be seen as a very detrimental prognosis for the church how few times divorce and remarriage, which is claimed to be a very critical issue, is seldom addressed from the pulpit. Evangelical type churches could be faulted for preaching a salvation message to the bulk of their saved listeners every Sunday instead of teaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) to them. When one considers there are only about twelve major themes within the Bible, the Doctrine of Man (Anthropology) being one of them, and twenty percent of the Ten Commandments deal with adultery and coveting a neighbor's wife, it seems reasonable that marital and familial sermons should consume about ten percent of a preacher's sermons, but seldom do. This equates to hearing marital and familial teachings at least ten times during the year for churches which only meet on Sunday mornings; twenty times for churches which meet Sunday mornings and evenings, and thirty times for churches which meet twice on Sunday and once in the middle of the week. Yes, the doctrines of sin (Hamartiology) and salvation (Soteriology) are critical, but the Apostle Paul warns that every believer needs to have works as a result of being obedient to God's word, else they will have no rewards when they enter Heaven (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

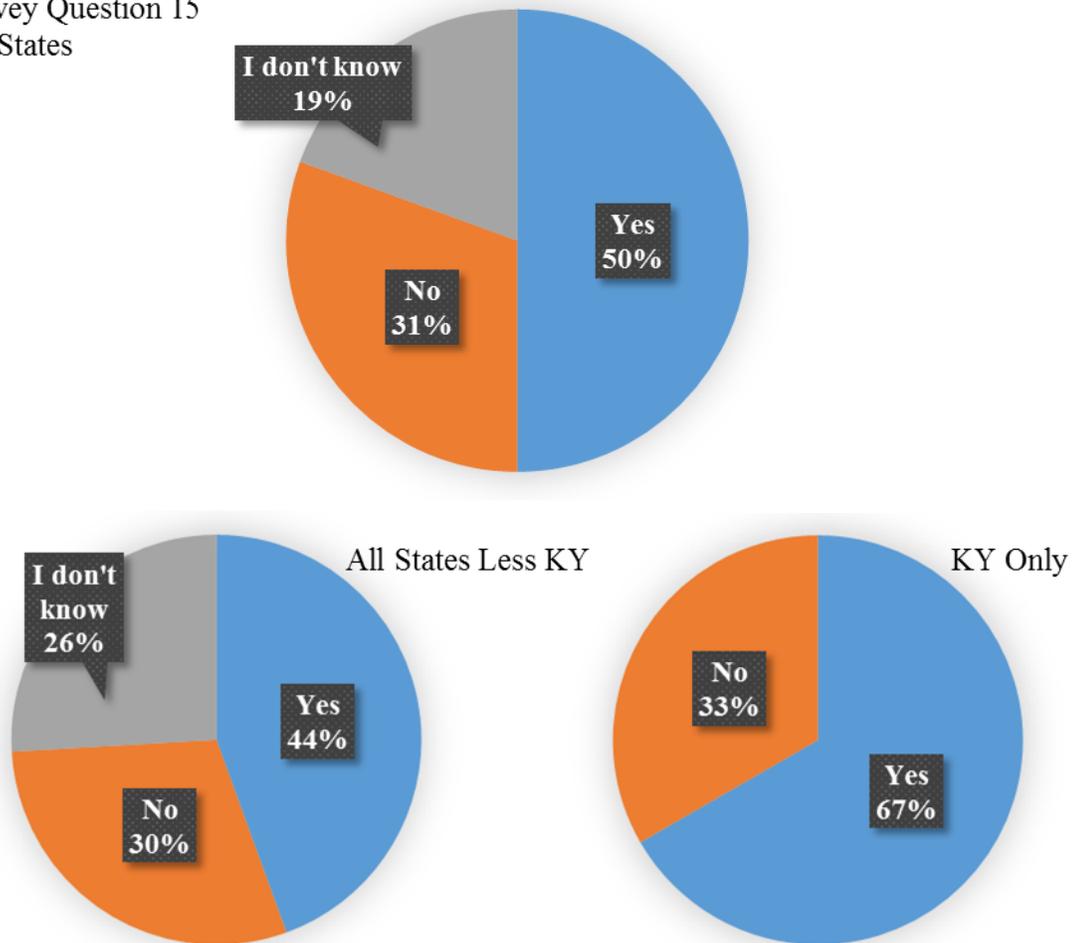
Survey Question 14  
All States



**Figure 4-14. Survey Question 14 – If you were to preach or teach on divorce and remarriage would you incur pressure from church members to desist?**

**Assessment of Survey Question 14.** This is another very encouraging survey result, similar to Survey Question 3, where it was observed over ninety percent of responders reflect they do not avoid preaching and/or teaching on divorce and remarriage. Here, this survey question reveals very few would encounter resistance if they were to preach on divorce and remarriage. So, the church seemingly has an open door for preachers to begin devising steps or activities required to curb the rising trend of divorce and remarriage of divorcees in their midst. Holistically, first it is seen from Survey Question 1 that every responder fully acknowledges that divorce and remarriage is a serious problem within the church today, and churches need to start defining and implementing steps to curb the current escalating trend; second, Survey Question 3 reveals over ninety percent of responders reflect they do not avoid preaching and/or teaching on divorce and remarriage; third, Survey Question 7 reveals churches, at least in Kentucky, perceive they are able to reverse the current high divorce rate; and last, this Survey Question 14 reveals very few would encounter resistance if they were to preach on divorce and remarriage. So, what is the church waiting for? Pastors have a green light to start taking action today.

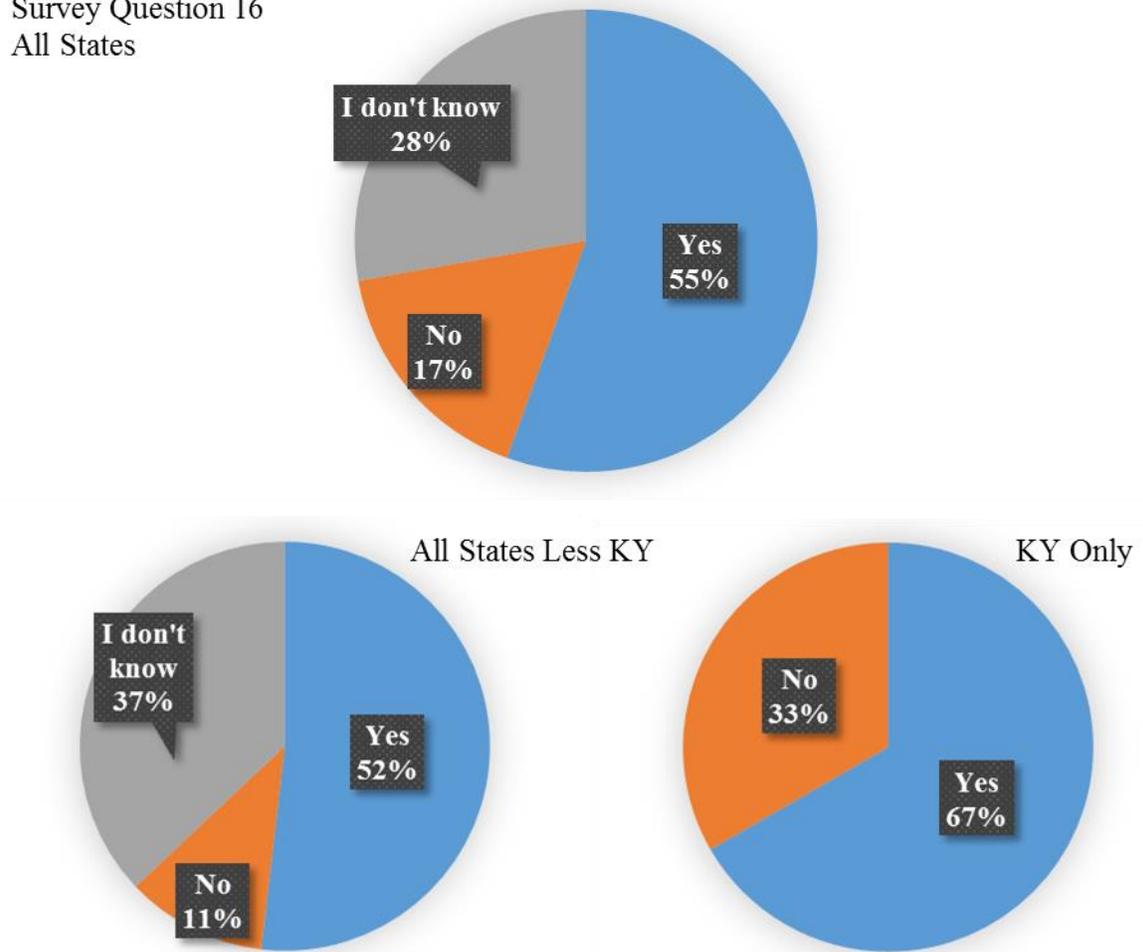
Survey Question 15  
All States



**Figure 4-15. Survey Question 15 – Do you acknowledge that remarriage of a divorcee while a previous spouse is still living makes their new marriage adulterous in God's eyes?**

**Assessment of Survey Question 15.** This survey result is quite telling. About half the churches outside of Kentucky seem to acknowledge the remarriage of a divorcee while a previous spouse is still alive causes an adulterous event. For churches within Kentucky, they exceed this by about fifty percent, indicating that Kentucky churches still have a commanding lead on being more conservative than their counterparts elsewhere around the country. To reemphasize Survey Question 7, a higher percentage of conservative-leaning churches perceive they are able to reverse the current high divorce rate, so they are probably best positioned to kick off any nationwide effort on this divorce and remarriage issue.

Survey Question 16  
All States



**Figure 4-16. Survey Question 16 – Do you see the remarriage of divorcees violating 1 Corinthians 7:11 (“...remain single or be reconciled”)?**

**Assessment of Survey Question 16.** The results of this survey question mirrors that of Survey Question 15, at least from Kentucky’s perspective. This survey question confirms the more conservative leaning of the responses, at least from Kentucky churches. The disheartening item of note about the results from this survey question is having more than thirty five percent of all other churches stating they do not know if the remarriages of divorcees violates the teaching of 1 Corinthians 7:11 for a divorced spouse to either remain single or to reconcile with their estranged spouse. It begs the question if it will take more biblical education to resolve the problem or simply more resolve to stay true to biblical teachings and principles.

### 4.3.2 Local Interview Results

The local interview process focused on 10 churches in Bullitt County, Kentucky. The interviews were more free form in nature to allow interviewees the opportunity to voice what they would do to tackle the problem of divorce and remarriage within their particular church, if anything. Many denominations were targeted for representation, to include Southern Baptist, Independent Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, and non-denominational. The feedback of these respondents was compared to how Ezra approached the issue. In particular, would compassion be in the forefront, and how flexible would the churches need to be in dealing with remarriage requests of divorcees and providing ministry opportunities for remarried divorcees. Other vital information gleaned from the interviews include determining how many churches would see the need to take action, how many plan to take action, and how soon do they plan to take action. The common questions the interviewees were asked and their aggregated responses are listed below:

1. Do you see divorce and remarriage of divorcees as being a major problem both in the church and within society?
  - All interviewees said YES
2. Ezra and Israel were in panic mode when about one percent (113 families out of about 10,000 families) of Israel's families were considered abnormal. Should churches today be in panic mode and begin to take more definitive actions to curb the relatively higher number of abnormal marriages?
  - Answers ranged from "Urgent" to a "Big Deal", but not something to be in a panic about

3. Do you see the remarriage of divorcees causing an adulterous event which tarnishes the church's reputation before the world by promoting and condoning adultery?
  - Most interviewees said YES, some reluctantly
  - A few interviewees believe that a divorce allows for remarriage without it being adulterous (this is in line with the positions held by many prominent teachers and preachers today, to include Tony Evans, John MacArthur, Charles Swindoll, David Jeremiah, and Jay Adams).
4. What definitive steps is your church taking or should be taking to improve the divorce and remarriage statistics within your church?
  - Maintain status quo, and continue to educate, disciple, teach, preach, and mentor as needed
  - Some interviewees said they may need to consider stopping the remarriage of divorcees
5. How do you minister to divorced and remarried couples so they do not feel ostracized or alienated?
  - Most interviewees said they would continue to love them and treat them as all others
  - Most interviewees acknowledged they do not have divorced or divorced/remarried men as elders or deacons
  - Most churches were also not against remarrying divorcees
  - One of the SBC churches does allow their pastors, elders, and deacons to be divorced and remarried

In brief, the interview results mapped to the nationwide and local survey results fairly well. Most of the interviewees acknowledged that the remarriage of divorcees does cause an adulterous event, and these adulterous events have tarnished the churches reputation and ability to be a positive influence before a society whose morals are ever declining. Unfortunately, most of the interviewees said they are not prepared to draw a hard line in the sand, so to speak, to change how they are currently handling divorced and remarried couples. In other words, churches who currently marry divorcees do not see the need to change their status quo to refuse to remarry divorcees. So, from the results of the local interviews, it could be forecasted that future generations of believers may continue to see the upward trending of divorce and remarriage within their congregations.

#### **4.4 Evaluation of the Research Design**

The evaluation of the research design is totally dependent on the survey results. The results from the nationwide and local survey responses and from direct interviews with local church leaders were expected to produce one of three possible outcomes. First, the results could reflect the concerns presented in the introduction of this dissertation where church leaders agree that divorce and remarriage of divorcees is a leading cause and effect why churches are not able to positively impact the communities they live in. Second, the results could reflect a more positive outcome than presented. Third, the results could reflect a grimmer situation than what is presented in the introduction of this paper.

The magnitude of the survey results as compared to what is presented in the introduction determines the urgency of future actions. A more positive leaning of the survey results may indicate no urgent action is required by the Church at this time. Maintaining status quo,

therefore, may be appropriate. If the findings are what is portrayed or worse, then the Church needs to either step up some activities or begin taking some specific actions to address the problem, or it will find itself becoming more and more inept and not relevant to society, and possibly on the receiving end of God's judgment, where the church is swept away with the rest of the unbelieving world.

Unfortunately, the outcome of the survey results reflect the church is in a dire state because of the divorce and remarriage epidemic it finds itself in – and the damage is self-inflicted. Hopefully church leaders will eventually take steps to begin curbing, if not reversing the current trend of the high rate of divorce and remarriage of divorcees. More definitive steps are detailed in the next section, Section 5 – Conclusions.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Tony Evans says that “divorce and remarriage remains the often unacknowledged elephant sitting squarely in the center of the sanctuary. We dance around it, carry on with our praise and worship services next to it, and frequently outright ignore it. This is dangerous to the body of Christ”<sup>57</sup>. Divorce and remarriage is still a taboo or a sacred cow with many churches. It often carries a stigma that is hard to shake loose. In generations past (e.g., early 1900s), divorcees would be ostracized from church and possibly from work. Today, the pendulum has swung to the other extreme where divorces and remarriages are just other life events like having a car accident. Unfortunately, no other life events cause such life-long havoc on the welfare of the family and of society at large.

Since churches have compromised on this critical moral issue of dissolving and reconstituting marriages, supposedly based on grace and mercy, the church at large has lost its ability to be the salt of the earth and a preserver of society’s morals. Many churches today choose to ignore or distort clear teachings in scripture so they can fill pastor, elder, and/or deacon positions with men who meet most but not all qualifications (e.g., “...husband of one wife”, 1 Timothy 3:12). This amounts to nothing less than playing church when they pick and choose which principles to live by. Fortunately, with Jesus Christ, there is no eternal shame for past sins and failures (Romans 9:33). Unfortunately, in a fallen world, divorce wrecks lives, and remarriages bring another dimension of complexity. For example, children are commanded in scripture to obey mom and dad, but there are no direct principles for them to obey step mom or step dad in lieu of their biological parent(s). Christians must glean from other more generic principles, such as “obey those who have rule over you” (Hebrews 13:17) to bring order to a situation that is not God’s ideal.

God's design for marriage has not changed since Adam and Eve. As men and women in a society move further away from God's word there is a widespread collapse of the family, often beginning with the dissolution of a marriage and its reconstitution in subsequent marriages or in just living together. In other words, marriage is disposable. So how do Christians fix what is broke and for the Church to be salty once again, and put itself in a position to receive God's intended blessings individually, corporately, and nationally? In brief, the Bible lays out ways to fix bad marriages, and for God, who never wants to throw people away, to be able to work in people's lives, though they are in "adulterated" situations. The final question is will Christians listen?

When the once-pure is made impure it is adulterated. God designed marriage for one man and one woman till death do they part. Any other scenario adulterates this design like adding dirt to a clear and pure glass of water. Once adultery is condoned in a society, it is often a precursor to other sins such as homosexuality and bestiality. When sexual promiscuity is rampant on a national scale the only remedy has been total or near total annihilation. God always had to wipe the slate clean as seen with Noah's generation, with Sodom and Gomorrah, and with Canaanites, and even with God's own people, the Israelites. What can the church do today about divorce & remarriage?

1. The Church needs to change its cavalier position on divorce & remarriage for adultery is the church's Jezebel (Revelation 2:18-29).
2. Seek marriage reconciliation, not divorce. If reconciliation is not possible, then the only other biblical alternative is to remain single (1 Corinthians 7:11). God is more concerned in having holy people, not married people.
3. The church needs to take a definitive step and say "NO" to remarrying divorcees

4. The church needs to take another definitive step and say “NO” to pastors, elders, and deacons who are divorced or who married a divorcee. These men need to be above reproach in this area and be a husband of no more than one wife. The only alternatives to consider are singleness and widowhood.
5. Consider adopting a resolution similar to what the Southern Baptist Convention crafted in Orlando, Florida, in June 2010. See Attachment D – Southern Baptist Convention Resolution to Resolve Divorce and Remarriage Issues.<sup>58</sup>

The Church cannot impact the morals of the world until it addresses the morality within its four walls. Every time a pastor marries a divorcee, the church tells its young people and the world that adultery is OK. If the church promotes and condones adultery by remarrying divorcees, it cannot address immorality outside the church walls.

### **5.1 Research Purpose (verbatim restatement from chapter one)**

Since the U.S. Supreme Court legalized homosexual marriages nationwide in 2015 Christian churches in America are now faced with two major challenges as never before. First, churches need to assess how they can improve their diminished influence in society to hopefully restore morality to a level that prevents God from having to take drastic actions against the nation as He once did against Noah’s generation, against Sodom and Gomorrah, against the ancient Canaanite civilizations, and even against His own people, Israel. Second, churches have to be prepared to provide proper biblical counsel to those within same-sex unions and marriages who see the need to escape that lifestyle after coming to Christ.

Fortunately, the arm of God is not so short that He cannot save those in sin’s deepest clutches. Envision, for example, a transgender lesbian in a same-sex marriage who comes to

Christ having “her kids” and the other “her kids” and “their kids” embroiled in an alternative lifestyle. A pastor or other Christian counselor would need to properly wield the principles of the Bible in such a way to compassionately show and walk the new believer through the legal and social quagmire which would result from coming to Christ and deciding to follow Christ in every aspect. Just saying, “Go and sin no more” fails to bring hope and comfort and to resolve the varied legal, social, familial, emotional, and physical issues associated with possibly separating from or divorcing a homosexual partner. Tumultuous issues include more than just determining appropriate alimony or palimony payments and resolving custody and visitation rights with any children. Issues could also include forsaking the alternative lifestyle community where they were once warmly received and embraced, and possibly reversing any transgender surgeries before moving on with the rest of one’s newly-found Christian life.

The first question to ask is, “How did a person or even a society that once lived within a God-fearing nation get to the point where they accept transgender and homosexual unions and marriages as normal and legal? Unfortunately, the blame for this dilemma could easily fall at the doorstep of the Christian church. Why? Because the Church, by and large, has lost its testimony and ability to positively influence society since it condones and actually promotes adultery within its own ranks by remarrying divorcees.

The rest of this dissertation looks at how the remarriages of divorcees create adulterous events and relationships, and how churches need to grasp the dilemma this invokes. Eventually, churches need to identify and implement steps in a loving and gracious way to restore its reputation for being the “pillar and support” of sound doctrine and teachings (1 Timothy 3:15) without wrongfully alienating those impacted by divorce and by the remarriage of divorcees. Those Christians who have been through the heartache of a failed marriage have a lot to share to

hopefully prevent or circumvent others from incurring similar heartache.

Even God, Himself, is divorced, as recorded in Jeremiah 3:8, when He handed Israel, His betrothed, a bill of divorcement; and Joseph contemplated divorcing his wife, Mary, who was pregnant with his stepchild, Jesus, the Savior of the world (Matthew 1:19). So, God has an affinity for those contemplating or recovering from a divorce. Likewise, the church, needs to have grace without sacrificing its moral fiber while handling divorced people within its midst.

This dissertation also lays out how a survey, which has reached across the United States, provides a snapshot in time of divorce and remarriage within many churches and compares that information to churches within a small, relatively-conservative, county in America, the author's county of residence in Bullitt County, Kentucky. This information will be used to assess the level of urgency for churches to respond, and devise ways to potentially reduce the escalating divorce trend and the more devastating trend of remarrying divorcees.

## **5.2 Research Questions**

This dissertation on divorce and remarriage prompts numerous questions. The first and foremost question is what can the church do to repair its tarnished reputation and once more become the "pillar and support" of sound doctrine and teachings (1 Timothy 3:15) without wrongfully alienating those impacted by divorce and by remarriage. History reflects that the church's once staunch position on divorce and remarriage seemed to have eroded away once leaders of the Reformation began to question the views of the patristic fathers.

Five hundred years following the Reformation the church and the Bible are viewed by modern society as no longer relevant. Morally, the church reflects the morals of society having at least the same ratio of divorces and remarriages within its walls as without, with some higher.

Even the renowned Southern Baptist Convention in 2010 proclaimed that they “ought to recognize how damaging Southern Baptist accommodation to the divorce culture is to our global witness for Christ [...and] address the spiritual wreckage left in our Southern Baptist churches by our own divorce rates and our silence about the same.”<sup>59</sup>

Other questions to be asked include: Does the church even want to pursue moral purity if its bottom line will be negatively impacted? How long would it take the church to restore its lost reputation? Will the pain be worth it? Does the church even have a choice in this matter? What repercussions await the church and society if it chooses to continue taking the path of least resistance? Will the church lose its candlestick? Will Christ bring wrath down on His own bride?

One of the final question to be asked is, “Can the church afford to make the effort?” A better question might be, “Can the church afford not to make the effort?” Luke 18:8 simply states, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” The Church, the Bride of Christ, from a dispensational perspective, will have already been raptured several years prior to the Lord’s coming so that God can once again deal specifically with His chosen and covenanted people, Israel. How sweet it would be if the Church is fondly remembered by those left behind as having a glorious testimony, and not a church who left no legacy.

### **5.3 Research Conclusions**

Gordon Wenham said it most eloquently, “So although it may seem very unkind if a church refuses to marry a divorced person, in the longer term, it is, I believe, for the good of our society. Such a policy will benefit children. It will encourage couples who have difficulties in their marriages to work at them. It will give the watching world a glimpse of God’s undying love. But to implement this policy in today’s society will be extremely difficult. It demands conviction,

wisdom, tuck, and prayer,"<sup>60</sup> and, most likely, a considerable amount of time. After all, the early church, who probably had more polygamous and divorced and remarried people than churches do today, only implemented two practices to hopefully and eventually restore marriage to what God initially intended for it to be: 1) Elders and deacons were to be above reproach in this area and be a husband of only one wife; which conveys non-polygamous marriages for these leaders and neither could the men be divorced or married to a divorcee to avert an adulterous label; and 2) they avoided marrying more wives to polygamous husbands and remarrying divorcees – which is nothing more than sequential polygamy and polyandry.

This is the crux of this dissertation – to encourage churches to take the higher road and stay obedient to God's word and to avoid sacrificing their moral integrity. After all, God prefers obedience to sacrifice, and God prefers having holy people, not necessarily married people to accomplish His will and to grow His kingdom.

**Divorce and Remarriage in the Future.** It seems in the Millennial Kingdom, when Jesus rules with a "rod of iron" (Revelation 19:15) and Satan is banished to the abyss (Revelation 20:2) for one thousand years, there will still be divorces and remarriages to contend with. This is depicted in Ezekiel 44:22 where it is stated, "And they shall not marry a widow or a divorced woman but shall take virgins from the offspring of the house of Israel, or a widow who is the widow of a priest." Ezekiel's temple, as some dispensationalists believe, is established during the Millennial Kingdom. Ezekiel gives the command for the Levitical priests not to marry a divorced woman. So, if such a command must be given, it is reasonable to assume divorce and remarriage will be evident even during the last days of the earth's physical existence. The church cannot get away from this dilemma. It can only be hoped that the percentage of divorced and remarried individuals during this final period of the earth's history will be infinitesimally small.

## 5.4 Research Implications

The greatest implication foreseen from this dissertation on divorce and remarriage is affirming the authority of God's word. Does the word of God mean what it says, and can His word be properly discerned to determine what it means? This interpretation process involves determining the appropriate principles of hermeneutics, which are used to derive the right interpretations on this vital topic. Ken Ham, president/CEO and founder of Answers in Genesis and the Creation Museum in Covington, Kentucky, teamed up with Britt Beemer, chairman of America's Research Group, and together they collected and assessed statistics on why young people are leaving the church in droves. Their assessment is found in their book, "Already Gone." In essence, their findings coincide with this dissertation, and that is the church and the Bible have lost their relevancy because the Bible is no longer taught as having absolute truth. The Bible is used, or more correctly, twisted to justify any conceivable doctrine imaginable. Ham made this startling proclamation, "The statistics show that not going [to church] won't hurt your kids one bit. In fact, they might be better for it."<sup>61</sup> Ham continues lambasting the church for failing to teach apologetics,<sup>62</sup> for not defending the Word of God and living by it,<sup>63</sup> and for letting go of the commands of God and holding to the traditions of men (Mark 7:6-8, NIV).<sup>64</sup> Ham sums up his case by quoting Psalm 11:3, "'If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?' Our foundation is the Word of God. We need to defend the Word of God as one of our top priorities as Christians."<sup>65</sup>

It is alarming how many prominent pastors, teachers, and theologians readily allow for and accommodate divorce and remarriage within the church today. Even biblically sound individuals, such as John MacArthur, David Jeremiah, Chuck Swindoll, and Tony Evans would advocate against drawing a line to stop the growing adulterous events caused by remarrying divorcees.

Wayne House, in his book, “Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views,” says this about the many and varied opinions on divorce and remarriage, “If the experts can’t agree, what is the laity to do or think?”<sup>66</sup> So, is there a way to determine which doctrinal position on divorce and remarriage is the most biblically correct? The answer must be a “yes,” otherwise deriving the truth on any Bible doctrine would be indeterminable.

Pouring through the various source materials of many of these prominent pastors and teachers, it is interesting to see what they agree with and what they do not agree about divorce and remarriage. It is even comical how some seem to contradict themselves at times. Table 5-1 depicts some of these agreements and disagreements.

**Table 5-1. Common Agreements and Disagreements among Church Leaders on Varying Aspects of Divorce and Remarriage.**

<b>Author</b>	<b>Issue: The Horrible Effects of Divorce</b>
John MacArthur	When we carefully consider the disastrous impact of divorce on children, other relatives, and society in general, it becomes obvious that few practices match divorce for sheer destructiveness. Divorce causes not only the multiplication of sin, but also confusion, resentment, hatred, bitterness, despair, conflict, and hardships of every sort. <sup>67</sup>
John MacArthur	The sacred bond of marriage is being ruptured at a fearsome rate, but few in the community seem to care anymore. <sup>68</sup>
Chuck Swindoll	Another critical concern is that divorce starts a cycle that never improves – it always erodes. <sup>69</sup>
Chuck Swindoll	If there is one massive blot on the record of human relationships since that day until now, it would be the breakdown of permanence of marriage. Divorce is crippling the emerging generations. Divorce in the church is nothing short of an epidemic. <sup>70</sup>
<b>Author</b>	<b>Issue: Grounds for Divorce</b>
Jay Adams	Since God instituted marriage, only He has the right to dissolve it. <sup>71</sup>
Jay Adams	<b>One Ground for Divorce:</b> Jesus acknowledged one, and only one, ground for divorce among believers: porneia (“fornication,” or “sexual sin”). <sup>72</sup>
Tony Evans	If a covenant is established by God, it can only be ended by God. <sup>73</sup>
Tony Evans	<b>Two Grounds for Divorce:</b> We have two legitimate grounds for divorce: immorality and abandonment by a non-Christian partner. <sup>74</sup>
Chuck Swindoll	<b>Three Grounds for Divorce:</b> Remarriage is permitted in the case of an unrepentant, immoral partner... in the case of desertion by an unbelieving mate... in the case of marital failure prior to conversion. <sup>75</sup>

John MacArthur	<b>Another Three Grounds for Divorce:</b> In God's sight, the bond between a husband and wife is dissolved only by death (Romans 7:2), adultery (Matthew 19:9), and an unbeliever's leaving (1 Corinthians 7:15). <sup>76</sup>
Carl Laney	It seems that from God's point of view, marriage ends with death, not divorce. If adultery ends a marriage, then there are a lot of people whose marriages have terminated (due to illicit activity), and they do not even know it. <sup>77</sup>
<b>Author</b>	<b>Issue: Grounds for Remarriage</b>
Tony Evans	The church has the authority to declare the husband covenantally dead and to give the wife permission for divorce. <sup>78</sup>
Tony Evans	Once you have a certificate of divorce, you have the right to remarry. Any legitimate grounds for divorce is automatically an allowance for remarriage. <sup>79</sup>
Jay Adams	Divorce is intended to free the parties to make the same commitment to someone else. <sup>80</sup>
John MacArthur	Divorce formally and legally dissolved the marriage for this very purpose: so that the aggrieved partner would be free to remarry without any guilt or stigma, The innocent spouse is free to remarry after divorce. <sup>81</sup>
John MacArthur	'Except for immorality,' clearly permits the innocent party who marries another to do so without committing adultery. <sup>82</sup>
David Instone-Brewer	If a Christian marriage ends despite the best efforts, he or she is entitled to a divorce and is free to remarry. <sup>83</sup>
Gordon Wenham	What is the outcome if we take Jesus' sayings about divorce and remarriage in their most literal sense? Simply put, Jesus would be saying that everyone who remarries after any divorce commits adultery (Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18). If this is the case, then marriage must be indissoluble. <sup>84</sup>
Carl Laney	Jesus puts himself in contrast to the other rabbis of his day by declaring that divorce and remarriage constitute adultery. <sup>85</sup>
Carl Laney	Many people argue that God's grace means that a divorced Christian gets a second chance at marriage. This smacks of license, not grace. <sup>86</sup>

The most profound implication from this dissertation is that until the majority of these more biblically sound pastors, teachers, and theologians come to terms on this critical subject through sound biblical apologetics, the Church is doomed to forever swirl on this issue of divorce and remarriage and never be able to positively impact the morals of a floundering society.

## 5.5 Research Applications

If the truths highlighted in this dissertation could be upheld in a few megachurches, then a tidal wave of change could ensue very quickly. Imagine churches such as Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church of Houston, Texas having over 43,000 attending a single campus each weekend, taking a definitive step when it comes to divorce and remarriage. If Joel Osteen and his congregation could be like Ezra and his entourage of faithful followers totally nearly 50,000, could say no to divorce and yes to reconciliation and no to remarriage of divorcees, America could be positively impacted overnight.

Where it would take decades for small churches, whose average size is less than one hundred adults to eventually have the same impact, even with the Holy Spirit's guidance, a megachurch could potentially propel change in a weekend. If Lakewood Church is considered too liberal, then consider adding Pastor Ed Young's, The Second Baptist Church, with more than 23,000 members to the list, along with Pastor Andy Stanley's church, and North Point Community Church in Alpharetta, Georgia with more than 22,000 believers.

Or what if at least one additional mainline denomination (outside of the Roman Catholic Church and Independent Baptists), such as the churches within the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), or the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ, or the United Methodist Church were brave enough to stand up in their pulpits on one particular Sunday, and state from this point forward they refuse to remarry divorcees within its churches? America would not be the same. Yes, there would be great controversy, but there would also be a snowball effect of change. People might begin to say, "There's a church or a denomination who takes God's word seriously!"

## 5.6 Research Limitations

Research limitations was based on practicality, cost, and time. Yes, it would be nice to have thousands of survey responses and hundreds of face-to-face interviews till the law of averages and the law of large numbers indicated that the effort to gather more information would yield little to no further value. For this type of effort, however, a sampling size of under one hundred seems sufficient. Thousands more responses and interviews would only support the same findings that the few responses revealed.

One limitation that was self-imposed intentionally, was that no church leader either in the survey or in the interview process was asked how large their congregation was in numbers of total individuals or married couples. Only percentages of divorced and remarried couples to total married couples was gleaned. This was to prevent unfair speculation of certain-sized churches being better equipped and all others being ill-equipped to address this sensitive social topic. Otherwise a field of social scientists would be required to better assess such data, and additional fields of data would also be required, such as denomination type, the tenure and educational level of the pastor or pastors, and even the programs within the church that catered to married couples. Such information would have been outside the scope of this dissertation.

## **5.7 Further Research**

One item of further research would be to find some churches of any size who implemented the core recommendation of this dissertation – to cease the remarrying of divorcees, and see how those churches fared over a few years. Did they grow or decline in membership? Was there any turmoil implementing the policy to cease remarrying divorcees? And what are the divorce and remarriage demographics of the church after a few years as compared to before implementing any changes to church policy.

The author eventually intends to turn this dissertation into his third book and use the findings and lessons learned from churches who implemented tighter policies on marrying divorcees to help other churches traverse this road with hopefully a little less turmoil. The author will be in a search for a possible co-author, an experienced pastor, who can bring more of the personal touch through real-life case studies.

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**Attachment A:  
Divorce and Remarriage Survey Questionnaire**

## Dissertation Investigation regarding Divorce and Remarriage in the Church

Introduction: I appreciate your willingness to help me gather some information on the state of divorce and remarriage within the church today. I intend to leverage this information in my doctoral dissertation, "How to Address and Reverse the High Divorce and Remarriage Trend in the Church Today." Your response will be aggregated with others to give me a snapshot in time where churches in Bullitt County, KY (small-town America) stand on the issue of Divorce and Remarriage as compared to other parts of the United States. Your individual response will be held in confidence.

Please click to check the following box if you would like to be provided a copy of the results of this survey:

### PROFILE

Position:  Senior Pastor |  Assoc. Pastor |  Other church position || Age:  Younger than 50 |  Older than 50

Church Location:  Bullitt Count, KY | Other U.S. City: \_\_\_\_\_; State: \_\_\_\_\_; | Other City: \_\_\_\_\_; Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation:  Baptist |  Methodist |  Presbyterian |  Pentecostal |  Non-Denominational |  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### QUESTIONS [Positional/Personal (P); Observational (O); Scriptural (S)]

1. (P) With 60% of marriages ending in divorce these days, and upwards of 80% of school-aged children coming from broken homes and blended families, what is your position on divorce and remarriage within the Church?
  - The Church has to see this as a serious problem and take strides to limit it more than what is being done today
  - Continue to live with it and preach/teach on it occasionally, for there is nothing that can really be done about it
  - Divorce and Remarriage is a small issue or non-issue and not worth addressing
  - No opinion
2. (P) What is your church's position on the remarriage of divorcees?
  - Remarriage is not an option unless the previous spouse has died
  - Remarriage is appropriate in some cases, based on certain criteria such as abuse, abandonment, or infidelity
  - Remarriage of a divorcee is appropriate in most situations to show grace and mercy
3. (P) Do you avoid preaching and/or teaching on divorce and remarriage?  Yes |  No
4. (P) Do you believe divorce and/or remarriage is more justifiable following the salvation of one or both of the spouses?
  - Yes |  No |  No opinion
5. (P) Does your church allow Pastors/Elders/Ministers to be divorced and remarried or allow to be married to a divorcee?
 

We allow them to be divorced/remarried:  Yes |  No || We allow them to be married to a divorcee:  Yes |  No
6. (P) Does your church allow Deacons to be divorced and remarried or allow them to marry a divorcee?
 

We allow them to be divorced/remarried:  Yes |  No || We allow them to be married to a divorcee:  Yes |  No
7. (P) Do you perceive your church being able to reverse the current high divorce rate?  Yes |  No |  Don't know
8. (O) What do you see as the predominant reason for divorce?
  - Emotional/Physical brutality |  Abandonment |  Infidelity |  No longer in love |  Other: \_\_\_\_\_
9. (O) What do you see as the predominant reason to justify remarrying a divorcee?
  - None |  Love |  Financial |  Compatibility |  Both partners are now Christians |  Other: \_\_\_\_\_
10. (O) About how many couples in your church are divorced and remarried (Percentage)?
  - less than 10% of all couples |  less than 25% |  less than 50% |  More than 50% |  Don't Know
11. (O) Have you or other ministers in your church within the past 12 months performed a marriage for a couple where at least one of the spouses was divorced with their previous spouse still living?  Yes |  No
12. (O) Within your church, do you see second marriages being better than the first marriage?
  - Sometimes |  Frequently |  Never
13. (O) How many times have you preached or heard someone preach on divorce and remarriage within the past 12 months?  None |  Less than 5 times |  more than 5 times |  Don't Know
14. (O) If you were to preach or teach on divorce and remarriage would you incur pressure from church members to desist?  Yes |  No |  Don't know
15. (S) Do you acknowledge that remarriage of a divorcee while their previous spouse is still living makes their new marriage adulterous in God's eyes?  Yes |  No |  Depends on the reasons |  No opinion
16. (S) Do you see the remarriage of divorcees violating 1Corinthians 7:11 ("...remain single or be reconciled")?
  - Yes |  No |  No opinion

**Attachment B:  
Survey Responses – Tabular (sorted by state)**

Noted peculiarities of the survey responses:

1. The web-based survey was initially posted and made available on 19 February, and was left up till 29 March (40 days)
2. A total of thirty-six responses were received from fifteen states
3. The author initially anticipated receiving about 40 responses out of a potential of at least 400 based on recent weekly pull downs of the posted Sunday School lesson plans
4. The state of Kentucky had the most responses (9) by state due to a direct emailing that went out to fifty churches in Bullitt County, the author's county of residence
5. Most of the responses are from the Bible Belt (20 out of 30)
6. Only about five responses out of thirty came from a large metropolitan area of 200,000 or more, so most come from smaller jurisdictions across the United States from MD to CA
7. Only fifteen responses came from Senior or Associate Pastors. The remainder (21 responses) came from deacons, Sunday School teachers, or other volunteer church positions

**Assessment of the Survey Demographics.** Ideally, it would have been nice to have had over 100 survey responses coming from a majority of the states within the union and being responded to predominantly by senior or associate pastors to give a higher confidence level in the results. It was also the intent to show that smaller jurisdictions provided more conservative responses than those from larger metropolitan areas, but with only thirty-six responses and only a handful coming from larger metropolitan areas, the confidence level is not high enough to cleanly and clearly make that distinction. Be it as it may, the survey still accomplished its main objective to provide a snapshot in time where churches are at with the divorce and remarriage conundrum.

No.	Received	Responder Position	STATE	CITY
1.	03/01/2017	Sunday School Teacher	AL	Ardmore
2.	03/18/2017	Sunday School Teacher	AR	Monticello
3.	03/23/2017	Senior Pastor	AR	Cabot
4.	02/25/2017	Senior Pastor	CA	Irvine
5.	02/19/2017	Associate Pastor	FL	Milton
6.	02/26/2017	Associate Pastor	IN	New Albany
7.	02/25/2017	Senior Pastor	KY	Flatwoods
8.	02/25/2017	Senior Pastor	KY	Shepherdsville
9.	02/25/2017	Sunday School Teacher	KY	Mount Washington
10.	03/01/2017	Senior Pastor	KY	Shepherdsville
11.	03/02/2017	Senior Pastor	KY	Shepherdsville
12.	03/05/2017	Deacon	KY	Mayfield
13.	03/11/2017	Music Minister	KY	Louisville
14.	03/22/2017	Associate Pastor	KY	Taylorsville
15.	03/26/2017	Worshiper Leader/Assoc Pastor	KY	Richmond
16.	02/28/2017	Sunday School Teacher	LA	Tioga
17.	02/26/2017	Associate Pastor	MD	Clinton
18.	03/21/2017	Senior Pastor	MD	Clinton
19.	02/28/2017	Sunday School Teacher	MS	Mantee
20.	03/08/2017	Associate Teacher	MS	Water Valley
21.	03/15/2017	Sunday School Teacher	MS	Carthage
22.	03/20/2017	Sunday School Teacher	MS	Booneville
23.	03/25/2017	Sunday school teacher	MS	Coldwater
24.	03/19/2017	Senior Pastor	NM	Las Cruces
25.	03/21/2017	Deacon/Sunday School Teacher	OK	Elk City
26.	03/25/2017	Deacon	OK	Tulsa
27.	02/18/2017	Deacon	TN	Church Hill
28.	03/03/2017	Sunday School Teacher	TN	Goodlettsville
29.	03/04/2017	Sunday School teacher	TN	Manchester
30.	02/26/2017	Associate Pastor	TX	Plainview
31.	03/04/2017	Deacon/Sunday School Teacher	TX	DeSoto
32.	03/24/2017	Sunday School Teacher	TX	Sandia
33.	03/25/2017	Senior Pastor	TX	Magnolia
34.	03/25/2017	Deacon/Sunday School Teacher	TX	Kemp
35.	03/15/2017	Sunday School Teacher	VA	Richmond
36.	03/07/2017	Deacon/Sunday School Teacher	WI	Madison

Sorted by State, then City

**Attachment C:  
Interview Results – Tabular**

No.	Date	Church	Denomination	Interviewee	% D&R
1	3/2/17	FBC Mt Washington	SBC	Sr. Pastor	30%
2	3/12/17	Living Hope BC	SBC	Music Min.	10%
3	3/12/17	Calvary Christian Center	Independent	Sr. Pastor	20%
4	3/15/17	Fairmount BC	SBC	Music Min.	75%
5	3/15/17	MW COG	COG	Sr. Pastor	60%
6	3/17/17	Valley Vision BC	Ind. Baptist	Sr. Pastor	30%
7	3/17/17	Eagle Heights BC	SBC	Sr. Pastor	20%
8	3/21/17	Bullitt Lick BC	SBC	Sr. Pastor	5%
9	3/24/17	Kings Baptist Church	SBC	Music Min.	25%
10	3/31/17	Mercy Hill	SBC	Sr. Pastor	10%

Where, BC = Baptist Church; MW = Mt Washington; SBC = Southern Baptist Convention;  
COG = Church of God; Ind. = Independent

Common Questions Asked and Responses Received:

1. Do you see divorce and remarriage of divorcees as being a major problem both in the church and within society?
  - All interviewees said YES
2. Ezra and Israel were in panic mode when about one percent (113 families out of about 10,000 families) of Israel's families were considered abnormal. Should churches today be in panic mode and begin to take more definitive actions to curb the relatively higher number of abnormal marriages?
  - Answers ranged from "Urgent" to a "Big Deal", but not something to be in a panic about
3. Do you see the remarriage of divorcees causing an adulterous event which tarnishes the church's reputation before the world by promoting and condoning adultery?
  - Most interviewees said YES, some reluctantly
  - A few interviewees believe that a divorce allows remarriage without it being adulterous
4. What definitive steps is your church taking or should be taking to improve the divorce and remarriage statistics within your church?
  - Maintain status quo, and continue to disciple, teach, preach, and mentor as needed
  - Some interviewees said they may need to consider stopping the remarriage of divorcees
5. How do you minister to divorced and remarried couples so they do not feel ostracized or alienated?
  - Most interviewees said they love them and treat them as all others
  - Most interviewees acknowledged they do not have divorced or divorced/remarried men as elders or deacons
  - Most churches were not against remarrying divorcees
  - One of the SBC churches does allow their pastors, elders, and deacons to be divorced and remarried

**Attachment D:**  
**Southern Baptist Convention Resolution to Restore the Church's Testimony in Light of  
Divorce and Remarriage Issues**

On the Scandal of Southern Baptist Divorce (Source: <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/1205>)  
Orlando, FL – 2010

The messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Orlando, Florida, June 15-16, 2010, acknowledged the complicity of many SBC churches failing to show the world the meaning of the gospel through marital fidelity, and thereby proposed the following resolution:

WHEREAS, The Bible reveals that marriage is a gospel mystery, pointing to Christ's union with His church (Ephesians 5:22-32); and

WHEREAS, The Bible teaches that marriage was established by God "in the beginning" to be a permanent one-flesh union (Genesis 2:18-25; Matthew 19:1-9); and

WHEREAS, Our Lord Jesus commands us that what "God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mark 10:9); and

WHEREAS, The biblical story shows us that one of the lamentable aspects of sin is the destruction of marriages and families, a destruction seen from the Fall until this present darkness; and

WHEREAS, The rampant divorce rate in our culture has come with great social and economic cost, with women and children suffering disproportionately in ways that are incalculable; and

WHEREAS, We have affirmed in our confession of faith our belief in the sanctity and permanence of marriage; and

WHEREAS, Some studies have indicated that conservative Protestants in the United States of America are divorcing at the same rate, if not at higher rates, than the general population; and

WHEREAS, Some studies also indicate that areas where Southern Baptist churches predominate in number often have higher divorce rates than areas we would define as "unchurched" and in need of evangelical witness; and

WHEREAS, Even the most expansive view of the biblical exceptions allowing for divorce and remarriage would rule out many, if not most, of the divorces in our churches; and

WHEREAS, The acceleration in rates of divorce in Southern Baptist churches has not come through a shift in theological conviction about scriptural teaching on divorce but rather through cultural accommodation; and

WHEREAS, We have been prophetic in confronting assaults in the outside culture on God's design for marriage while rarely speaking with the same alarm and force to a scandal that has become all too commonplace in our own churches; and

WHEREAS, We do not serve those who are hurting from divorce by speaking to them only in therapeutic terms rather than in terms of both repentance and forgiveness; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Orlando, Florida, June 15-16, 2010, acknowledge the complicity of many among us for too often failing to show the world the meaning of the gospel through marital fidelity; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we express our conviction that a denomination defined theologically by our belief in the authority and inerrancy of Holy Scripture ought to proclaim the whole counsel of God, especially when the Bible confronts our own patterns of sin; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we express our further conviction that a denomination defined missiologically ought to recognize how damaging Southern Baptist accommodation to the divorce culture is to our global witness for Christ; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we express our further conviction that a denomination seeking God's blessing in revival and reformation ought to address the spiritual wreckage left in our Southern Baptist churches by our own divorce rates and our silence about the same; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we call on our churches to proclaim the Word of God on the permanence of marriage, and to provide ongoing marriage enrichment opportunities, in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ and God's abhorrence of divorce; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we call on our churches to unite in marriage only those who are biblically qualified to be married to one another and who demonstrate an understanding of the meaning of lifelong love and fidelity; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we call on our churches in our wedding services to maintain the gravity of the vows being undertaken, not simply as a token of a couple's romance but as a covenant before God, until death do them part; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we call on our churches to minister to couples and families in crisis through counseling, mentorship, and, where necessary, through biblical church discipline; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we call on our churches to proclaim God's mercy and grace to all people—including those who have been divorced without biblical grounds—due to the truth that the blood of Jesus can atone for any sin and can cleanse any conscience; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we call on our churches to have special compassion for and energetic ministry to those who have been left in the wake of family brokenness; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we urge all Southern Baptists in troubled or faltering marriages to seek godly assistance and, where possible, reconciliation; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That we pray that the true peace of our Lord Jesus Christ will reign in us such that the next generation will see the gospel not only in the counter-cultural nature of our verbal witness but also in the counter-cultural love and fidelity of our marriages.

**Attachment E:  
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