

10 Reasons Why The "Exception Clause" Does Not Mean "Marital Unfaithfulness."

#1. Because it does not "Exceed The Righteousness of The Pharisees"

When Jesus first gave the exception clause in **Matthew 5:32**, He emphasized in the same chapter, "*That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven*" **Matthew 5:20**. The Pharisees followed two schools of thought on the matter of divorce. One Rabbinical school believed that a man could only divorce his wife if she were guilty of marital unfaithfulness. Would Jesus condemn the religious conduct of the Pharisees in one breath and then in another breath establish their conduct as the norm for Christians?

#2. Because it was taught in one Rabbinical school which Jesus rejected

When the Pharisees tried to get Jesus to side with one of the Rabbinical schools of thought on divorce, Jesus rejected both schools (**Matthew 19:3-10**). Both Rabbinical schools were based on **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**. Jesus did not side with either interpretation but instead went back to Genesis and re-emphasized God's original creation order, in which there was no divorce. He even added a warning to it: "...What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (**Matthew 19:6**). Then, when the Pharisees persisted in justifying their practice of divorce on the basis of Moses' Law, Jesus restated His rejection of divorce for any cause. To be comprehensive, however, He would have had to "except" the illegal marriages of incest and sodomy which are forbidden in **Leviticus 18** and also betrothal unfaithfulness, which is listed in **Deuteronomy 22** and illustrated in **Matthew 1:19**.

#3. Because it is building a whole doctrine on one word

To teach that divorce is permissible on the grounds of "marital unfaithfulness" is to build a doctrine on one word while using the wrong translation for the word! The word fornication (*porneia*) cannot be restricted to "marital unfaithfulness." The word adultery (*moichos*) would have been used if Jesus meant only "marital unfaithfulness."

#4. Because it is contrary to the higher standards which Christ re-established

Jesus rejected the current thought on **Deuteronomy 24:1-4** in His Sermon on the Mount and reaffirmed this rejection in **Matthew 19:3-10**. "*It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you...*" (**Matthew 5:31-32**). The very word structure emphasizes that His teaching is in sharp contrast to what they had heard, including the teaching that divorce was permissible for marital unfaithfulness.

#5. Because it makes void God's New Testament teaching to husbands

If we say that a man can divorce his wife because of her "marital unfaithfulness," we totally disregard the responsibility which God gives to a husband to love his wife as Christ loved the Church, to give himself for her, and to sanctify and cleanse her by the Word. (See **Ephesians 5:25-28**.) The Church is guilty of spiritual adultery by its friendship with the world (**James 4:4**), but Christ is not going to divorce the Church! If a husband divorces his wife for "marital unfaithfulness," he is "giving her up" for his purposes, rather than giving himself up for her sanctification!

#6. Because it is usually a form of vengeance, and we are forbidden to take revenge

We cannot say that divorce for "marital unfaithfulness" is a form of obedience, because God does not "command" divorce. Divorce is often a form of vengeance, and God warns that vengeance belongs to Him-- not to us. "...*Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord*" (**Romans 12:19**). This is also why God would have grounds to give Israel "a bill of divorce," but we do not have any such authority. (See **Jeremiah 3:8**.)

#7. Because it puts scripture in conflict with scripture

If we say that "marital unfaithfulness" is Scriptural grounds for divorce, we make Scripture contradict itself. God condemns those who go to law before the unbelievers (**I Corinthians 6:1-10**), and we must go to law to get a divorce. God's warning on this point is very strong: "*Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud...*" (**I Corinthians 6:7-8**).

#8. Because it negates God's call to suffer for righteousness' sake

It is true that "marital unfaithfulness" causes intense suffering in the marriage relationship. If we teach that "marital unfaithfulness" is Scriptural grounds for divorce, however, we disregard the basic call and ministry and rewards of suffering in the Christian life. "*For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps*" (**I Peter 2:20-21**). Are we not to encourage each other to be victorious through suffering rather than to reject suffering? (See **I Peter 4:12-14**)

#9. Because it is reading into Scripture a "Private Interpretation"

The Deuteronomy 24 passage, upon which "marital unfaithfulness" is based, and is designed to regulate an existing condition, not to condone divorce. Verses 1 through 3 contain a series of conditional clauses in the original Hebrew; and then, if these conditions are true, a regulation is given in verse 4: "...*[If] a man hath taken a wife, and ...[If] she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her... [And if he] write her a bill of divorcement... and ...[If she becomes] another man's wife. [And if] the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement...[or if] the latter husband die...[then] her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife...*" Furthermore, the passage cannot be construed to include "some uncleanness" after the marriage has been in existence for any length of time. Provisions had just been given two chapters previously for a man to contest the marriage at the beginning if he believed his wife was not a virgin. (See **Deuteronomy 22:13-21**)

#10. Because it fails to account for the astonishment of His disciples

The response of the disciples in **Matthew 19:10** indicates that Jesus' interpretation of Old Testament Scripture on divorce was much stricter than what they had imagined. "*And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry*" (**Matthew 19:9-10**). The disciples, too, were aware of the Rabbinical schools. Their astonishment at Christ's teaching would hardly be in order if He had simply said, "You can only divorce for marital unfaithfulness."