

Dear Pastor \_\_\_\_\_,

Please read through this short book on Christian covenant marriage. I think it does an excellent job in defending the permanence of marriage, through reading the exception clause in Matthew naturally as an exception for fornication. In a time when marriage is dissolving, and even ministers are divorcing and remarrying without shame, I think the thesis of the book, as well as the message of repentance, are urgent and necessary.

The main support for the thesis is Daniel Jennings' research into the word *porneia* and all of its usages prior to the 1<sup>st</sup> century, as well as during that period and after it. He goes through numerous usages of this Greek word, and answers some possible exceptions. His conclusion is that the common meaning of *porneia* is to have intercourse before marriage or to practice prostitution. Any usages of this word to simply mean "sexual immorality" as some claim are rare exceptions indeed.

If this is the case, and the research is correct, then it is natural to read the exception clause in light of Jewish marriage regulations. This means it refers to ending the union because of fornication during the Jewish betrothal period (which was similar to a marriage) or just after the final marriage ceremony if the husband discovered the bride had lied about her virginity. The latter is detailed in Deuteronomy 22:13-21. Therefore, any argument that the exception clause allows for divorce and remarriage for immorality in general is a misreading.

This view of the exception clause, along with the historical interpretation of the clause as allowing for divorce but not remarriage, allows scripture to be in harmony with scripture. It allows the exception clause to be in harmony with the permanent God-joined nature of the union. In contrast, the current Christian allowance of divorce and remarriage for adultery is in clear conflict with scripture, as remarriage is multiple times called adultery. A husband and wife who are separated are to either reunite or remain celibate. The book also explains why the exception clause only appears in Matthew, and not elsewhere, as Matthew is considered to be aimed at a Jewish audience who would understand an exception for fornication. Others are not. It furthermore explains why the exception clause uses the word *porneia*, and why remarriage is in contrast called *moichao*, literally to commit adultery. The exception is NOT for adultery, it is for fornication which occurred before marriage.

To answer a couple of common objections to the "fornication" view, some people ask how the passage could use the word "wife" to describe the woman, when the separation is allegedly happening during the betrothal period. One answer is because the view also allows that it speaks of discovered loss of virginity after the final marriage ceremony, so this person is certainly a wife. The second answer is that the word translated wife (*gyne*) can also mean a betrothed woman such as we are speaking of. My concordance reads – A woman of any age, whether a virgin, or married, or widow! Another objection is that allowing for the Jewish exception of discovered loss of virginity after marriage causes an allowance for divorce and remarriage, hence making the permanence of marriage view contradict itself by conflicting with plain scripture which calls remarriage adultery. This may be the case IF it allowed for a divorce because of behavior after marriage, but it is not the case since it relates to discovered behavior

BEFORE marriage, making it not the ending of a union, but the recognition of an invalid union which was based on a lie, similar to an annulment. That is the main difference. And I think everyone agrees there are at least some valid reasons for annulments. It is the ending of a false union.

To add a few more observations about the contemporary Christian claim that *porneia* simply means sexual immorality including adultery, this view clearly allows for quite many ended marriages, something which conflicts with the context of the passage. In fact, when you think about how common adultery is, it makes no sense for the apostles to show disbelief in Yeshua's teaching and ask – who then would marry? Their question only makes sense in light of the true permanence of marriage. Many people commit adultery, and many more would lie about it for the sake of obtaining a new marriage. Not only that, but if *porneia* just means immorality in general, we all know that viewing pornography is also sexually immoral. Then there is no logical reason to disallow divorces and remarriages based on viewing pornography, something the majority of people have done. This would make the majority of marriages not truly binding, something completely absurd in its own right, and even more harshly in conflict with the apostles' words of wonder. Is it really that hard then, to respect the plain meaning of scripture, when in the very same passage it calls remarriage adultery? Is it that hard to respect the others calling it adultery?

This book contains other lines of argument in support of the fornication view, and of marriage permanence in general, but the research into the word *porneia* is clearly most central, and the strongest support. Please read it carefully, and consider it in your heart. The book ends on a relevant and very sad note. It recounts the major Christian denominations which have accepted sodomy and accepted sodomite leaders. It documents the arguments that were made in favor of this terrible collapse, and as you'd imagine, the sodomy supporters all point to the fact that the denominations had already accepted divorce and remarriage so why not accept this too. I don't agree with the sodomite cause of course, but they do have a point here. The Church had badly harmed itself, and has little ground of truth left to stand on. It is not very firm ground.

Lastly, I do not image there is much of a future for believers, outside of serious repentance and change in their lives, and outside of real sacrifice, suffering and loss. I believe turning away from ending marriages and back to lifelong unions is a great part of that repentance. It will not be easy. It will require real tears, as must have been required in Ezra's day, when he sent away the pagan wives. I don't think there is much room left for a comfortable Church. It will be swept away.

Many blessings and peace to you.

Yours in the Savior,

Tom Ackerman