

Covenant Oneness-Two Become One Flesh

TWO BECOME ONE FLESH

Synonymous Terms:

- Co-Mingling of Blood
- Sharing of Blood
- Sharing of life

See Table Summarizing Co-mingling of Blood

The covenant customs summarized in the table entitled **The Oneness of Covenant** are simple physical pictures that can help us understand spiritual truths, especially the truth about our **oneness** with our New Covenant Partner Jesus Christ. Many of us have known these basic truths about the oneness of covenant for years (eg, the custom of the exchange of wedding rings, the custom of the sharing of cake by the wedding couple on their wedding day, the custom of the bride taking the groom's surname, the sharing of lives of the husband and wife, etc), but we may have never have viewed them from the perspective of **covenant** and specifically from the perspective of how the truths of **oneness** might relate to our New Covenant relationship with our Bridegroom, Christ Jesus.

You may also want to study the table entitled **The Oneness of Covenant** where these truths are presented in a question and answer format.

What is oneness?

The 1828 version of Webster's **American Dictionary of the English Language** defines **oneness** as "Singleness in number; individuality; unity; the quality of being one. "Our God is one, or rather very oneness." (Hooker)

The **Concise Oxford English Dictionary** adds that **oneness** is "the state of being unified, whole, or in harmony."

The **Tenth Edition of Webster's Collegiate Dictionary** says that **oneness** is "the quality or state or fact of being one: as... integrity, wholeness, harmony, sameness, identity, unity, union."

An understanding of the customs of covenant can help the believer grasp at least to some degree the significance of our **oneness with Christ** (cp our Lord's prayer regarding "**one**" in Jn 17:20, 21, 22, 23, 26), a oneness that becomes a reality the moment we enter the **New Covenant** by grace through faith (Ep 2:8, 9-note). Christianity is a relationship with a Person, not a program. Entering into the New Covenant is an entering into a new identity, into a oneness, into an exchange of robes (of the unrighteousness in Adam [Isa 64:6, 2Ti 1:9-note, Titus 3:5-note] for the righteousness of Christ [1Co 1:30, 2Co 5:21, Php 3:9-note]) that transpires as we enter into covenant with the living God. Now believers can be identified, in **oneness** with God and experience **communion** with Him, even as Adam and Eve experienced **communion** with Jehovah before sin entered the world (cp Adam and Eve's first reaction of fear reflecting the "break in oneness" after sin entered the world Ge 3:8, 9, 10, 11, 12, contrast the hope foreshadowed in the records of Enoch in Ge 5:22, 23, 24 and Noah Ge 6:9).

The New Manners and Customs of the Bible summarizes the events associated with entering into a **blood covenant**...

After agreeing to make the covenant, the two involved would detail the conditions of the covenant and tell what would happen to the other person if they broke the covenant. If it was a covenant in which they were **binding themselves together as partners**, they would also list what the other would receive from the covenant. These were called the "blessings and cursings." You can see an example of these in Deuteronomy 28 when God made covenant with His people concerning His laws.

Each party would then cut himself somewhere on his hand where the cut would be visible (**Ed comment:** Resulting of course in the spillage of blood), often on the fat part of the thumb. He would then rub fresh ashes into the cut so that it would form a dark **scar** that could easily be seen. This was the **mark of the covenant**, and showed that each person had a **covenant partner** somewhere (**Ed comment:** Compare God's ordinance for a Hebrew slave and what happened on the seventh year if the slave loved his master! Ex 21:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Do you see in this practice the "mark of covenant" [the scar from the awl pierced ear would be easily visible for all to see. Can the world easily see that you have entered covenant with Christ and that He is your new Master and you are no longer your own? {cp 1Co 6:19-note, 1Co 6:20-note}], a mark of ownership which

remains on the slave forever! It is notable that this is the first ordinance after the Ten Commandments!) The modern **wedding ring** is derived from this custom.

To demonstrate that what each partner had was now available to the other partner whenever needed, they would then **exchange** some article of **clothing** (Ed: see **Covenant: The Exchange of Robes**). After that they would exchange weapons of some type to demonstrate that each would come to the other's aid whenever they were being attacked by an enemy and needed help (Ed: **Covenant: The Exchange of Armor and Belts**). An enemy of one was now the enemy of the other. Thus Christ said to Saul, "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*" when Saul was actually persecuting Christians (Acts 9:4-see **explanatory note**). At the end of all they did, they would then **have a meal together to demonstrate their friendship** ... , and take into themselves what the other had provided, for it was customary for each to provide something for the covenant meal. The **covenant meal** was the final binding and demonstration of the newly made covenant. (Ed comment: Compare our tradition of the husband and wife feeding each other wedding cake after becoming **one flesh** (one body, one skin)[Ge 2:24] in the marriage covenant! See **Covenant As It Relates to Marriage**)

It was a **covenant meal** that the Lord and His disciples ate together in the upper room. It started as an Old Testament Passover meal, and was changed by the Lord into a New Testament covenant meal: And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. (Luke 22:19, 20) ([Freeman, J. M., & Chadwick, H. J. - The New Manners and Customs of the Bible](#)). (Bolding added)

COMMINGLING OF BLOOD

Webster says that to **commingle** is "to blend thoroughly into a harmonious whole." ([Ref](#)) What a great definition of our covenant oneness with Jesus Christ, that "harmonious whole" being fully consummated when our Blessed Hope appears for "We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is." (1 John 3:2-[note](#))! Glorified bodies in perfect **harmony** with our Bridegroom Christ Jesus! **O Glorious Day**! But can you see one of the applications to everyday life? When a man and a woman marry they supernaturally become **one flesh** (one body, one skin) (Genesis 2:24) **commingling** their lives together, the ideal being "a harmonious whole." How tragic when that harmony is disrupted by sin and the marriage covenant is broken. Thank God that our Bridegroom will NEVER break His "marriage" covenant with us! In Ephesians 5:31-32-[note](#) Paul writes " FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This **mystery** (in NT something previously hidden, but now made known by God's Spirit) is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church." *Can you see how earthly marriage is a small picture of the heavenly marriage of saints to their Savior? O God grant us mercy and grace to fight the good fight of faith for all marriages, for the sake of Thy great Name and glory in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

In Ephesians 5:31 quoted above notice the verb **joined** ([4347](#)) which in Greek is the verb **proskollao** (derived from **prós** = to, toward + **kollao** = to glue) and which literally means to glue one thing to another so that it cleaves or adheres. The idea is to unite or to stick to. It is used purposely by Paul draw an important picture of the marriage bond and thus described a couple as adhering closely to one another, faithfully devoted to each other. This is a beautiful picture of oneness that God's Spirit has brought about on the day the two entered into their marriage covenant. It is interesting also to note that **proskollao** was a medical term used to describe the uniting of wounds. Every marriage has "wounds" but a supernatural bond has been wrought by God to keep them the wounds from festering and leading to the death of the marriage and the breaking of the covenant. And so the compound verb **proskollao** denotes the most intimate of unions possible between a man and woman, their joining being much like "conjoined twins" who even share the same blood supply. So too the two lives of the marriage partners are irrevocably commingled. And so **proskollao** emphasizes not only permanence but also unity of the two who have been "glued" together. Practical application - *Take a picture of a husband and another of his wife and glue them together. Allow time for the glue to set. What happens when you try to take the two individual pictures apart? Do you see what God is saying about the binding nature of the marriage covenant between a husband and a wife?*

John Piper in commenting on Ephesians 5:31-32 adds that "Marriage Is the Display of God. (He says that) Paul makes the point most clearly that marriage is designed to be the display of God. In Ephesians 5:31–32, he quotes Genesis 2:24 and then tells us the mystery that it has always contained: “ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” In other words, the covenant

involved in leaving mother and father and holding fast to a spouse and becoming one flesh is a portrayal of the covenant between Christ and his church. Marriage exists most ultimately to display the covenant-keeping love between Christ and his church."

When I was the medical director of the Travis County Blood Center in the 1980's, in the beginning days of the AIDS crisis, the commingling of blood took on an entirely new dimension when we came to realize that the HIV virus could be transmitted in blood transfusions! In contrast the commingling of the "blood" so speak of the husband and wife instead of bringing death births a synergistic relationship that is meant to give life and add to the overall enjoyment of life.

One of the key passages regarding the importance of blood is found in Leviticus 17:11...

For (explaining why one who eats blood will be cut off - Lev 17:10) the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.'

Comment: To make atonement means to cover the sin. The principle of blood atonement is God's divinely ordained remedy for the problem of sin. The Scriptures insist that forgiveness for sin is not possible apart from the shedding of blood (Heb 9:22). The biblical emphasis upon the blood of the sacrifice, and ultimately of Christ, is indicative of the giving of the life of an innocent victim to atone for the guilty. The blood poured out emphasized the sacrificial nature of the death, together with its efficacious significance, but it was only a foreshadowing and could not take away sins (Heb10:4). It provided a covering for the time so that God might pass over their sins (Ro 3:25, Heb 9:15).

In the ISBE article on "**Blood**" we read...

Although the real function of the **blood** in the human system was not fully known until the fact of its circulation was established by William Harvey in 1615, nevertheless from the earliest times a singular mystery has been attached to it by all peoples. Blood rites, blood ceremonies and blood feuds are common among primitive tribes. It came to be recognized as the life principle long before it was scientifically proved to be. Naturally a feeling of fear, awe and reverence would be attached to the shedding of blood. With many uncivilized peoples scarification of the body until blood flows is practiced. **Blood brotherhood** or **blood friendship** is established by African tribes by the mutual shedding of blood and either drinking it or rubbing it on one another's bodies. Thus and by the inter-transfusion of blood by other means it was thought that a community of life and interest could be established...

New Testament Teachings... The exaltation and dignifying of this idea finds its highest development then in the vicarious shedding of blood by Christ Himself (1Jn 1:7). As in the Old Testament "blood" was also used to signify the juice of grapes, the most natural substitute for the drinking of blood would be the use of wine. Jesus takes advantage of this, and introduces the beautiful and significant custom (Mt 26:28) of drinking wine and eating bread as symbolic of the primitive intertransfusion of blood and flesh in a pledge of eternal friendship (compare Ex 24:6, 7; Jn 6:53, 54, 55, 56). This is the climactic observance of blood rites recorded in the Bible. ([Blood](#))

In much of our modern world there seems to be little comprehension of the [solemn and binding nature](#) incurred when one enters a **covenant** with **one's marital partner** (see **Covenant: As It Relates to Marriage**) or even more significantly, when one by grace through faith enters the New Covenant (in His blood) with the **Lord Jesus Christ**.

George Berry in his discussion of **Covenant Among Men** in the OT covenant writes that...

In essence a covenant is an agreement, but an agreement of a **solemn and binding force**. The early Semitic idea of a covenant was doubtless that which prevailed among the Arabs. (Berry goes on to explain that the covenant between the Arabs) was primarily **blood-brotherhood**, in which two men became brothers **by drinking each other's blood**. Ordinarily this meant that one was adopted into the clan of the other...

In this early idea, then, "primarily the covenant is not a special engagement to this or that particular effect, but **bond of troth** (one's pledged word) and **life-fellowship** to all the effects for which kinsmen are **permanently bound** together" (W. Robertson Smith, op. cit., 315 f)...

In later usage there were various substitutes for the drinking of each other's blood, namely, **drinking together the sacrificial blood**, **sprinkling** it upon the parties (cp Ex 24:6,7,8, He 9:19), **eating together the sacrificial meal** (cp Ex 24:9, 10, 11), etc.; but the same idea found expression in all, the community of life resulting from the covenant.

Combining statements made in different accounts, the following seem to be the **principal elements in a covenant between men**. Some of the details, it is to be noted, are not explicitly stated in reference to these covenants, but may be inferred from those between God and men.

(1) **A statement of the terms agreed upon** (Ge 26:29; 31:50,52). This was a modification of the earlier idea, which has been noted, in which a covenant was all-inclusive.

(2) **An oath by each party to observe the terms, God being witness of the oath** (Genesis 26:31; 31:48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53). The oath was such a characteristic feature that sometimes the term "**oath**" is used as the equivalent of "**covenant**" (see Ezekiel 17:13).

(3) **A curse invoked by each one upon himself in case disregard of the agreement.** In a sense this may be considered a part of the **oath**, adding emphasis to it. This **curse** is not explicitly stated in the case of human covenants, but may be inferred from the covenant with God (Dt 27:15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26).

(4) **The formal ratification of the covenant by some solemn external act.** The different ceremonies for this purpose, such as have already been mentioned, are to be regarded as the later equivalents of the early act of **drinking each other's blood**. In the Old Testament accounts it is not certain that such formal act is expressly mentioned in relation to covenants between men. It seems probable, however, that the sacrificial meal of Ge 31:54 included Laban, in which case it was a covenant sacrifice. In any case, both **sacrificial meal** and **sprinkling of blood** upon the two parties, the altar representing Yahweh, are mentioned in Ex 24:4, 5, 6, 7, 8, with allusions elsewhere, in ratification of the covenant at Sinai between Yahweh and Israel...

The **immutability** (unchangeable nature) of a covenant is everywhere assumed, at least theoretically...

This is the case with the **setting up of a stone**, or **raising a heap of stones** (Ge 31:45,46- see **Table Summarizing these aspects in various Biblical covenants**) (**Ed note**: These served as a memorial and so as a steadfast "witness" that the covenant had been cut)...

Striking hands ([see note](#)) is a general expression of an agreement made (Ezra 10:19; Ezek 17:18, etc.). ([Orr, J.: The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia 1915 - G R Berry's article - "Covenant in the OT" - Scroll down to "Principle Elements"](#))

Commingling of the blood (making a cut and mingling blood, making a cut or sacrifice and drinking blood or other liquid from a common cup) of the partners who cut covenant signified that they were now "**blood brothers**" which resulted in a new relationship. When the covenanting partners co-mingled blood either literally or symbolically, the result was that two had become one. The purpose of cuts in the flesh and co-mingling of blood was to symbolize that two had become one and that now because of their covenant (and covenant marks) their lives were intermingled or held in common. As you study and meditate on the concept of covenant, consider the clear and striking parallels with the marriage covenant.

Aristotle in his Ethics quoted one of the well-known proverbs of friendship, 'One soul [in two bodies]'

A modern equivalent of the commingling of the blood is found in the practice of lighting [aunity candle](#) during which the bride and groom light the "unity candle" by simultaneously using two candles previously lit by one of their family member (usually their mother).

"INTER-COMMINGLING"

Clay Trumbull has several comments related to this aspect of covenant... ,

All my thought is, to ascertain what new meaning, if any, is found in the Bible teachings concerning the uses and the symbolism of blood, through our better understanding of the prevailing idea, among the peoples of the ancient world, that blood represents life; that the giving of blood represents the giving of life; that the receiving of blood represents the receiving of life; that the inter-commingling of blood represents the inter-commingling of natures; and that a divine-human inter-union through blood is the basis of a divine-human inter-communion in the sharing of the flesh of the sacrificial offering as sacred food. (Read online - [The Blood Covenant](#))

Below are other quotes from **Trumbull** that mention the term **inter-commingling**...

One of these primitive rites, which is deserving of more attention than it has yet received, as throwing light on many important phases of Bible teaching is the rite of blood-covenanting - a form of mutual covenanting, by which two persons enter into the closest, the most enduring and the most sacred of compacts, as friends and brothers, or as more than brothers, through the **inter-commingling of their blood**, by means of its mutual tasting, or of its inter-transfusion. This rite is still observed in the unchanging East; and there are historic traces of it, from time immemorial, in every quarter of the globe; yet it has been strangely overlooked by biblical critics and biblical commentators generally, in these later centuries. (Read online - [The Blood Covenant](#))

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In bringing this rite of the covenant of blood into new prominence, it may be well for me to tell of it as it was described to me by an intelligent native Syrian, who saw it consummated in a village at the base of the mountains of Lebanon; and then to add evidences of its wide-spread existence in the East and elsewhere, in earlier and in later times.

UNITY CANDLE

([Wikipedia](#))

The lighting of a unity candle ([picture](#)) is a relatively recent addition to the traditional wedding ceremony, most popular in the United States. The unity candle ceremony uses two taper candles with a large pillar candle (called the "unity candle") in the center. At the beginning of the wedding ceremony, a representative from each family (usually the mothers of the bride and groom) light the two taper candles. Later in the ceremony (usually after the formal vows), the bride and groom use the two taper candles to light the large pillar (unity) candle together.

Often a unity candle is decorated with the wedding invitation, an inscription, a picture of the couple, or other ornamentation. The candles are almost always white. The lighting ceremony may be accompanied by special music, an explanation of the symbolism, or just some period of mutual gazing by the happy couple. In some circles, it is customary for the couple to save the unity candle and relight it on anniversaries.

Symbolism- It is sometimes performed to symbolize the joining together of the two families, and their love for the bride and the groom, into one united family that loves the new husband and wife. More often it is to symbolize the union of two individuals, becoming one in [commitment](#). (**Ed:** More Biblically stated they are becoming [one flesh](#) ~ one body, one skin) The popular explanation is that the taper candles are lit by representatives from each family to symbolize the love and allegiance that each family has for either the bride or the groom. As the bride and groom use these two flames to light the unity candle, they bring the love of both families together in a united love of the new couple. Generally, the two tapers are left burning and replaced in their holders (because each family's love for their own will continue). However, in some ceremonies they may blow out their individual candles (**Ed:** One wonders if this might be to symbolize "leaving and cleaving" - Genesis 2:24). When the ceremony is alternatively performed to symbolize simply the joining together of the bride and groom, the tapers may be blown out, to indicate that the two lives have been permanently merged, or they may leave them lit beside the central candle, symbolizing that the now-married partners have not lost their individuality.[1]

Use in Church Weddings - The use of unity candles is a very recent tradition[citation needed], though the meaning assigned to the candles can vary.

While the use of unity candles has become widespread, it is prohibited in some churches.[citation needed] It is not part of the Catholic or Anglican wedding ceremonies, and many parishes do not allow its inclusion in the ceremony. While the US Conference of Catholic Bishops has not explicitly prohibited the use of the unity candle in the marriage rite, neither has it encouraged the practice. The Conference has noted that the policies of most dioceses do not prohibit this custom but many suggest that it be done at the reception since the Rite of Marriage already has abundant symbols of unity. The analysis of the Bishops regarding unity candles concludes by indicating that if the unity candle is permitted, the couple should light their individual candles from the paschal candle, the individual candles should not be extinguished and the unity candle should not be placed on the altar.[2] Within Australia the Unity Candle lighting ceremony has now become part of the Uniting Church wedding Ceremony as an optional extra and is discussed with the parties and the minister prior to the wedding (Uniting church complete marriage service). ([Wikipedia](#))

Illustration of Oneness (somewhat humorous) - Extinguishing Old Flames - Weddings in our church always include the lighting of a unity candle. At one recent rehearsal I was explaining the symbolism of the candle ceremony. "After the middle candle is lit, blowing out the two side candles means the two become one," I said. "Oh," a guest admitted in surprise. "I thought it meant 'no more flames!' " —Greg Asimakoupoulos, Concord, California. "Rolling Down the Aisle," Christian Reader. (Today's Best Illustrations)

Marriage—Two Becoming One - The unity candle is often used in weddings. Both the bride and groom have lighted candles. During the ceremony, they light a single candle in unison. In some cases, the individual candles are blown out to symbolize that the two become one. In other cases, the individual candles remain lighted to symbolize the couple's need to be separate but interwoven in love. Which is the correct symbolism? Either is appropriate. In Matthew 19:4-6 and Mark 10:6-8, Jesus talked about the two becoming [one flesh](#). Each person's individual heritage and identity contribute to a lifetime covenant relationship within marriage. Jesus did not mean that individuality is lost in marriage any more than it is lost in redemption as a disciple is made one with Christ. Christ was quoting from the passage in Genesis 2:24. It is interesting and pertinent to note the meaning of the word flesh. The Genesis reference to flesh is referring to kindred or blood relative. The one flesh, therefore, refers to relational interaction rather than the merging of two individuals into a single being. God created woman from man in order to establish relational compatibility. They were two people in kindred relationship. In Genesis 2:24, the term "one flesh" has a definite sexual connotation, but relational intimacy is also a key factor. Getting to a level of relational intimacy in a marriage that is referred to as one flesh involves a great deal of work. It does not occur automatically with marriage. It involves becoming transparent with one another and emphasizing communication and trust, which oftentimes can be difficult. This is an aspect of the one-flesh relationship that is frequently overlooked. ([William Tillman - Understanding Christian Ethics](#))

A NEW PARTNERSHIP

Lehman Strauss

Lehman Strauss articulates "The Purpose for the Marriage Relationship" - In the God-planned life there is purpose behind the institution of marriage. If you are going to have a happy marriage you should know the purposes and their meaning. First **"Marriage Provides a New Partnership"** The marriage of a man and woman marks a new and exciting union, a partnership for our stay on earth. Before marriage we share life with our family, mother, father, sister or brother; then we find companionship with playmates. But at the time of puberty (which is the state of physical development when it is possible to beget or bear children) we instinctively are drawn to the opposite sex. This is the normal and natural process; it is the way God intended it to be. During these adolescent years we begin to think about marriage. But too often no thought is given to God's purpose for this new relationship. The Apostle Peter tells us that the husband and wife are "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7-[note](#)). The word **"grace"** ([charis](#)) suggests the idea of a gift. The term **"heirs together"** tells us that God has given to the husband and wife the privilege of sharing together their precious gift. Each is God's gift to the other as the new partnership is formed. God said, **"They shall be one flesh"** (Genesis 2:24). Whatever else it is for, marriage is a partnership in which the two become **one**. This is

the biblical view of marriage. This mutual relationship results in mutual fellowship, whether in joy or in sorrow. Where there is a mutual interest in glorifying God, life's burdens become lighter. In this God-planned partnership there must be mutual trust and respect between both partners. Be honest with each other. Level with one another. Talk together and pray together. Don't keep secrets. Share your feelings in love and confidence. You are lifetime partners. Don't be jealous or suspicious of your partner....

The Permanency of the Marriage Relationship - The Bible is clear in its teaching that the marriage relationship is a permanent one. I have never read one verse in the Bible where God approved divorce. The whole idea of divorce is diametrically opposed to the marriage plan as it was instituted by God. From the very beginning God intended one man for one woman and no more. Marriage is for life. Divorce is one of society's serious crimes. Every Christian who wants God's will for his or her life must settle this issue at once. **I have made it clear in all of my premarital counseling that any person contemplating marriage should accept what God says about the permanency of marriage or else remain unmarried.** The person who utters the solemn vow, "Till death do us part," and contemplates the possibility of the divorce court if the marriage does not succeed, is a liar and a hypocrite. Remember, God holds the marriage contract.

The Lord Jesus Christ could not be in disagreement with His Father's ruling on the permanency of marriage. He said, "Have ye not read, that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9 cf. Genesis 2:24). Please note that it is "What God hath joined together," not "Whom God hath joined together." The emphasis is upon the institution of marriage, not upon a certain class of persons coming to be married. The rule of permanency is binding upon all married persons. Marriage is a civil institution, that is, the rules apply to all civilization. When Moses wrote "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife," God most assuredly knew that Adam's posterity would be fallen sinners. When the statement was given there were no fathers and mothers. God is the Author of civil and moral law as well as spiritual law. The marriage relation supersedes the relation of the child to the parents. The man must cleave to his wife for life.

If you want a happy marriage, abide by God's rules and shun the demon of divorce. Beware of all teaching and teachers, whether in or out of the organized church, which speak of "scriptural grounds for divorce." Such "grounds" are based on a single parenthetical phrase, "except it be for fornication" (Matthew 5:32; 19:9). In the entire context in which the parenthesis appears, our Lord is teaching the permanency, or indissolubility of the marriage relation.

Recently I read again Malachi 2:11-16. I am convinced that the prophet was strongly persuaded that God was not hearing the prayers of His people because of the multiple divorces in Israel at that time. What Malachi wrote indicates clearly that God hates divorce.

Now does the parenthesis, "except it be for fornication" change the teaching in the entire context? Of course not! I have examined several English standard dictionaries, and they all make the clear distinction between the words "fornication" and "adultery." These two words are not used interchangeably because they are not synonymous in their meanings. The word "fornication" (Gr. [porneia](#)) means "illicit sexual intercourse of unmarried persons." The word "adultery" (Gr. [Moicheia](#) cp [moichos](#)) means "illicit sexual intercourse of two persons when either is married to a third person." In the exception clause our Lord used the word "fornication." The word He used had not lost its meaning, and we may be certain He expressed Himself clearly. The exception clause is not dealing with the sin of married persons.

Why then did Christ use the word "fornication" of that sin of which a "wife" can be guilty? A wife in the Orient was so called when the betrothal or engagement was announced. This is evidenced in Matthew 1:19 where we read, "Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily." Actually he was not her husband by the standards of our western civilization because there had not been the consummation of the civil ceremony nor the marriage act. Mary's pregnancy was looked upon (by those who did not know the truth) as the result of fornication, not adultery. In verse 20 the angel added, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife." According to our Western usage of the word "wife" she was not yet Joseph's wife, but by the custom of the Jews, a betrothed girl was called a wife. (See Deuteronomy 22:23-24.) Joseph accepted the testimony of the angel, believing that Mary had not committed fornication. Our Lord's enemies would not believe the truth about his supernatural and miraculous conception, and so they taunted Him with the innuendo, "We be not born of fornication" (John 8:41). The parenthetical phrase, "except it be for fornication" does not fit the case of married persons. Our Lord

is merely saying that sexual unfaithfulness on the part of either party involved in a betrothal agreement, allows for the breaking of that contract. God's rule that marriage is for life has never been annulled.

Listen again to Christ speaking. "Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery" (Luke 16:18). This verse might appear to be disconnected from the rest of the passage, but actually it is an essential part of the context. The Pharisees had derided Christ for His teaching in the parable in verses 1-12. While they were legalistic in their demands upon others, insisting that Moses' laws be obeyed, they were guilty of breaking those same laws . . .

In answering their ridicule, Christ said, "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the Kingdom of God is preached . . ." (vs. 16). He defends the law of Moses in verse 17, and immediately follows with His "Kingdom of God" teaching about marriage. The marriage rule in verse 18 preceded and superseded the Law of Moses. This is God's rule for His people.

Now examine our Lord's words in Mark 10:11,12. "And He saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery." In both the Mark and Luke passages there is not the "exception" clause. The word "adultery" is used, The message is unmistakably clear. The demon of divorce is condemned.

In conclusion there is one more passage we should consider. It is one that has been used to justify divorce and remarriage. "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace" (I Corinthians 7:15). It appears from verse 12 that Paul is speaking of a marriage involving a believer and an unbeliever. Not that there had been an unequal yoke at the time of marriage, but a case where one had been converted to Christ after marriage and the other had not. Such a case would not be uncommon. Nor would it be uncommon for the unsaved partner to oppose his or her spouse and separate. In such instances the believer is not to oppose the departure of the unbeliever. Then follows the statement, "A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases."

This statement that "a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases" has been made the basis of the argument in favor of divorce and remarriage. But it is unsound exegesis that arrives at this false conclusion. Verses 10 and 11 in the context say, "Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried." Now is there contradiction in the context of this passage in I Corinthians 7? Of course not! The fault does not lie in the Scripture but with those of us who interpret the Scriptures.

Does the statement in verse 15, "a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases" teach divorce and remarriage? Some say, Yes! But does it? The Greek word translated "bondage" is *doulouo* means to serve as a slave. The verse is saying that if the unbelieving partner separates, the believer is not under obligation to the departing unbeliever. There is no responsibility in matters of servitude. A sound exegesis eliminates any reference to the basic marriage relationship.

Now to the proof! In verse 27 we read, "Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed . . ." Here the word "bound" is the Greek word *desmeuo*, the term Paul used when referring to the marriage relationship. He used the same word when speaking about the permanency of marriage in Romans 7, "For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth . . ." (Romans 7:2). If Paul had reference to marriage in I Corinthians 7:15 he unquestionably would have used this word. Most certainly he is not allowing for marriage and divorce. Those who teach that he is are in error both contextually and exegetically.

The full truth on any subject cannot be gathered from an isolated passage, but rather from the cumulative revelation of all the Scriptures which deal with the same truth. If we had only Matthew 5:31, 32, and Matthew 19:11, the champions of divorce and remarriage might have some grounds upon which to stand. But when all of the New Testament passages on marriage and divorce are considered, the total cumulative revelation will show that remarriage of divorced persons for any reason the divorce might have been obtained, is not sanctioned by God but constitutes adultery in His sight.

The bond formed in the marriage union is a permanent one. Divorce and remarriage never were a part of God's plan for mankind. You can have a happy marriage if you follow the rules in God's Book. **(For full article see [Lehman Strauss - Marriage, Abortion, Divorce](#))**