

The LAW and COVENANT of MARRIAGE As it relates to Divorce, Adultery and Plural Marriage

The general definition of the word covenant may prove helpful. In the dictionary of the King James' version of the Holy Bible, the word Covenant is defined as:

"Sometimes denoting an agreement between persons, or nations, more often between God and man; but in this latter case the two parties to the agreement do not stand in the relation of independent and equal contractors. God in His good pleasure fixes the terms, which man accepts.

The same word is rendered 'testament' and this is liable to create confusion, The 'Old Testament' contains the covenant or covenants made by God with His people before the Coming of Christ. When a covenant was made, either between God and man, or between one man and another, a victim was slain and divided, hence such phrases as 'the blood of the covenant'.

The 'New Testament' contains the new covenant made between God and man, ratified by the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ. By this covenant God promises to those who are 'in Christ' forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He requires in return our faith, our love, and our obedience."

Reading this, it cannot help but bring to the mind of a Mormon, an interesting parallel. Joseph Smith ushered in the final dispensation, and established 'The New and Everlasting Covenant' of the restored gospel, with himself becoming the sacrifice confirming this covenant. This covenant is 'New' because it is the gospel, and laws, and covenant that were established by Christ by fulfilling and replacing the first covenant made with Adam. And it is 'Everlasting' because of God's promise that it would never again be taken from the earth. Some have taught that it is everlasting because it is a covenant that cannot be broken. In part that is true, however, no covenant made with God has ever been able to be broken by man, to be no longer in effect. A man can only live in violation of a covenant, once it has been entered into. So, actually, all covenants made with God have always been everlasting in that respect.

To investigate this 'New and Everlasting Covenant' with its particular meaning in regard to marriage, we must begin with the Doctrine and Covenants, Section 132. In this section, among other things, it states that only covenants and agreements ratified by the Holy Spirit of Promise, which is the authoritative agent of God Himself, will remain in effect after this life, and all else will be of no effect when men are dead, or in other words, out of this worldly existence. More particular, this is stated as several examples of marriage. One of which, follows.

D&C 132:15

Therefore, if a man marry him a wife in the world, and he marry her not by me nor by my word, and he covenant with her so long as he is in the world and she with him, their covenant and marriage are not of force when they are dead, and when they are out of the world; therefore, they are not bound by any law when they are out of the world.

Stopping here, a very important point must be made. Two truths are expounded. The first is what can be referred to as a foreground issue. It is, what is obviously stated. That any marriage made in the world, or sanctioned only by worldly laws, ends with the death of at least one of the parties to that marriage. The other, background issue, is that a marriage covenant made in the world, by the law of the world, is binding in the sight of God while the parties are still alive and in the world. The point to be made is that although God will not recognize this type of marriage after this mortal life, He does recognize it and holds the parties involved in it accountable for it, while they are alive in mortality. A marriage in the world, by the world's laws is sanctioned, recognized, held valid, deemed binding, lawful, legal, and is ordained by God as a valid institution of union for the fulfillment of bringing souls into this realm of creation. Furthermore, God's laws concerning marriage as stated in the Bible apply primarily to this worldly form of marriage, as will be seen. An eternal marriage that remains intact after this life not only falls under the laws stated in the Bible, but also has other, or additional, requirements to be met and complied with to have God's approval, and blessings.

To understand the differences for a marriage that will be recognized after this life, another example has been supplied.

D&C 132:19

And again, verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife by my

Word, which is my law, and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise, by him who is anointed, unto whom I have appointed this power and the keys of this priesthood; and it shall be said unto them- Ye shall come forth in the first resurrection; and if it be after the first resurrection, in the next resurrection; and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths- then shall it be written in the Lambs Book of Life, that he shall commit no murder whereby to shed innocent blood, and if ye abide in my covenant, and commit no murder whereby to shed innocent blood, it shall be done unto them in all things whatsoever my servant hath put upon them, in time, and through all eternity; and shall be of full force when they are out of the world; and they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fullness and continuation of the seeds forever and ever.

This is rather explicit and serves as a well-defined template whereby a comparison can be made to any other marriage ceremony.

Definition of the word 'Marriage' is a good place to begin with. Again from the Bible dictionary it says:

"Marriage among the Jews was usually preceded by a formal act of betrothal, such a contract being regarded as absolutely binding. On the marriage day, the bride was escorted to her husband's home by a procession consisting of her own companions, and the 'friends of the bridegroom', or the 'children of the bride-chamber'. When she reached the house, some such words as 'Take her according to the Law of Moses and of Israel' were spoken, the pair were crowned with garlands, and a marriage deed was signed. After the prescribed washing of hands and benediction, the marriage supper was held. For a year after marriage a man was released from all military service,"

The Christian and gentile forms of marriages are performed essentially the same. They all have someone to administer or perform the ritual, witnesses, vows offered and the term of the covenant or contract expressed, which is usually until death. There are also less formal types of marriages that are no less under the auspices of the heavens.

This description, while not fitting the template for an eternal marriage, does serve as a

fine example of traditional marriage, in many cultures, down through thousands of years of history. These were performed more-or-less in compliance with the method established by Moses, an undisputed prophet of God, and these too must therefore be an acceptable marriage in the eyes of God, and a marriage for which God, through Moses, delineated His commandments, which govern any marriages of the children of Israel on this earth.

In the New Testament, Christ and his apostles clarify and amplify the laws, or commandments with regard to all marriage covenants among the children of Israel. These obviously apply to all and should be clearly understood by all people who believe in, and worship the God of Israel.

To begin developing an understanding, and a clear picture of the laws that govern all marriages of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, including all Christian sects as well, we will refer to the words of Christ. There are only a few scriptures that directly apply to this subject and there is a fair amount of redundancy. Nevertheless, they all will be presented for clarity. Starting with the book of Matthew, it states:

MATTHEW 5:31,32.

It has been said, whosoever shall put away his wife let him give her a writing of divorcement:

But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced commiteth adultery,

During Christ's sermon on the mount, he raised this issue, and stated it quite clearly. To begin with, and as will be seen later, the notion that a bill of divorcement could be issued to dissolve a marriage comes from a provision made in the days of Moses. It is necessary to understand why that was allowed, and under what circumstances could it be invoked. The answer lies in the book of Deuteronomy.

DEUTERONOMY 24:1.

When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.

The Hebrew word that was interpreted here as uncleanness, is also interpreted as nakedness. With some further investigation, which will not be chronicled here, it becomes clear that what is meant by this statement is that the husband was told by his bride-to-be, or her father, that she was a virgin, and he found out after they were married that she had lied, and was not a virgin at the time they were married. Under this specific circumstance alone, a bill of divorcement could be legitimately issued. To adequately understand the gravity of this situation, it is important to follow this scenario to its conclusion the way it would have been resolved under the Law of Moses. We find this also in the book of Deuteronomy.

DEUTERONOMY 22:13-21.

If any man take a wife, and go in unto her, and hate her, And give occasions of speech against her, and bring up an evil name upon her, and say, I took this woman, and when I came to her, I found her not a maid: Then shall the father of the damsel, and her mother, take and bring forth the tokens of the damsel's virginity unto the elders of the city in the gate: And the damsel's father shall say unto the elders, I gave my daughter to this man to wife, and he hateth her; And, he hath given occasions of speech against her, saying, I found not thy daughter a maid; and yet these are the tokens of my daughter's virginity. And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city. And the elders of the city shall take that man and chastise him; And they shall amerce him in an hundred shekels of silver, and give them unto the father of the damsel, because he hath brought an evil name upon a virgin of Israel: and she shall be his wife; and he may not put her away all his days. But if this thing be true, and the tokens of virginity be not found for the damsel: Then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her fathers house, and the men of the city shall stone her with stones that she die: because she hath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her fathers house: so shalt thou put away evil from among you.

This is very serious business. If a husband lies, or is mistaken, he is humiliated, and the silver that is given to his father-in-law comes from his pocket as a restitution payment for dishonoring his families name. If the woman has lied, having her stoned at their front door dishonors her parents, and she dies a painful and horrible death.

For better understanding of this subject, two terms need to be properly defined. They are Fornication and Adultery. The definitions that will be offered here are not wholly consistent with currently accepted definitions and contemporary dictionaries. They are however, accurate to the intent and context of the scriptures that follow and are consistent with how God apparently defines them, as well as consistent with the gospel to which they apply.

The word 'fornication' as used here is the act of sexual intercourse between people that are not under a marriage vow to one another.

The word 'adultery' is the adulterating of a union, or covenant made, or sanctioned by God. It is the sin of an illegal combination in the sight of God, which includes fornication, or stated another way, the sinful effort to destroy the work of God by trying to undo, or set aside a union originally sanctioned by God and make a different one through an act of sexual intercourse which might, or might not, be attended by a secondary ritual of marriage, all of which is not sanctioned by God, and which man no longer has the authority to do once originally done. A man or woman has the right to marry anyone they wish the first time. However, once that right is exercised and a union made, it is taken out of their hands and resides only with their Maker after that.

The Savior stated these truths this way:

MATTHEW 19:3-12.

The Pharisees also came to him, and saying unto him, is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, 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 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 no man put asunder. They say unto him, why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, commiteth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery,

The main points to be reckoned with is that when people marry they not only dwell together, join together socially and sexually, but also there is a joining in the way they are viewed by God. God no longer sees them as two separate people, but one entity together. Once that is done, we cannot undo it through any means other than what is provided by God. At that point man is no longer authorized to modify that combination, except as described in this paper. Even the bad and wicked deeds of the parties to the union cannot change the fact. They can only violate the conditions of that union as defined by the author and maker of the union, who is God Himself. This union in the sight of God is a permanent change that occurs in an individual's status before God, which is done by God when people exercise their choice to enter into this sacred union, and after it is initiated no one has license to tamper with it, and trying to do so brings the condemnation of God upon them. It should be remembered that this applies to any and every marriage that is entered into, no matter how casually the participants might view it, or how lightly it may have been considered before hand. This, as does everything else to be found in the Bible on this subject, applies to marriages performed by the justice of the peace, to the grand wedding held in the church, or synagogue, and even to the common law agreement of exchanged vows between consenting adults. Once a marriage is entered into, by the children of God, who have heard the law and should understand it, then God's governing laws apply, whether it's liked, or not, and becomes part of the criteria on which we will be judged at the last day.

It is important to understand the gravity associated with being declared an adulterer. As we define terms and consider sin in the intellectual context of literary investigation, it is too easy to lose sight of the fact that moral perversion is one of the most serious offenses to God, next to the murder of an innocent person. The following may help give us a sense of just how serious this offense is.

DEUTERONOMY 22:22.

If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel.

The simple truth here is that the punishment for adultery was physical death. The penalty in this day and age does not take away our mortal life, but is a spiritual death by the withdrawal of the Spirit and blessings of God in our lives. It is a spiritual death, but a death nonetheless, and is as sure as the setting of the sun once it has risen.

To illustrate the basis for the preceding definition of adultery, consider which people in the examples given by Christ are labeled as having committed adultery. In Matthew Chapter 5 he said the man putting his wife away caused her to commit adultery. This implies blame to him, but does not relieve her of the sin also, even though she may have believed her bill of divorcement freed her from any condemnation. Since the man causes all this to happen, he too must be guilty. This is actually verified in Matthew Chapter 19 where he is properly condemned if he remarries. In both cases, the man marrying the estranged wife is also guilty of adultery. He would seem rather innocent of the folly of the original pair. However, according to the definition offered earlier, he is guilty, even if unwittingly, of trying to change, or make a different union than the one God had already sanctioned and recognized. This becomes the basis of his fatal error. The definition holds true and renders clear understanding in the context of these illustrations. Once understood, it enlightens the mind to the awful epidemic of condemnation people are foolishly bringing upon themselves in the world, in the church, or in any congregation of Christ's people today. If people were still stoned to death for committing adultery, the world would truly be a desolate place. The people remaining however, would be troubled with far fewer sexually transmitted diseases, and would enjoy a greater outpouring of the Spirit and blessings of a loving and nurturing God, instead of the judgments and scourges we endure today. In reality the price paid today is even more insidious than being stoned to death, for two reasons. First, if the sin is not repented of, there is a spiritual death that attends the sin of adultery, wherein God withdraws His influence from us and we fall victim to our avowed enemy Satan. Unfortunately, there is no earthly, immediate, and outward sign of this occurrence. It happens without fanfare or any kind of official notification that would alert even the offender to the change. If determined Vigilance is not employed with great care, sensitivity, and understanding of the law, a life can pass without awareness to the peril it is in, until it is too late and this temporary, probationary state is over and we die, sealing our fate for eternity. Secondly, Stoning did cause the blood of the offender to be spilled upon the earth and their life lost in an act of paying for their transgression, which is a prescribed sacrifice and is acceptable to God as payment for that sin. However shocking that idea may be, it does offer an opportunity for an individual to pay for the sin and permits them a better resurrected state than if the law had not been satisfied at all.

Christ's apostles understood the implications of the law and the stricter rendering pronounced by Jesus. Their reaction is found in Matthew 19: 10. Starting with verse 9

for clarity, through verse 12, we have Christ's answer to their concerns.

MATTHEW 19: 9 -12.

And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, commiteth 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. But he said unto them, all men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born, from their mothers' womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heavens sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

This will not be exhaustively explained in all its implications and possible applications. What is true and accurate, even if incomplete, is that upon hearing the pronouncement of their Master, knowing the strictness of the law, and imagining the compounding effect of many divorces and re-marriages that did, and do go on, with the resulting jeopardy of unknowingly being guilty of adultery by just entering into a marriage where the woman may have lied about her past, they concluded that marriage was truly a dangerous thing. Jesus could not soften the law, but could only state the obvious. That being, if a righteous man found himself in a condition that marrying a certain woman, or reentering marriage with any woman, would place him under condemnation of the law, he must, for the kingdom of heavens sake, and for his own salvation in it, refrain and thereby make himself a functional eunuch as it relates to that situation. Obviously, not all men are able to receive this and live according to it.

Going on to the Book of Mark, the same event as in Matthew 19:3-9, is described with a slight variation.

MARK 10: 2 -12.

And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? Tempting him. And he answered and said unto them, what did Moses command you? And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. And Jesus answered and said unto them, for the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept: But from the beginning of the

creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. 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,

Evidently, they also had wife-initiated divorces also in that day. This, as well as being socially enlightening, is another variation on the theme, which is spelled out clearly, so there will be no misunderstanding which might afford an alibi by virtue of ambiguity.

In the book of First Corinthians, the apostle Paul is striving to advise members of the gospel who were struggling with difficult issues involving marriage, fidelity, and moral correctness. Not only were there marriages which had the usual difficulties, there were now marriages entered into before the conversion of only one of the married pair. Much of what was taught in this particular letter was counsel aimed at trying to mitigate already convoluted situations. An explanation, and clarification of these advisory teachings of Paul's opinion can be found in D&C 74. Part of Paul's teachings are his opinions, as already stated, and some are commandment from the Lord, to be fair to Brother Paul, he does clearly identify which of these teachings are opinion and which are directly from the Lord. That part which is direct commandment is unmistakably clear.

1 CORINTHIANS 7: 10 -11.

And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.

There is no ambiguity here. The marriage cannot be altered, even if it means living out the rest of one's life alone and celibate. This may seem harsh, but it is unmistakably the law, nevertheless. There is one general opportunity for a woman to possibly remarry. Since a wife is under the law of her husband while he is alive, when he dies she is no longer bound by that constraint, and she may marry again if she desires to do so, without

the condemnation of adultery. This is stated in the following scripture:

1 CORINTHIANS 7:39.

The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.

Here is proof that Paul's teachings, and the source of these teachings, namely; Christ Himself, were addressing even the common form of marriage that ends with the end of this life. The last thought in this verse means that the woman in this circumstance, when re-marrying should marry within the church, by proper priesthood authority. This form of remarriage is stated also in the Book of Romans.

ROMANS 7:2-3.

For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another then, she shall be called and adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from the law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.

Note the implication that under the law, that if a woman remarried while her first husband was still living, she was considered an adulteress, and therefore subject to the prescribed punishment, along with the man who married her.

In latter days, the Mormon Church was given specific instruction with regard to accepting previously married individuals into the church and community, and how to handle existing members that separate from their spouse. This instruction is given by way of commandment in the following passage:

D&C 42:74-78.

Behold, verily I say unto you, that whatever persons among you, having put away their companions for the cause of fornication, or in other words, if they shall testify before you in all lowliness of heart that this is the case, ye shall not cast them out from among you; But if ye shall find that any persons have left their companions for the sake of adultery, and they themselves are the offenders, and their companions are living, they shall be cast out

from among you. And again, I say unto you, that ye shall be watchful and careful, with all inquiry, that ye receive none such among you if they are married; and if they are not married, they shall repent of all their sins or ye shall not receive them. And again, every person who belongeth to this church of Christ shall observe to keep all the commandments and covenants of the church.

Once again it is amply clear that what Christ taught applies to all those who would be called by His name. Since Christ's day, people are no longer stoned to death for the sin of adultery. The temporal punishment now is supposed to be disenfranchisement, or expulsion from the body of Christ, or His church, or congregation, if not repented of and ever repeated. The spiritual penalty is to stand in shame before the face of God, if it is not repented of, and forsaken, to be found on the left hand of Christ at the final judgment. With the ultimate price to be paid by living for endless eternities outside the presence of God our Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

The impression is often left, and indeed some even teach that this law requires a woman to endure, and even to participate in what ever her husband wishes to put upon her, with no avenue of escape in this life. Making her completely dominated, and at the mercy of her husband whether he be righteous or wicked. This is not the case, nor was that ever intended to be what God would condone. To clarify this common misconception, it is enlightening to determine what standard of conduct is expected of a husband in relation to his life and family.

There is a large body of scripture which taken together spells out what can be simply stated; that a man who claims to be a follower of Christ and his teachings is expected to emulate Christ in his own life and embody the example offered by our Lord while He was in His earthly ministry. He is to be a savior to his own family and in some measure to anyone within his sphere of influence by his teachings and example. This obviously precludes any wickedness, carnal mindedness, abusive treatment of women or children, or any evil thing. He is to be like Jesus Christ in the treatment of his wife and children. God holds men to the highest standards of conduct. With respect to adultery, Christ put it this way:

MATTHEW 5:27-28.

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

A man is obviously expected to be virtuous in every way, and even lustful thoughts subject him to the judgments of God. This is the Savior stating the way He will judge even a man's thoughts in direct language so as to not be misunderstood. The Lord expects a man to commit himself to walk in the footsteps of his Lord and Master and do the works of Christ, if nowhere else, at least in his own family. The following expresses that very sentiment.

MATTHEW 16:25-30. (Joseph Smith Translation-Inspired Version)

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. And now for a man to take up his cross is to deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments. Break not my commandments for to save your lives; for whosoever will save his life in this world, shall lose it in the world to come. And whosoever will lose his life in this world, for my sake, shall find it in the world to come. Therefore, forsake the world, and save your souls; for what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels; and then shall reward every man according to his works.

The apostles continued to teach after the crucifixion, the things they received at the feet of the Savior, and through their subsequent teachings we know more of the teachings of Christ in greater scope than just what was recorded in the four books covering the Saviors earthly life and ministry. Evidently the Lord expects a man to attend to the temporal well being of his family as well as offering them the benefit of his wisdom and guidance.

1 TIMOTHY 5:8.

But if any [man] provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

What the Lord expects of the marriage union between a husband and wife, and the proper actions of the children of the household, is expressed best in the Book of Ephesians.

EPHESIANS 5:21-6:4.

Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself, for no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband. Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promises) that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Having laid out the stringent requirements a man is obligated to, it should not be assumed by a wife that if her own husband might fall short of what she understands to be his obligation, or her interpretation of what is Christ-like demeanor, that she is then empowered and justified in becoming her husbands judge and task master. It is then she has her opportunity to learn to be Christ-like herself. The order of love and respect is well defined, and stated in the following:

1 CORINTHIANS 11 :3.

But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.

After expressing how things should be, it is unfortunately true that there are abusive and wicked men oppressing women and children and the question might well be asked if a woman must submit herself, or her children to evil treatment. The answer quite simply is no, there is no such requirement, stated, or implied. Care should be exercised to understand if a husband is merely annoying, or if there truly is reason to remove oneself from contact with a husband. If unjustified, such separation constitutes rebellion against proper order and will be accounted as unrighteousness on the part of the woman. If however, the wife finds herself, or her children in actual peril, a wicked, or evil situation, then she is not required to remain in it, nor does she have to participate in it and can temporarily, or permanently remove herself, and her children from it, by her own decision. She may not however, remarry while her husband still lives, and it would seem reasonable, and proper to believe that if the husband caused such a separation by his evil deeds, he may not marry again either. Leaving the dominion of a wicked man does not damn a good woman. But it does not relieve her of her obligations to adhere to the law either.

It would seem that any marriage is an irreversible pairing of individuals that is either honored for the rest of this life, or abandoned and never entered into again in the face of a singular failure ending in an unjustified divorce. Sexual intimacies outside wedlock, once the institution of marriage has been entered, is fornication resulting in the sin of adultery which imposes celibacy for the remainder of mortality, if one is to have salvation of one's soul in the eternal worlds. Indeed, this is the plain rendering of the scriptures, and to be on safe ground, and firm footing in one's life, would dictate strict adherence to them.

Under the law, as stated by Christ, there are those who are party to a broken marriage that do not automatically come under the condemnation of adultery, if they remarry. If a woman's husband dies, she may remarry without condemnation. Although, it would be better if she remained single and pure until death. A man whose wife leaves him of her own choosing and has sexual relations with another man, or his wife dies, is not considered adulterous if he remarries. Nor is he condemned if his wife confesses infidelity, or is caught in the act, and he no longer has sex with her giving her a bill of divorcement and sends her out of his life, and then takes another wife.

If a woman is found to be not a virgin at the time of marriage, under the Mosaic Law, she could be given a bill of divorcement and sent away, or if the issue were taken to the elders of the city, she would be put to death. Under the New Covenant, or New Testament, it seems that the Lord would prefer that a bill of divorcement, and stoning, be replaced with forgiveness, if repentance is performed for the foolish act of a previously unmarried woman, with the strict requirement that nothing like it ever be repeated.

The precedent for the forgiveness of the sin of adultery is also well established, but must be accurately understood, because of its limitations, and strict application. The scriptural example is found in the Book of John.

JOHN 8:3-11.

And the scribes and pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him that they might have [cause] to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

It is obvious from this that a clear case of adultery can be forgiven. It should also be understood that this sin can only be forgiven once, and must never be repeated. To verify this conclusion, reference is made to the Book of Doctrine and Covenants.

D&C 42:24-26.

Thou shalt not commit adultery; and he that committeth adultery, and repenteth not, shall be cast out. But he that has committed adultery and repents with all his heart, and forsaketh it, and

doeth it no more, thou shalt forgive; But if he doeth it again, he shall not be forgive", but shall be cast out.

Regarding the practice of being married to more than one woman at the same time, the only modern scriptural reference is found in the Doctrine and Covenants, Section 132. Here again, this matter must be carefully understood to avoid falling victim to the snare of adultery. This entire section relates to the 'New and Everlasting Covenant'. Contained in this, which is God's Law and His Word concerning the subject of marriage, are two divisions. The overall law governing all marriages, and the law of the Holy Priesthood. The law of the Holy Priesthood as contained in the New and Everlasting Covenant, allows for plural marriage without the condemnation of adultery, if properly conducted and administered. It is very precise and strictly defined, and entirely consistent with the laws of marriage already spelled out. All of the law as established and clarified by Christ directly applies, and because this involves the holders of the High Priesthood, the strictest adherence to the law is expected. This includes all of the original law of Moses that Christ upheld, coupled with the new, or additional pronouncements made by the Savior, which we received directly from Him, or through His apostles, and prophets which came after Him, who's teachings we find in canonized scripture.

In Section 132 the Lord gives this portion of the New and Everlasting Covenant pertaining to the subject of marriage and adultery, and defines it's application, and results. He then in verse 28 begins dealing with the particular issue of defining adultery in this context, and the issue of many wives and concubines, which was the original query of Joseph Smith to the Lord that instigated this revelation in the first place.

D&C 132:28.

I am the Lord thy God, and will give unto thee the law of my Holy Priesthood, as was ordained by me and my Father before the world was.

In this Section, the Lord then goes on talking about the men who were given wives and concubines, and an example concerning adultery, and then some things specific to Joseph Smith and his wife Emma. Then, getting back to the subject at hand in verse 58, quoted later in this paper, which begins, "Now, as touching the law of the priesthood ... ", He goes on to explain that He will uphold Joseph in all he does which is in compliance with God's Law and His Word. In verse 61, the Lord spells out precisely what this is in

relation to plural marriage.

D&C 132:61-63.

And again, as pertaining to the law of the priesthood - if any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another, and the first give her consent, and if he espouse the second, and they are virgins, and have vowed to no other man, then is he justified; he cannot commit adultery with that that belongeth unto him and to no one else. And if he have ten virgins given unto him by this law, he cannot commit adultery, for they belong to him; therefore is he justified. But if one or either of the ten virgins, after she is espoused, shall be with another man, she has committed adultery, and shall be destroyed; for they are given unto him to multiply and replenish the earth, according to my commandment, and to fulfill the promise which was given by my Father before the foundation of the world, and for their exaltation in the eternal worlds, that they may bear the souls of men; for herein is the work of my Father continued, that he may be glorified.

The Law here is very explicit. To engage in this Law the women to be married must be virgins. Without trying to define the circumstances by which a woman qualifies for this title, or may re-qualify, by virtue of repentance, it is clear that a woman that has already been married, and previously been given to another man, which man is still living, does not qualify, except under a singular provision that follows.

There is only one circumstance, under specific conditions, that alterations to the initial marriage under the New and Everlasting Covenant can be made. Once again, it is only in response to violation of existing covenants as a matter of correcting a situation that is un-redeemable, and is unjust to the virtuous member of the pair.

D&C 132:41-44.

And as ye have asked concerning adultery, verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man receiveth a wife in the new and everlasting covenant, and if she be with another man, and I have not appointed unto her by the holy anointing, she hath committed adultery and shall be destroyed. If she be not in the new and everlasting covenant, and she be with another man, she has committed adultery, And if her husband be with another woman, and he was under a law, he hath

broken his vow and hath committed adultery. And if she hath not committed adultery, but is innocent and hath not broken her vow, and she knoweth it, and I reveal it unto you, my servant Joseph, then shall you have power, by the power of my Holy Priesthood, to take her and give her unto him that hath not committed adultery but hath been faithful; for he shall be made ruler over many.

As can be seen, this provision is very narrow and limited in its application. A valid and authorized dissolving of a marriage, which will be recognized and accepted by God involves only the case of an adulterous husband, and requires innocence on the wife's part, and only then a direct revelation to Joseph or he who stands in Joseph's place on earth is required, just for authorization for this holder of Joseph's authority to intervene in each case, to modify one marriage union by way of direct revelation from God. The language regarding an appointed man to a woman by holy anointing is recognition of this provision being stated inside the self-same provision. What should be clear beyond any doubt, or disputation at this point, is that so-called releases, or divorces from dysfunctional marriages, which are based on a variety of accusations offered as grounds that range from the obviously minor to the seemingly profound, but not for adultery, have no validity under the law of God. The only acceptable reason for a release from a marriage is clearly spelled out, and allows for no variation, nor deviation, and requires direct revelation from the Lord, who will permit and appoint a new husband for the valiant and virtuous woman, by holy anointing. The simple rule for the majority of married people who wish to have the acceptance of God, and his Spirit upon them is, that if you are in a marriage, be true to that marriage covenant, make it work, or give up and never enter another, living single and celibate for the rest of your life on earth. If you should find yourself in a questionable circumstance, created due to ignorance of the true law, you must weary the Lord in humble supplication, with a broken and contrite heart to know your standing before God, and what repentance is required of you to gain favor and forgiveness in the eyes of the Lord. All things can be corrected by following the directions of the Lord through the Holy Ghost, and through the atonement of Jesus Christ, keeping in mind that an existing marriage which may have been improperly entered into does not have to automatically be abandoned, but may become the foundation of a proper, and acceptable union through correct repentance and dedication to correct principle and law thereafter.

Some espouse the notion that the holder of the priesthood sealing keys is empowered to exercise them to bind and loose on earth and in heaven according to his own

Judgement or whim, or if he wishes, in agreement with the current earthly wisdom and traditions, and all will be accepted as valid operations of God, and therefore acceptable to God. Verses 58-59 clearly establish the boundaries of this authority.

D&C 132:58-59.

Now as touching the law of the priesthood, there are many things pertaining thereunto. Verily, if a man be called of my Father, as was Aaron, by my own voice, and by the voice of Him that sent me, and I have endowed him with the keys of the power of this priesthood, if he will do anything in my name, and according to my law and by my word, he will not commit sin, and I will justify him.

It's true he can do anything as long as it is in compliance with the law of God, which is the word of God, pertaining to the thing, which is to be done. What is equally true is that if things are done in violation of the law and word of God, there will be no justification, which may affect all the individuals concerned. This applied, and continues to apply to Joseph Smith as the holder of the keys in this last dispensation, and also to those who receive them in the chain of succession from him until the Second Coming of Christ. The law, which applies to marriage, and legitimate divorce, on earth, is easily understood and is represented accurately herein.

It is not the purpose here to explain, nor contradict any alleged actions taken by Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, or any other of God's servants who have held and now hold this authority, in respect to releases they may have granted. Any man holding those keys of this authority is fully capable of answering for themselves, since they are the only one's who are aware of all the facts in the cases they presided over. In any case, they owe no explanations to anyone, but Joseph Smith and the Lord. The purpose and intent here is to spell out what the scriptural law is, in the hope that being well informed may translate to repentance, if needed, and thoughtful and careful actions in one's life to avoid falling into transgression, because of ignorance to the law. Which, as we well know, will not be a valid excuse or defense when we are facing Christ to be judged.

The only conclusion to be reached, in the face of all the canonized, or authoritative information on this subject, is that the marriage covenant, entered into by whatever ceremony chosen by those entering it, once done, is viewed by God as permanent, while in this world, and unalterable, except in a case where the spouse violates very precise codes of sexual conduct, either before, or after the marriage vows are made. And then

any correction, or change to that initial union must be done in strict accordance to prescribed law and revelation from the Lord to be justifiable. Otherwise, if the first attempt at marriage goes badly, and ends in an unjustified divorce, it ends any subsequent marriages that would be acceptable to God, thereafter, remarriage after remarriage is but going from one adultery to another, and any questionable remarriage exposes all parties to the condemnation of adultery and its eternal consequences.

It is true that people make bad choices and decisions in their lives that lead to wrong actions. Because of Christ's atonement any mistake can be repented of, and come under the covering of the Saviors mercy and forgiveness, with the only exceptions being the deliberate shedding of innocent blood, and the denial of the Holy Ghost. This forgiveness includes failed marriages, and other mortal, moral sins. There are laws that govern repentance as well, and fearful, cautious, careful, and sincere repentance can overcome anything if it is within those laws, and accepted by our Redeemer. It would be well to note that, although the punishment seemed more severe, the Mosaic Law condemned fewer of those involved in failed marriages as adulterers, as compared to Christ's pronouncement of the law. Christ allows for repentance, but He also made the law to include everyone with any complicity, as parties to the adultery, which is a stricter rendering of the law. It is this stricter rendering that applies to us today. Lest we take too lightly these things, it would be wise to remember that above all, God will not be mocked, and neither will Christ.

Understanding this law is not meant to provide a yardstick whereby anyone should judge his or her neighbor. It is meant to expose and express the yardstick whereby we all should judge ourselves, to the end that repentance may be sought, and to inform as to the yardstick by which God will judge us all. Whether we agree with, or think it fair, or not, is of no consequence. We have the option to live in compliance with God's laws, or live in violation of them. And we will be rewarded, or condemned accordingly. For a certainty, our choices in lifestyle will not alter the law. If we live in violation to the laws of God in this part of our lives we will be left without comfort, without a remission of sins, without the gifts of the Spirit, without guiding revelation, without salvation, and without excuse.