



**HOSEA &  
EZEKIEL**

## UNDERSTANDING DIVORCE

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## WEEK 1 – UNCONDITIONAL PROMISES

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<sup>2</sup> *“Argue with your mother. Argue with her because she is no longer my wife, and I am no longer her husband! Tell her to stop being like a prostitute. Tell her to take away her lovers from between her breasts. <sup>3</sup> If she refuses to stop her adultery, I will strip her naked and leave her like the day she was born. I will take away her people, and she will be like an empty, dry desert.*

*Hosea 2:2-3 ERV*



### **Is Divorce a Mortal Sin?**

My parents separated for a year when I was little, unraveled further while I was in high school, and divorced when I left home. I myself have been divorced twice; once as the initiator, and once as the dumbfounded partner that was cast aside. After seeing divorce firsthand from these positions, I still did not understand it. I tried to cope with my loss by journaling everything the Bible says about divorce, marriage, and love. At the end of a year I understood that “blanket” forgiveness (or *grace* as we say in church) is a necessary part of marriage, but I still had nothing solid to help me understand God’s views on divorce. When I wrote the chapter on Ezekiel for my book, *The Two Breads*, I stumbled upon the answer I was seeking.

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EVERY DIVORCE IN THE BIBLE IS PRECEDED BY SOME FORM OF  
ADULTERY

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Divorce only makes sense when it is seen as the eventual consequence of deliberate unfaithfulness. God divorced Israel in the verses we just read, and said why. We cannot say that divorce is sin if God engages in it. It is a just and understandable response to a spouse who has demonstrated a pattern of disloyalty while denying misconduct. When this is the case, grace alone cannot restore the relationship to wholeness.

### **What is Covenant Relationship?**

Covenant is an old word for a formal relationship that has binding consequences that do not change with circumstances. Whether for richer or poorer, in sickness or in health, the marriage covenant is “until death” and was meant to be immutable. Because of sin, God allowed divorce in the Law of Moses, but this exception required a *minyán* or quorum of ten elders to ratify it. A divorced woman needed a certificate of divorce to own property, enter into contracts, or to remarry unless her husband was dead. The divorcing husband wrote it out, and the elders certified it so that she would be able to exercise her property and marital rights in the community.

Read Matthew 19:7-8. What is the heart of God concerning this law? What is the significance of hard hearts in this statement? Where else does Jesus speak about hard hearts?

The Lord made conditional promises in the law, but three covenants are unconditional:

- The first is the covenant made with Noah to “all flesh” upon the earth. Read this covenant in Genesis 8:15 to 9:17. In this relationship, God is earth’s present Creator and future Judge. Anyone not included in the other two covenants is under this one.
- The second is the covenant made to Abraham and his seed before he was circumcised (see commentary in Romans 4:9-10). Read this covenant in Genesis 15. In this relationship, God is Israel’s present Deliverer and future King. YHWH’s role as Husband to Israel was conditional in the Law, permitting divorce (see Deu. 24:1), but his role as Messiah of Israel is unconditional.
- The third is the new covenant in Jesus’ blood. Read this covenant in 1 Corinthians 11:23-32. In this relationship God becomes our Father whose Son is our present Shepherd and future Husband. No one can take us out of his hand (see John 3:29; 10:25-30). This role is unconditional, illustrated in the NT as the marriage of the Lamb of God to his Bride. In this covenant there is no divorce, even if one partner “departs” from the other (see 1 Cor. 7:10-16).

### Love vs. Law

In love relationships proper conduct is not spelled out, but depends on getting to know each other well and by deferring whenever possible to the other’s preferences. This is called “mutual submission” in Ephesians 5:21, but it just means becoming a servant to each other. Jesus laid aside his glory and gave his life for us. We lay aside our sins and give our lives to him. He hears and answers our prayers. We strive to please him by our mode of life. This is the mutual submission of love where specific duties are never enumerated, and unintentional offenses are not remembered.

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LAW BEGINS WHERE LOVE ENDS

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The other way to determine proper conduct is by spelling it out. Laws are enacted to redress unresolved wrongs. In some marriages, each partner makes “rules” for the other to follow. If either partner transgresses the other’s laws, there will be consequences.

- Read Galatians 5:13-23

How did the unconditional covenant God made with Abraham become the 613 commandments spelled out in the Law of Moses?

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LET ME PUT IT ANOTHER WAY. THE LAW WAS OUR GUARDIAN UNTIL CHRIST CAME; IT PROTECTED US UNTIL WE COULD BE MADE RIGHT WITH GOD THROUGH FAITH.

-GALATIANS 3:24 NLT

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## HOMEWORK FOR WEEK 2

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Next week, you (the group) will give the lesson by sharing your answers to the following questions.

1. Re-read Matthew 19:7-8. Where else does Jesus speak about hardness of heart? What condition is the opposite of a hard or callused heart?
2. Compare Deuteronomy 10:15-16, Deut. 30:5-6, and Romans 2:29. How can anyone circumcise the heart? In what way is your heart like a sexual organ?
3. List the unconditional promises of God to Noah in Genesis 8 and 9. What did God require of Noah and his family in 9:3-6? Now read Acts 15:1-29 and note the very few “rules” imposed on Gentile believers compared to Jews. What did they base these rules on?
4. List the unconditional promises of God to Abraham. You can find them in Genesis 12:1-3, Genesis 15, and Genesis 17:9-14. What did God command Abraham to do as he entered this relationship?
5. List the unconditional promises of Jesus to believers. Take your time with this. Does he spell out all the rules we need to follow to please him, or does he just insist on a few things? What things?
6. Read Ephesians 5, the whole chapter, in the context of this lesson. What is God really saying about marriage to us?

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WEEK 3 – HOSEA AND GOMER

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<sup>2</sup> This was the Lord’s first message to Hosea. The Lord said, “Go, marry a prostitute who has had children as a result of her prostitution. Do this because the people in this country have acted like prostitutes—they have been unfaithful to the Lord.” <sup>3</sup> So Hosea married Gomer daughter of Diblaim. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son for Hosea. <sup>4</sup> The Lord said to Hosea, “Name him Jezreel, because soon I will punish the family of Jehu for the people he killed at Jezreel Valley. Then I will put an end to the kingdom of the nation of Israel. <sup>5</sup> And at that time I will break Israel’s bow at Jezreel Valley.”



*-Hosea 1:2-5 ERV*

**Object Lessons**

Hosea and Ezekiel were sent as witnesses to Israel and Judah of their adultery against the Lord. Since the people stopped listening to the prophets, he instructed these men to act out their messages in ridiculous ways to get their attention. The ploy worked, but the messages went unheeded. Below is a chart showing where they fit into historical events in Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and Judah (the Southern Kingdom).

BC 930 - Kingdom divided	Israel	Judah
BC 930 - 723	19 kings reign	
BC 753	Hosea prophesies	
BC 722	Israel destroyed	
BC 930 - 586		19 kings and one queen reign
BC 597		First siege of Jerusalem
BC 593		Ezekiel prophesies
BC 586		Jerusalem destroyed

Israel fell in two portions to the Assyrians, ten years apart, so their destruction began 20 years after Hosea prophesied. Judah also fell twice to Nebuchadnezzar, first in BC 597, and 12 years later when the vassal king he installed also rebelled. Ezekiel was carried into captivity after the first siege to the northeast corner of Syria, and it was there that he prophesied. The second siege of Jerusalem left no survivors.

- Why did the Lord not destroy either kingdom completely in the first campaign?
- What would you think of someone who divorced after giving just one warning?

## Hosea's Family

God gave Hosea three children by Gomer, each with a name the Lord chose:

- Jezreel, which could be translated *Gettysburg* if he were American – it is strategically important, so that holding or losing it either meant *victory* or *defeat*.
- Lo-Ruhamah means *Unloved*
- Lo-Ammi means *Unwanted*

Their names suggest that Hosea was not their biological father. Gomer gives as her excuse that Hosea was too poor to afford good food, nice clothing, or the other things she wanted. As each child came, the family became even poorer.

*<sup>4</sup>I will have no pity on her children because they are the children of prostitution. <sup>5</sup>Their mother has acted like a prostitute. She should be ashamed of what she did. She said, 'I will go to my lovers, who give me food and water, wool and linen, wine and olive oil.'*

### *-Hosea 2:4-5*

Hosea allowed Gomer three children of prostitution before doing anything. In the Law, no one is convicted unless there are 2 or 3 witnesses. The 3 illegitimate children were ample evidence of her unrepented adultery.

## Gomer's Exile

- Read Exodus 33:19 and 34:6-9

In this remarkable passage, the Lord agreed to show Moses part of his glory and to tell him his Name. In Hebrew, the word for name – *shem* – also means a person's reputation. Jews today call the Lord *Hashem*, the Name. God states his reputation for great mercy, but he also says he does not clear the guilty, but visits lawlessness in the third and fourth generation. Hosea and Gomer are a visual image of this. Hosea bears his grief over her unfaithfulness while she gives him three illegitimate children, but she already had an illegitimate child when he married her – *three or four generations*. He had every right to have her stoned after one adultery, but to fulfill God's merciful image he endured it three times before divorcing her.

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THEN THE LORD SAID, "NAME HIM LO-AMMI, BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT MY PEOPLE, AND I AM NOT YOUR GOD." – HOSEA 1:9

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- Read Hosea 2:14-20.
- How can the Lord say he will speak to her "romantically" (ERV) while she is being stripped and sold as a slave to pay her debts?
- Does this help you understand *Hashem*, or God's Name?
- Why does he mention the covenant with Noah instead of the one with Abraham in verse 18?

## Gomer's Redemption

When you redeem something, you pay more than it is actually worth to get it back after it has been sold or taken as booty. You can hock an item for a reasonable price at the pawn shop, and redeem it within a certain time by paying a higher price for it. This is what the Lord told Hosea to do for Gomer.

*Then the Lord said to me again, "Gomer has many lovers, but you must continue loving her. Do this because it is an example of the Lord's love for Israel. He continues to love them, but they continue to turn to other gods, and they love to eat those raisin cakes."*

*<sup>2</sup> So I bought Gomer back for 6 ounces of silver and 9 bushels of barley. <sup>3</sup> Then I told her, "You must stay at home with me for many days. You will not be like a prostitute. You will not have sexual relations with another man. I will be your husband."*

*<sup>4</sup> In the same way the people of Israel will continue many days without a king or a leader. They will be without a sacrifice or a memorial stone. They will be without an ephod or a household god. <sup>5</sup> After this, the people of Israel will come back and look for the Lord their God and for David their king. In the last days they will come to honor the Lord and his goodness.*

*-Hosea 3:1-5 (ERV)*

## Review and Application

- After Hosea bought Gomer at the slave market, was she legally his wife or his servant?
- How much are we like Gomer in this situation?
- How did he treat her after this?

Our covenant with Jesus is a covenant of mutual love and fidelity until death, like marriage. The Lord promised never to leave (separate) or to forsake (divorce) us in Deut. 31:6 and Hebrews 13:5. But when unfaithfulness is deliberate and ongoing, the Holy Spirit is grieved and withdraws until we consider our ways and reach out to him. In effect, the Lord stops acting like a husband and returns to his earlier role as our Father to give us a dose of parental love. If we refuse discipline as sons and daughters, then we become subjects. If we refuse even this, then we become like beasts and fall under his covenant with Noah.

- Read Matthew 18:15-17

God's heart was always to live in fellowship with us, but when love fails to support a relationship, law and discipline eventually take over. We are not under law today, but God may temporarily treat us that way to lead us back into the way of life. If we will not turn, we have to ask if we sincerely gave ourselves to the Lord in the first place.

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GOMER REPENTED, AND SO WILL ISRAEL ONE DAY.

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## HOMEWORK FOR WEEK 4

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Next week you (the group) will give the lesson. I used the Easy to Read Version (ERV) online and found it very helpful with explaining Jewish idioms in the text.

1. How would you apply the story of Hosea and Gomer to a divorce between a believing man and believing woman? Write your answer without consulting the NT.
2. Read 1 Corinthians chapter 7. Does it agree with your answer?
3. How many different ways are there to be unfaithful in a relationship? Read through Hosea quickly and list the ways the Lord enumerates.
4. Read Matthew 19. What kind of infidelity justifies divorce in the Law? Why is this kind of unfaithfulness different from all the others?
5. Is it any different if one partner was not a believer? Find a NT verse that supports your answer.
6. Read Hosea 11:8-11 in at least 2 versions. How does this help? What is the difference between God's love and human love?

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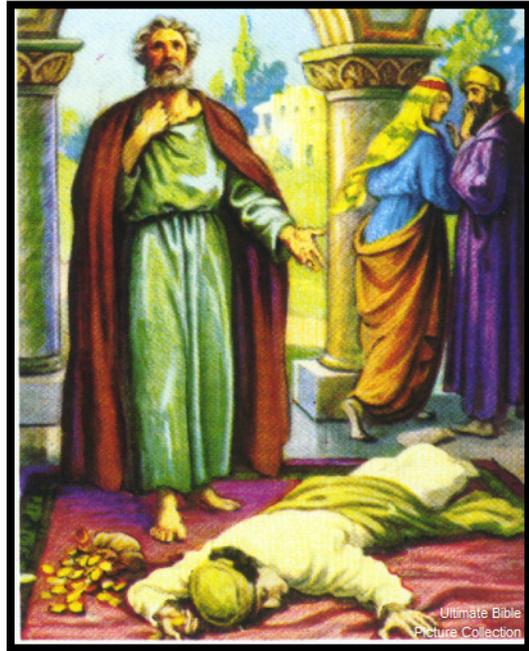
## WEEK 5 – THE SIN UNTO DEATH

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*13 I write this letter to you who believe in the Son of God. I write so that you will know that you have eternal life now. 14 We can come to God with no doubts. This means that when we ask God for things (and those things agree with what God wants for us), God cares about what we say. 15 He listens to us every time we ask him. So we know that he gives us whatever we ask from him.*

*16 Suppose you see your fellow believer sinning (sin that does not lead to eternal death). You should pray for them. Then God will give them life. I am talking about people whose sin does not lead to eternal death. There is sin that leads to death. I don't mean that you should pray about that kind of sin. 17 Doing wrong is always sin. But there is sin that does not lead to eternal death.*

*18 We know that those who have been made God's children do not continue to sin. The Son of God keeps them safe. The Evil One cannot hurt them.*



*1 John 5:13-18 ERV*

### **Two Kinds of Death**

There are two kinds of death in the Bible – separation from the body and separation from God. If we think of divorce as a type of death then there are also two kinds: one in which there is physical separation, and one in which the separation is relational.

My parents separated when I was about 8-9 years old, but they remained in communication with each other, and eventually reconciled. The rift between them was not yet “unto death”. Later on, they obtained a legal divorce and each remarried. This effectively cut them off from reconciliation. They remained friends, but were never to become husband and wife again.

In the above passage, John speaks about believers praying for a brother or sister who has fallen into sin, because God hears prayers for reconciliation and forgives. The exception he mentions is sin that leads to death, and by this he means the death of the person's relationship with God. It is not that hard to understand whom he means, because in verse 18 he says that anyone who has become a son of God will not continue to sin.

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“ONLY A PIG STAYS IN THE PIG PEN. A SON WILL GET OUT OF THE PIG PEN AND GO TO HIS FATHER'S HOUSE.”

- J. VERNON MAGEE

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## Sin leading to Death of the Flesh

- Read Acts 5:1-11

In this case two believers died physically. It is possible to sin in a way that God ends the life of a believer prematurely as a matter of discipline, even if the person is saved. Paul dealt with a difficult case of sin in the Corinthian church by suggesting the same thing:

*I don't want to believe what I am hearing—that there is sexual sin among you. And it is such a bad kind of sexual sin that even those who have never known God don't allow it. People say that a man there has his father's wife. <sup>2</sup> And still you are proud of yourselves! You should have been filled with sadness. And the man who committed that sin should be put out of your group. <sup>3</sup> I cannot be there with you in person, but I am with you in spirit. And I have already judged the man who did this. I judged him the same as I would if I were really there. <sup>4</sup> Come together in the name of our Lord Jesus. I will be with you in spirit, and you will have the power of our Lord Jesus with you. <sup>5</sup> Then turn this man over to Satan. His sinful self [flesh] has to be destroyed so that his spirit will be saved on the day when the Lord comes again.*

*1 Corinthians 5:1-5 ERV, bracket added*

Paul judged him worthy of physical separation from the church and of physical death if necessary to get him away from his sin. It seems that either this man repented, or another did, and that Paul wrote his second letter to plead for the church to reconcile with him:

*<sup>5</sup> Someone in your group has caused sadness—not to me, but to all of you. I mean he has caused sadness to all in some way. (I don't want to make it sound worse than it really is.) <sup>6</sup> The punishment that most of your group gave him is enough for him. <sup>7</sup> But now you should forgive him and encourage him. This will keep him from having too much sadness and giving up completely. <sup>8</sup> So I beg you to show him that you love him. <sup>9</sup> This is why I wrote to you. I wanted to test you and see if you obey in everything. <sup>10</sup> If you forgive someone, then I also forgive them. And what I have forgiven—if I had anything to forgive—I forgave it for you, and Christ was with me. <sup>11</sup> I did this so that Satan would not win anything from us. We know very well what his plans are.*

*2 Corinthians 2:5-11 ERV*

If this was the same man, then we can say that he did not sin unto death, and the prayers for his reconciliation were heard and answered.

## Hardness of Hearts

We said earlier that every divorce in the Bible is preceded by some form of adultery. We enumerated the different ways God said Israel was unfaithful to him in the Book of Hosea, but he was prepared to forgive them all of it if they would confess their sins and turn back to him.

When the Pharisees asked Jesus for his position on divorce there were two schools dividing Jews over the issue, and they hoped to trap him into taking sides. One school taught that a man could divorce his wife for burning dinner.

- Read Matthew 19:3-9

Jesus told them the problem causing divorce was the hardness of their hearts. A wife who had an affair was no guiltier of adultery than a husband who would divorce her for burning his toast.



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## HOMEWORK FOR WEEK 6

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Next week you (the group) will give the lesson. Read over the verses in the lesson for Week 5 and write down your answers to the following questions to share with the group.

1. What happens when a person dies physically? What is the condition of a person who is dead spiritually? How is divorce like death?
  
2. What kind of offence causes the death of a relationship? Is it the offence or negligence itself, or the heart behind it that makes these behaviors so poisonous?
  
3. Read Mark 3:22-30. What does Jesus call unforgivable? What happens to a relationship when we “explain” the other person’s behavior by saying their motive is evil?
  
4. Why did God kill any of the following people (choose one pair)? Did their physical death imply that they went to hell, or was their death for another purpose?
  - a. Er and Onan
  - b. Nadab and Abihu
  - c. Hophni and Phinehas
  - d. Mahlon and Chilion
  - e. Ananias and Saphira
  
5. How does 1 Cor. 5:1-5 and 2 Cor. 2:5-11 help us to understand why God would discipline one of his own people in this way?
  
6. Look up several bible verses that speak about the hardness of hearts. What does your research reveal about the real reason why a relationship dies?

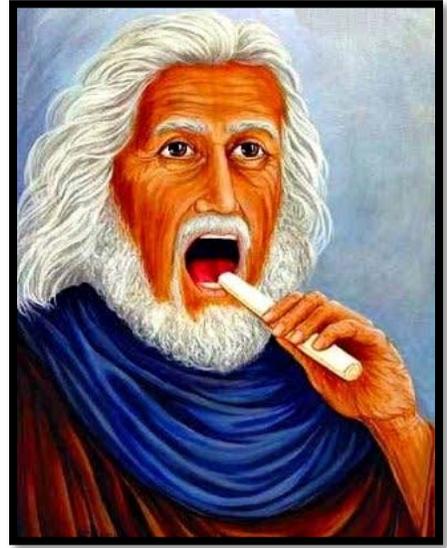
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## WEEK 7 – EZEKIEL'S SCROLL

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*“You shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or are put off, because they are a house of provocation. You, son of man, listen to the One who speaks to you. Do not be one who rebels like the house of provocation, but open your mouth wide, and eat what I give you.” Then I looked, and behold, there was a hand reaching out to me, and the roll of a book was in it. He unrolled it before me, and there written on the inside and the outside were words of lamentation and mourning and woe.*

*- Ezekiel 2:7-10 Orthodox Study Bible*



### A House of Provocation

In love relationships we easily forget unintentional offenses, but when love begins to fail a detailed record of wrongs is kept. If trust and love are not restored we can end up having to eat a book of lamentation, mourning, and woes.

- Where else in the Bible do we read that the Lord was “provoked”?
- Where else in the Bible do we read about a scroll in the hand of God with writing on the inside and outside?
- What happened each time the Lord opened a book like this?
- Why do you think the scroll was sweet in Ezekiel’s mouth, but bitter in his belly?

### Ezekiel Hears the Lord’s Case

In Israel, most legal matters were heard by a quorum (*minyan*) of ten male heads of families or elders. Whatever they decided was accepted as binding on their community, so when a matter was heard before the elders it was like what happens in a court of law. On this occasion, the elders were assembled in Ezekiel’s house when the Lord carried him away in the Spirit to hear His case against Israel. It was a court of divorce. Three witnesses were needed to prove a case when the penalty was death. Adultery was punished with death.<sup>1</sup>



- Read Ezekiel Chapter 8 together.
- What three “witnesses” did the Lord bring before Ezekiel to make his case?

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<sup>1</sup> Deut. 22:22

- Read Ezekiel 9 together.

### Discussion

- Is anyone here upset by reading this? Why?
- Where else do we read about the Lord sparing people with a mark on their foreheads?
- Based on this, who is the “man” with the writing case? Is there a parable of Jesus that points to the same thing?
- Read through Ezekiel 10-11 together.



### Discussion

This describes Ezekiel’s vision of the glory of the Lord leaving his temple and city – his wife. I think it is among the most difficult and important to understand passages in the OT, because it shows God’s heart in judgment.

- How long had the glory of the Lord’s presence been visible in Israel?
- Did the Lord leave quickly, or did he linger?
- Why does he keep looking back as he pulls away?
- What is the last thing Ezekiel sees as the vision ends? What mountain overlooks Jerusalem from the east? What did Jesus do on that mountain to get back his wife? Did she respond?



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## HOMEWORK FOR WEEK 8

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Next week you (the group) will give the lesson. Review Ezekiel chapters 2-11 and think about how the Lord views divorce, even as he divorces Israel. Write down your answers to the following questions to share with the group.

1. What things did the Lord command Ezekiel to prophesy before his glory departed from Jerusalem?
2. How has this book added to your view of God?
3. How has it altered your definition of adultery?
4. Review the standard "church" wedding vows. How has this study affected your views on what they mean?
5. How has it affected your views on divorce?

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## WEEK 9 – FINDING GRACE (FINAL)

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*“In regard to chastity, [Jesus] has this to say: ‘If anyone look with lust at a woman, he has already before God committed adultery in his heart.’ And, ‘Whoever marries a woman who has been divorced from another husband, commits adultery.’ According to our Teacher, just as they are sinners who contract a second marriage, even though it be in accord with human law, so also are they sinners who look with lustful desire at a woman. He repudiates not only one who actually commits adultery, but even one who wishes to do so; for not only our actions are manifest to God, but even our thoughts”*



*-Justin Martyr, First Apology 15 [A.D. 151]*

*<sup>3</sup> The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? <sup>4</sup> And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, <sup>5</sup> 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? <sup>6</sup> Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. <sup>7</sup> They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for **fornication**, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. <sup>10</sup> His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. <sup>11</sup> But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. <sup>12</sup> For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's 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 heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.*

*Matthew 19:3-12 KJV*

In the above passage, “fornication” is the correct translation for the Greek word *pornea*. I chose the King James because so many translations get this wrong. The word for “wife” in this passage is the same as the word for “fiancée.” A wife cannot commit *pornea*, because in her case it would be adultery, but if a man is engaged to be married, he might discover that she has had sexual relations with someone (or fornication) before the ceremony. Jesus makes this exception because it leaves Joseph blameless when he decided to “divorce” Mary when she became pregnant with Jesus (Matthew 1:18-19).

### Law and Grace

It's human nature to look to God for laws and rules, but the moment he gives one we say he meant something else to justify ourselves. If we do not rebel outright, we often rebel within our hearts, which amounts to the same thing. Jesus was responding to Pharisees who practiced easy divorce

and re-marriage whenever they wanted a new and better wife. That is not an acceptable lifestyle for a believer.

The clear teaching of the Bible is one marriage until death. If a spouse dies and the widow or widower wishes to marry again, they may do so, but in 1 Cor. 7 Paul recommends what Jesus said, saying it would be better to be like a eunuch and refrain from re-marriage. A eunuch is a person who is incapable of having sexual relations. Jesus was saying that a person can receive supernatural power to live this way if they are willing to receive it. That is a promise from God to believers.

When a believer is divorced, the correct thing to do is to remain single until the divorced spouse has died. This was the practice of the first century church, and is the practice today in orthodox churches. As I write this, the Roman Catholic Church is rethinking its stance on refusing communion to a person who has divorced and remarried, if they have repented and confessed it as sin.

- Suppose a believer is married and has an affair, then repents. Will Jesus forgive?
- Suppose a believer divorces and remarries, then repents. Will Jesus forgive?
- Is there any difference between these two examples?
- Is the Church justified in refusing communion or leadership responsibility to a person who has done this?
- When we willfully commit sin and then turn to God, are there consequences?

## Conclusion

I am not a trained theologian, but the following summary and conclusions were written by John Piper, Chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary, and author of over 50 books. I have carefully reviewed the scriptures myself on this subject over a long period of time, and have read arguments proposed by orthodox, reformed, and liberal readings of them. Piper, in my view, has a correct biblical perspective. Interested parties should read his entire position paper here:

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/divorce-remarriage-a-position-paper>.

*In the New Testament the question about remarriage after divorce is not determined by:*

1. *The guilt or innocence of either spouse,*
2. *Nor by whether either spouse is a believer or not,*
3. *Nor by whether the divorce happened before or after either spouse's conversion,*
4. *Nor by the ease or difficulty of living as a single parent for the rest of life on earth,*
5. *Nor by whether there is adultery or desertion involved,*
6. *Nor by the on-going reality of the hardness of the human heart,*

7. *Nor by the cultural permissiveness of the surrounding society.*

*Rather it is determined by the fact that:*

1. *Marriage is a "one-flesh" relationship of divine establishment and extraordinary significance in the eyes of God (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:8),*
2. *Only God, not man, can end this one-flesh relationship (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9—this is why remarriage is called adultery by Jesus: he assumes that the first marriage is still binding, Matthew 5:32; Luke 16:18; Mark 10:11),*
3. *God ends the one-flesh relationship of marriage only through the death of one of the spouses (Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39),*
4. *The grace and power of God are promised and sufficient to enable a trusting, divorced Christian to be single all this earthly life if necessary (Matthew 19:10-12,26; 1 Corinthians 10:13),*
5. *Temporal frustrations and disadvantages are much to be preferred over the disobedience of remarriage, and will yield deep and lasting joy both in this life and the life to come (Matthew 5:29-30).*

*Those who are already remarried:*

1. *Should acknowledge that the choice to remarry and the act of entering a second marriage was sin, and confess it as such and seek forgiveness,*
2. *Should not attempt to return to the first partner after entering a second union,*
3. *Should not separate and live as single people thinking that this would result in less sin because all their sexual relations are acts of adultery. The Bible does not give prescriptions for this particular case, but it does treat second marriages as having significant standing in God's eyes. That is, there were promises made and there has been a union formed. It should not have been formed, but it was. It is not to be taken lightly. Promises are to be kept, and the union is to be sanctified to God. While not the ideal state, staying in a second marriage is God's will for a couple and their ongoing relations should not be looked on as adulterous.*

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## HOMEWORK FOR WEEK 2

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Next week, you (the group) will give the lesson by sharing your answers to the following questions.

1. Re-read Matthew 19:7-8. Where else does Jesus speak about hardness of heart? What condition is the opposite of a hard or callused heart?
  - Mark 6:49-52 they did not believe it was Jesus walking on the sea because they had not understood the miracle of the loaves and their hearts were hard.
  - Mark 8:17-21 after seeing great miracles with their own eyes, they still did not understand who Jesus was or what he was saying to them.
  - Mark 16:14 they did not believe the report of those who saw Jesus resurrected before they did.

A person with a hard heart will not change his mind or believe, even with clear evidence in front of him. A calloused heart has no trust. The opposite condition is a circumcised heart, which is sensitive and believing like a child's heart is.

2. Compare Deuteronomy 10:15-16, Deut. 30:5-6, and Romans 2:29. How can anyone circumcise the heart? In what way is your heart like a sexual organ?
  - Circumcision was the token of the unconditional covenant between Abraham and God. God demonstrated his trustworthiness when he gave him Isaac in his old age. Abraham demonstrated his trust when he offered Isaac back. When we circumcise our hearts, we decide to give our full trust to God and to stop doubting his power, love and commitment to us.
  - Marital communion is the token of the unconditional covenant of marriage. This relationship also requires trust to thrive, and a willingness to receive each other as we are; not as we might wish we were. If we only allow sexual intimacy with one mate, and sanctify this union with marriage vows, then we should only allow Jesus into our hearts and sanctify this union with the new covenant in his blood.
  - In the marriage bed we reveal ourselves, but outside we stay covered. Our hearts are the "wedding bed" where Jesus is revealed. Do you make a wedding bed with canvass tarps, or with satin sheets? So our hearts should be toward Him.
3. List the unconditional promises of God to Noah in Genesis 8 and 9. What did God require of Noah and his family in 9:3-6? Now read Acts 15:1-29 and note the very few "rules" imposed on Gentile believers compared to Jews. What did they base these rules on?
  - I will never again curse the earth because of man's works.
  - Nor will I again destroy every living thing.
  - While the earth remains, the seasons shall not cease.
  - Noah and his sons were given dominion over the earth again.
  - They were allowed to eat animals as well as plants, any kind they wanted. They were not to eat blood, or kill a man, and no animal was to kill a man on penalty of death.
  - The Apostles commanded Gentile believers not to eat things offered to idols, not to eat blood or animals that were strangled, and to keep themselves from sexual immorality. These rules were partly taken from the covenant with Noah.

- They were not required to be circumcised or to follow any of the other Jewish laws or customs. Neither are we.
4. List the unconditional promises of God to Abraham. You can find them in Genesis 12:1-3, Genesis 15, and Genesis 17:9-14. What did God command Abraham to do as he entered this relationship?
- I will make you a great nation.
  - I will bless you and make your name great.
  - I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you.
  - In you all the tribes of the earth will be blessed.
  - I will establish my covenant with Isaac. Kings will come from him.
  - I will also bless and multiply Ishmael exceedingly; he shall be 12 nations.
  - He and all the males with him must be circumcised.
5. List the unconditional promises of Jesus to believers. Take your time with this. Does he spell out all the rules we need to follow to please him, or does he just insist on a few things? What things?
- Mt. 10:32 whoever acknowledges me before others, I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven. 10:39 Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.
  - Mt. 11:28 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.
  - Mk. 9:23 everything is possible for one who believes.
  - Mk. 10:29 no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.
  - Lk. 5:12-13 “if you are willing, you can make me clean.” “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!”
  - Lk. 11:9 ask and it will be given you. Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door will be opened.
  - Lk. 12:29-31 and do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.
  - Lk. 22:19-20 and He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, “This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.
  - Lk. 23:43 today, you shall be with me in Paradise.
  - Jn. 3:16 for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.
  - Jn. 5:24 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.
  - Jn. 6:35 “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”

- Jn. 11:25 “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.
- Jn. 15:5-8 “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Jesus gives simple commands that are easy to remember. Believe in him. Listen to his voice. Don't be afraid. Love one another as he loves us. Take the lowest place. Forgive. Go tell the world the good news. Abide in him (stay loyal). Avoid the “yeast” or pride that religious people engage in.

6. Read Ephesians 5, the whole chapter, in the context of this lesson. What is God really saying about marriage to us?
  - Paul is amplifying the difference between the relationship a Jew has with YHWH through the law, and the relationship we have with Jesus by faith. Jews hold the Lord in awe as the great king to whom they must offer daily sacrifices, but our relationship with Jesus is one of mutual submission, based on the sacrifice he made for us. We respect and serve him, but he loves, nourishes, and serves us also as our continual provider and Advocate.
  - If marriage is to be like this, then there is no room for men to demand anything of their wives on religious grounds, a thing Jesus hates. Rather, the man is called to sacrifice himself for his wife, and she is called to make him the head of her home, voluntarily. Mutual submission is impossible without love and respect that goes both ways.
  - Jesus demonstrated this relationship when he took the role of the lowest servant and washed the Apostles' feet. This is the washing of the Word, or the way Jesus (the Word) continually washes and forgives us so that we are spotless before his Father. So a man should forgive his wife and present her as “spotless” before others.

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## HOMEWORK FOR WEEK 4

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Next week you (the group) will give the lesson by sharing your research on the following questions.

1. How would you apply the story of Hosea and Gomer to a divorce between a believing man and believing woman? Write your answer without consulting the NT.

Hosea and Gomer lived under the Law of Moses, which would have put Gomer to death for her adulteries. Hosea also had every right, under the Law, to divorce her in the same way Joseph planned to divorce (put away) Mary when he discovered she was pregnant and not by him. Although they are a great picture of God's heart toward Israel, this story does not describe the new covenant under which believers marry today.

There are, however, principles we can draw from Hosea and Gomer that do apply. First, they were unequally yoked. Hosea believed God, but Gomer acted as though she did not. Second, there was no law forbidding Hosea from being patient, kind, faithful, or from suffering long. The law protected him from an unfaithful wife, but did not require him to act in haste. He gave her many opportunities to repent, waited until it was clear that there was no remedy, and waited for God to tell him what he should do.

2. Read 1 Corinthians chapter 7. Does it agree with your answer?

In reading the entire chapter—not just the verses on marriage—the main point is not to let anything get between us and the Lord. Hosea put God first, and showed long-suffering toward his unbelieving wife. A married couple should not withhold sex from each other except by agreement for a short time of fasting and prayer. If the partner feels injured and wishes to leave, let them leave. If the partner will reconcile, then reconcile.

When we want what we don't have, it causes us to put these things before the Lord. Paul's advice is to stay as we are and live our lives as God gives it. If a person can't handle being single, then it is better to marry than to burn with sexual desire, but this decision often draws believers away from intimacy with the Lord.

3. How many different ways are there to be unfaithful in a relationship? Read through Hosea quickly and list the ways the Lord enumerates.

Chapter 1: Sex with another partner, walking away (forsaking).

Chapter 2: Using money or things as an excuse for disloyalty, expressing a preference for someone else, giving gifts to another of what should be reserved for the husband or wife; being lewd before outsiders, going to everyone's special days but forgetting the day that belongs to the husband or wife; dressing up for an outsider in your best evening attire, calling your spouse "boss" or "master".

Chapter 3: using your husband or wife's sacred items inappropriately.

Chapter 4: no faithfulness or steadfast love – the love comes and goes as it will; swearing (promising) while lying, stealing, breaking all boundaries, shedding blood, not doing your duty, rejecting facts, greed, enjoying seeing other people sin, drunkenness, swearing to God while not meaning it, idolizing sex and wealth.

Chapter 5: revolt, slaughter, bearing alien children, going after filth.

Chapter 6: love that vanishes like vapor, breaking vows, dealing faithlessly (cheating), violence, villainy.

Chapter 7: treachery, adultery, intrigue, anger, overthrowing authorities, pride, silliness, senselessness, straying, rebelling, refusing to be redeemed, crying over stuff but not over the lost relationship, devising evil against the husband or wife, an insolent tongue.

Chapter 8: spurning the good, using your gold and silver to purchase idols, making allies of outsiders against the husband or wife, pretending to be religious, going back to Egypt (your old sinful life),

Chapter 9: exulting, taking money for sex or fellowship, hatred in the house, stripping to dance before strangers, sacrificing children to your idol.

Chapter 10: a false heart, pretending to be single when actually married, making empty promises, believing lies, trusting your own way, thinking you are strong enough.

Chapter 11: Hearing your spouse call but pretending not to hear, taking advantage of his goodness for evil.

Chapter 12: falsehood and violence, ingratitude, unfair practices, oppression, loving wealth, taking credit.

Chapter 13: idol worship, forgetting how others loved you, fighting against your helper, raising an unwise son.

Chapter 14: refusing offers of reconciliation and forgiveness.

4. Read Matthew 19:1-12. What kind of infidelity justifies divorce in the Law? Why is this kind of unfaithfulness different from all the others?

Jesus said marriage was intended to be permanent, but sexual immorality fractures a relationship in a way that justifies breaking it permanently. Sex is not just a physical act; it is also a creative act and spiritual communion through which lives are joined and life is given.

James Pruch writes,

“Sexual immorality has a way of tearing apart lives and relationships in a way that other sins do not. This doesn’t excuse other sins. This doesn’t mean that obscene pride and outrageous lifestyles will not ruin a life. O, they will! But a plain reading of scripture reveals this truth especially about sexual immorality. Proverbs 5:8-11 teaches us, ‘Keep your way far from her [that is, the forbidden woman, v. 3], and do not go near the door of her house, lest you give your honor to others and your years to the merciless, lest strangers take their fill of your strength, and your labors go to the house of a foreigner, *and at the end of your life you groan, when your flesh and body are consumed.*’”

5. Is it any different if one partner was not a believer? Find a NT verse that supports your answer.

Consider the future of the believer in paradise, and the future of the unbeliever in hell. When you marry, this is a reality one seldom thinks about in the throes of love, but it ends up dogging the believing spouse all his or her life. A believer should not marry an unbeliever, but in some cases they married as unbelievers, and later, one comes to Christ.

This is what Paul was addressing in 1 Corinthians 7:14-16 where he says that the believing spouse sanctifies the unbelieving spouse, in that the children may be saved, and who knows if the unbelieving spouse may also be saved?

When both partners believe, they work out their marriage in mutual submission before God, forgive trespasses, and except for a complete breakdown such as may occur by abuse or sexual sin, they stay married. This is not a rule—because we are not under rules—but it is a clear principal. When the unbeliever departs, there is no such mutual submission before God, so Paul says to let the partner go in peace, and don't seek to become married again. When a spouse departs, leaving the door open for reconciliation is a godly response to it.

6. Read Hosea 11:8-11 in at least 2 versions. How does this help? What is the difference between God's love and human love?

(Easy to Read Version)

"Ephraim, I don't want to give you up.

Israel, I want to protect you.

I don't want to make you like Admah.

I don't want to make you like Zeboiim.<sup>[1]</sup>

I am changing my mind.

My love for you is too strong.

<sup>9</sup> I will not let my terrible anger win.

I will not destroy Ephraim again.

I am God and not a human.

I am the Holy One.

I am with you.

I will not show my anger.

I, the Lord, will roar like a lion,  
and my children will come and follow me.

They will come from the west,  
shaking with fear.

<sup>11</sup> They will come from Egypt,  
shaking like birds.

They will come shaking like doves from the land of Assyria,  
and I will take them back home."

This is what the Lord said.

God's love is patient, his love is kind. He does not envy, he does not boast, he is not proud. God does not dishonor others, he is not self-seeking or easily angered; he keeps no record of wrongs. God does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. His love always protects, it always trusts, it always hopes, it always perseveres.

God's love never fails. (1 Cor. 13:4-8)

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## HOMWORK FOR WEEK 6

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Next week you (the group) will give the lesson. Read over the verses in the lesson for Week 5 and write down your answers to the following questions to share with the group.

1. What happens when a person dies physically? What is the condition of a person who is dead spiritually? How is divorce like death?

Physical death is the separation of body and spirit. The body cannot live without the *ruah*, the spirit or the breath of life. Spiritual death does to the soul what physical death does to the body. It is the separation of the soul from God. The soul continues to exist, but the spirit within it dies, and soul without the spirit cannot inherit eternal life.

Divorce is also a separation that can be physical, relational - and in most cases - both.

2. What kind of offence causes the death of a relationship? Is it the offence or negligence itself, or the heart behind it that makes these behaviors so poisonous?

Read Matthew 12:30-32. When a person is no longer *with* their spouse, they are against them. This can be manifested in many ways, by all kinds of thoughts, words, and actions. The behavior is not what makes a marriage die; it is the betrayal of the other person's spirit. Some spouses kill their relationship without ever committing an outward sin. Jesus said he could forgive any kind of sin or blasphemy, but there was one thing he could not forgive - blasphemy against his spirit. When married people do this the relationship dies a spiritual death. Other offenses may follow that bring about its physical death.

3. Read Mark 3:22-30. What does Jesus call unforgivable? What happens to a relationship when we "explain" the other person's behavior by saying their motive is evil?

If I say you offend me because your motives are evil, there is no viable defense because every person is evil. God loved us before we were saved, when we were still his enemies, but after we enter into a covenant relationship (marriage) with him if we say he hates us or is doing something to us because he is motivated by evil, the relationship becomes as if the covenant was never made. The marriage covenant is a promise to do good to one another all our lives.

4. Why did God kill any of the following people (choose one pair)? Did their physical death imply that they went to hell, or was their death for another purpose?

- a. Er and Onan - Gen. 38:6-10, the law was intended to provide an heir, but they used it as a free pass to satisfy their own lust and refused to fulfill the Lord's will.
- b. Nadab and Abihu - Lev. 10 they offered strange (unauthorized) fire. See v.8-9, they were probably also drinking while serving in the sanctuary.
- c. Mahlon and Chilion - Ruth 1:3, see also Deut. 23:3-4. They married outside the covenant, cutting their children off from the inheritance God wanted for them.
- d. Hophni and Phinehas - 1 Sam. 2:12-17, 22-25, see also 1 Kings 2:26-27. They used their position to enrich themselves, brought shame upon the offerings, and were raping women who came to worship. Their family line was already under David's curse, so it was the Lord's will to kill them.
- e. Ananias and Saphira - Acts 5. See Lev. 2:11. There was leaven (pride) and honey (deceit) in their offering, while they pretended to be fully devoted.

These acts have one characteristic in common: going through the motions to appear righteous, when their hearts were fundamentally against the Lord and what he wanted. They were all proud and pretending to be right. Pride and pretending also destroy marriages.

5. How does 1 Cor. 5:1-5 and 2 Cor. 2:5-11 help us to understand why God would discipline one of his own people in this way?

First, if the man is not dealt with, his sins bring shame on the body of Christ, like Hophni and Phinnehas did. Eli should have removed them, as Paul removed this man. Second, they must forgive him after he repents so that he will not fall completely away from God and be lost as Eli's sons were.

6. Look up several bible verses that speak about the hardness of hearts. What does your research reveal about the real reason why a relationship dies?

Psalm 17:10 They have closed their unfeeling heart, With their mouth they speak proudly.

Psalm 95:8-9 Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness, "When your fathers tested Me, They tried Me, though they had seen My work.

Proverbs 28:14 How blessed is the man who fears always, But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

Isaiah 6:10 Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed.

Hebrews 4:5-7 and again in this passage, "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST." Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS."

Pride and fear are presented to us as opposites. "Fear" means reverence, the fear of coming into judgement, and a desire to be approved. Should married people have these things? When hearts are hard, there is no chance for healing or forgiveness. In Hebrews 3 and 4, Paul uses Psalm 95:8-9 as his main text to illustrate what prevents people from receiving the free gift of God's forgiveness and marriage to him forever.

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## HOMEWORK FOR WEEK 8

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Next week you (the group) will give the lesson. Review Ezekiel chapters 2-11 and think about how the Lord views divorce, even as he divorces Israel. Write down your answers to the following questions to share with the group.

1. What things did the Lord command Ezekiel to prophesy before his glory departed from Jerusalem? **Read Ezek. 11:16-20**

2. How has this book added to your view of God?

*It illustrates both sides of his character as described in Exodus 36:5-7*

*...The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."...*

*Romans 2:4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?*

3. How has it altered your definition of adultery?

*Adultery may be viewed as physical or spiritual. Spiritual adultery is any kind of unfaithfulness within our hearts.*

4. Review the standard "church" wedding vows. How has this study affected your views on what they mean?

*'I, (name), take you, (name)  
to be my wife/husband,  
to have and to hold  
from this day forward;  
for better, for worse,  
for richer, for poorer,  
in sickness and in health,  
to love and to cherish,  
till death us do part,  
according to God's holy law.  
In the presence of God I make this vow.'*

*The above does not have any provision for dissolution except death. It resembles the vow in Ruth 1:16-17.*

5. How has it affected your views on divorce?

It is possible to go too far in the direction of law or of grace, so I think we need to be careful in the way we treat this. The breaking of a vow is very serious and I think it has consequences on earth and possibly in heaven. If God rewards faithfulness, then that reward is not given to the one who was unfaithful. But the same grace that forgives a man who commits murder can also forgive a man and woman who fail to keep the wedding vow and become divorced. In the old world, divorce was only possible after the betrothal and before the sex. If they had sex before the wedding, they were as bound together as if they did have the ceremony, hence the “shotgun weddings” of an older era in which this was just understood.