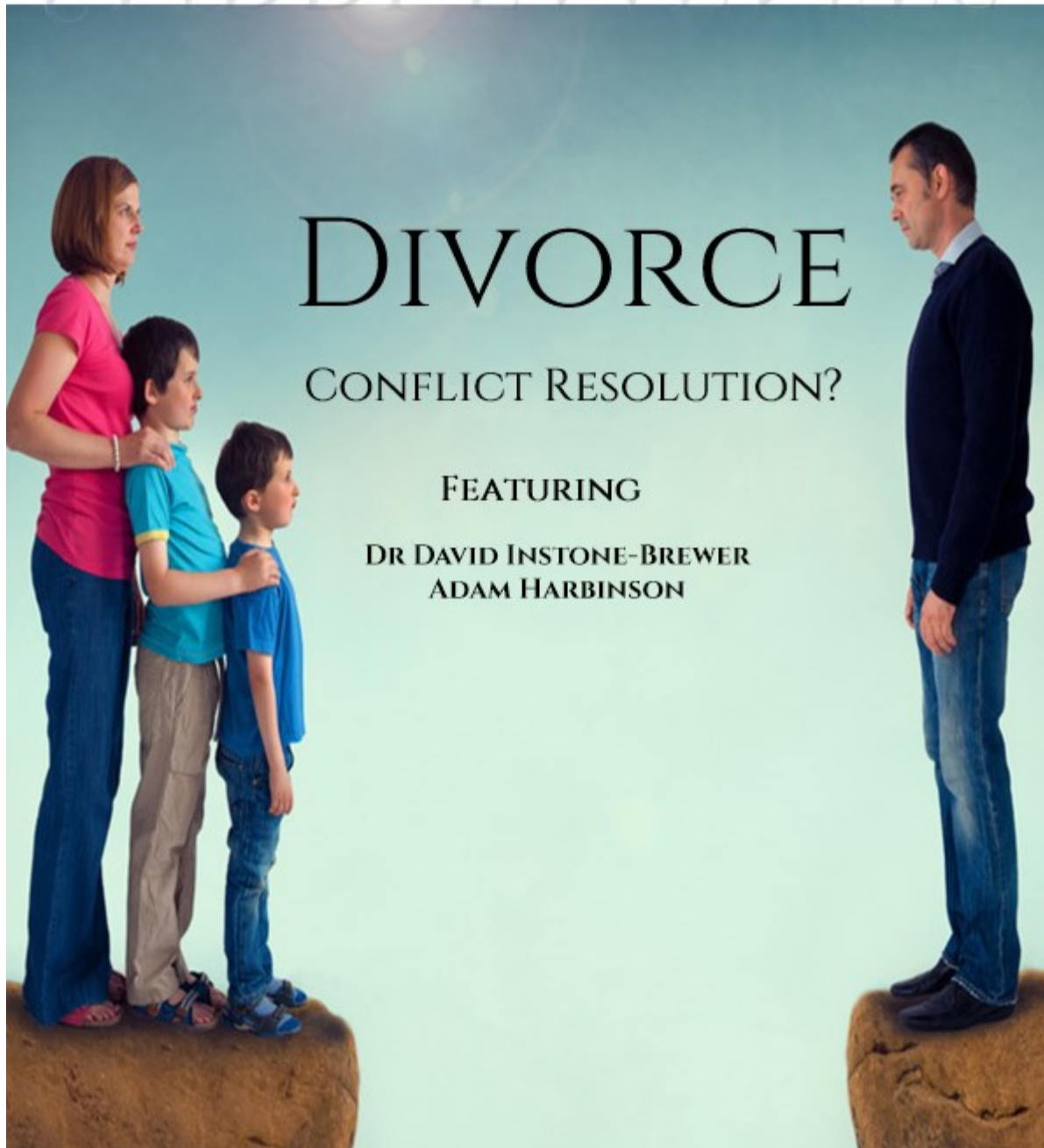


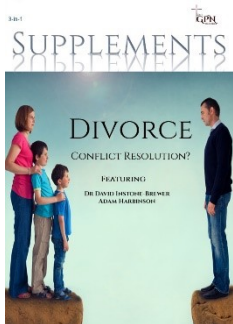
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Editor-in-Chief

AK Chenoweth

Editor

Dave Chenoweth

Digital & Design Consultants

LLC DESIGNS

Publishing

3-in-1 Walking in the Light

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MINISTRIES

C/O 901 N Brustcher Street

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ALL PHOTOS

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Divorce – Conflict Resolution?

By AK Chenoweth

INTRODUCTION

When putting this supplement together I had to search hard for answers. I wanted to ensure that we are not 'promoting divorce' but instead helping



AK Chenoweth
Award Winning Author

people to understand the experiences of someone who is enduring or has just undergone one. These people are going through a 'grieving process' yet when they turn to other believers or their church for help they are more often than not come up against more obstacles usually in the form of objection to their decision. In response to this objection the divorcee will sometimes be referred to a scripture, usually it is Matthew 19:8 where Jesus is addressing the Pharisee's questions about

divorce. Or maybe they will be quoted Paul, where a wife is not supposed to leave her husband (1Cor 7:10). So are the scriptures being misinterpreted and misused? Or are these people right after all? There are new studies that give a new slant on all of this and offer real food for thought. The scriptures were written in the 1st Century AD, and yet we are looking at them in the 21st Century. Would a person in the 1st Century from a Jewish background have thought the same as us in the 21st Century, I for one would very much doubt it...

Therefore, during the 'research process' something emerged very quickly – everyone is in conflict to a greater or lesser degree on this subject matter. Personally I found some of the experiences, mainly I have to say of women, harrowing. However it has to be said that I truly believe the same is for many men, though they keep their stories well-hidden due to shame and embarrassment.

Marriage is and should be a time of union, deep fulfilment and happiness for a couple. For believers it is a covenantal relationship between the man, woman and God. Representative of Christ's relationship with His bride (the Church). However it is safe to say that the statistics reflect a very different reality, what the statistics fail to show is how many of these divorce's ended because of adultery, abuse, neglect, or abandonment. It also fails to tell us how the women or men coped bringing up their children in a home environment whereby they had to make all the decisions and in many cases, in the absence of maintenance, had to now provide for their children with one wage. However, these are just the practical problems that a divorcee has to endure, 'post-divorce' if the person or persons involved are believers, more often than not these people report that they have had to endure another stumbling block - a frosty congregation, a cold shoulder from a person they used to call a friend, or a Pastor or Minister who has become suddenly very distant!

QUESTION: IF THE CHURCH, SCHOLARS AND THEOLOGIANs HAVE MISINTERPRETED THE SCRIPTURES HOW AND WHY HAS THAT COMPOUNDED A PERSON'S LOSS AND MADE THEM IN SOME INSTANCES AN OUTCAST WITHIN THEIR CONGREGATIONS?

Fortunately we have the expertise of Dr David Instone-Brewer who has spent years of study at Tyndale House, Cambridge University examining the ancient Hebraic texts in order to shed more light and understanding on the New

Testament. When approached as a Baptist minister by divorced couples wishing to remarry, Dr Instone-Bewer decided to look into the matter more – his discoveries are mind blowing, and have enabled over the years individuals, scholars and Pastors and Ministers to embrace the Word of God fully and in some cases have caused them to rethink the entire subject and their stance on the subject.

Then we have Adam Harbinson who gives a frank and heartfelt account from his own personal experience and how he overcame the obstacles to understand more. This is a painful and conflicting subject but because of demand we want to give you an opportunity as the believers to possibly understand more about this area.

Please understand the majority of people I have spoken to and know will tell you that they never sought a divorce, many entered the marriage as a lifelong commitment, however, there are major difficulties that some people experience within their homes that cannot be resolved through negotiations and indeed it would make a mockery of God if they were allowed to continue. For years the church and believers have reacted to these people in an ungodly way, many divorcee's having to qualify their status, feeling compelled to impart private information in order to feel accepted and to justify their actions, this is not how Christ taught us. He taught us to love one another - unconditionally.

Finally when we examine the scriptures further, one can read that God issues a Certificate of Divorce to an adulterous nation Israel in Jeremiah 3:8, and if you read the passages following until the end of the chapter, you could ask this question – what if Israel had not repented, would the Certificate of Divorce stood? Food for thought...

AK

IN FOCUS

DR DAVID INSTONE-BREWER B.D Hons, Ph.D.,

[Tyndale Fellowship](#)

Senior Research Fellow in Rabbinics & the New Testament



The Rev. Dr. David Instone-Brewer is a research fellow at Tyndale House, a research library in biblical studies located in Cambridge University, England. He previously served as a Baptist minister. His previous publications include „*Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis Before 70C.E.*“ „*Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*“ and „*Traditions of the Rabbis from the Era of the New Testament.*“ His book „*Divorce Remarriage in the Church*“ has been cited by the Trinity Journal as „*Arguably the best biblical study on the question of divorce and re-marriage*“. The

Journal of the Evangelical Theology Society wrote „*paradigm-challenging of the NT divorce texts*“. Dr Instone-Brewer is married with children.

His Research Interests listed include: Rabbinic background to the New Testament with special interest in dating rabbinic sources. Electronic resources for Biblical Studies.

Q Thank you Dr Brewer for taking time out to answer these questions. Have you always been a Christian or how did you come to know the Lord?

I was sent to a little local protestant Sunday School by my nominally Catholic mother and gave myself to Jesus when I was 12.

Q You studied at Cambridge University, is that where you first thought about the Rabbinic foundations of the Christian faith or had you already started to look into this area prior to your time there?

While I was studying for the Baptist ministry in Cardiff, I was introduced to the writings of Edersheim at a Bible study partly run by John Lennox (the one who debated Dawkins recently). For my doctorate in Cambridge I looked at the ways the early rabbis interpreted the Old Testament, in order to understand how it was done in the NT.

Q Do you believe that the church is lacking the Hebraic roots in its teachings and that in doing so is 'missing out' on the full conceptual understanding of the Word of God and in turn this can lead to erroneous teaching?

I'm not interested in making the church more Jewish – though I don't see much harm in that either. My interest is understanding what the NT says, and to do that we need to know what the first listeners and reader knew. We have to understand early Jewish terminology and logic so that we can understand the terminology and logic of the NT.

Q The subject of divorce has made your writings and your book *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church* (Paternoster in UK, IVP in USA) very popular, why did you decide to examine this area of relationship?

I'd much rather be known for a book on marriage than divorce! I'm very fortunate in my marriage and my three siblings and other immediate family are all married to their first partners – so I didn't write this out of any personal „need“. The study came out of pastoral problems – divorced people who came to my church wanting to remarry. This forced me to confront an issue I hadn't looked at properly.

Q Predominantly many women as opposed to men are subject to physical and psychological abuse in their marriages, some are abandoned and many have adultery committed against them, by their spouse. I have known of women, when they sought counsel from their church leader were forced to remain with their spouse and try and 'work it out' which not only seemed to compound the pain, but in the majority of cases the unrepentant partner continued the abuse. In many of these cases the woman becomes depressed and even suicidal, spending many years in counselling. What would you say to these leaders who are advising this?

Not only women suffer this way – a fellow scholar had bones broken by his violent wife, and he too was told he had to remain married. Origen, as early as AD 200, was puzzled that a man couldn't divorce a wife who was trying to poison him (Comm. on Matt. II.14.24). I'd ask the church leader to read my book – I'm convinced that when they understand the Jewish legal terminology

which Jesus quoted, they'll see that he didn't reject the OT law allowing divorce for abuse. God doesn't change his mind about things like this.

Q On first reading Matthew 19:8 & 9 where Jesus is challenged by the Pharisees about the subject of divorce, it would appear from Jesus' response that adultery seems to be the only 'acceptable' grounds for divorce, there is no mention of abuse or abandonment and with what is written in the passage it would appear that He continues to give the impression that remarriage would be committing adultery for both parties. Is this really the case or is there a fundamental flaw in our interpretation of this passage?

When they asked Jesus about "divorce for any cause" (Matt.19.3) we are apt to misunderstand the question because we don't know the legal terminology of the time. The most popular form of divorce, which had virtually supplanted all other grounds for divorce in Jesus' day, was called the "Any Cause" divorce. This was very similar to the modern "No-fault" divorce. In other words they were asking Jesus: "Is it lawful to divorce your wife for „Any Cause“?" Jesus utterly rejected this newly invented "Any Cause" divorce as unbiblical and unjust. So he replied: If you get divorced [with an Any Cause divorce], and remarry, you are committing adultery [because your divorce is invalid and you are still married]." Of course he didn't have to pedantically spell it out like this, because they all knew more about ancient Jewish law than we do.

Q Finally, post 'divorce' an individual regardless of the 'justified' reasons find himself or herself outside of the fold. What in your opinion has caused the body of Christ to treat these individuals in this manner almost excluding them in some cases from the assembly? How can this be redressed?

I have no criticisms for church leaders who have felt that they had to apply the Scriptures in this way. I am proud that they have bravely followed what they felt Scripture says, even when this was difficult. However, I am ashamed for my fellow scholars who have not helped the church understand these scriptures in the past. All the academic commentaries since about 1850 have pointed out the legal Jewish background to Jesus' debate about divorce, and yet hardly anyone spelled out its implications. Admittedly we couldn't be sure about this interpretation until the discovery of ancient Jewish marriage and divorce certificates in the Dead Sea desert, including and one key document which was deliberately hidden for 40 years, but looking back, we have had the solution for a long time.

It will be a long time before the situation is healed. The church is like a large ship – it takes a long time to turn. People rightly ask why the Holy Spirit allowed this to be hidden for so long, but the same can be asked concerning church teaching on slavery, forbidding priests to marry and other doctrines which have caused problems. However, I'm heartened to see that many autonomous churches and small denominations are already recognizing this Biblical teaching, and I'm sure that the bigger ones will follow – slowly.

Link to access more on Tyndale House & Dr David Instone-Brewer

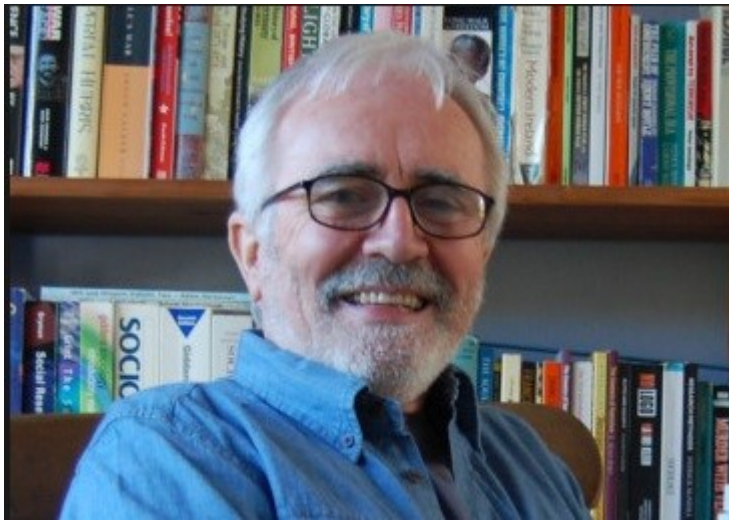
FEATURE

God Hates Divorce – Doesn't He?

By

Adam Harbinson – Author/Presenter

Emile Durkheim, a philosopher of the last century, is renowned for his classic work, *The Elementary Form of the Religious Life*. His project was to explain



the origin of religion. Obviously he could not travel back in time to the cradle of civilization to watch its birth, but he did the next best thing; he studied the world's most basic form of religion; Totemism, as practiced by the Aborigine people. Totemism intrigued

Durkheim. He discovered that each Aborigine clan has its own unique totem, a carving or an object that symbolized the beliefs and values of the clan. For example, if a clan highly valued cunning, then their totem might be a fox. If they valued physical strength then an ox might be their totem. In other words, the Aborigine people projected their belief system and values onto their gods; they were in effect worshipping a reflection of themselves. There are many ways in which we worship a god of our own making; to the man who is a racist, his god is a racist. Some of us serve a sectarian god who is 'on our side' as we wage war against those whose doctrinal views differ from ours.

When I was a child the god of my imagination was a kindly silver-haired granddaddy, but he was a man, and he was the boss, and I grew up with this

god who taught me that it was OK for fathers to rule their home with a rod of iron. Whose wives were good Christian wives, only if they were submissive, and to an extent that view finds support in an overly patriarchal church. My first wife died when I was fifty one. I thought I would live out my days as a bachelor, for I reasoned that if I were to marry again my new wife would either be a forty-odd year old spinster who was fixed in her ways, or she'd have been previously married – and I wasn't enamored by either of those prospects. In time I did meet a beautiful lady, and yes, she had been married before, and the legalistic god of my youth rose up in righteous indignation; he was implacably opposed to divorce, no exceptions and no extenuating circumstances.

Like many, I had never thought the issue through, I'd never had reason to, but I had now, and so I began my search for truth with a commitment that if the true God was as opposed to me marrying a divorcee as my small-minded god was, I would strangle the fledgling relationship at birth and retreat to the seclusion of my books.

I found that God hates divorce; that much was clear – but what I didn't find was any trace of a harsh and non-negotiable prohibition. The true God is full of grace, and love. The true God gave us law as a map, not a trap. Over and over again I found that theme repeated, from the Book of Deuteronomy where he laid down laws to protect the rights of divorcees – especially women, to the writings of Paul to the Corinthian believers where he said; *„... if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.“*

So my conclusion was this; a woman might emerge from an unhappy marriage in which she had been systematically humiliated, physically and emotionally

abused, or a man might find that the wife of his youth had been unfaithful. Their marriage bond was a contract, they promised to love and honor each other, to care for each other in sickness and in health, for better or for worse, for richer or poorer. But the moment he swore at her in public, humiliated and embarrassed her, punched, kicked or slapped her, the contract was broken, and despite the howls of pious protest from those who would insist that marriage is forever, she is morally and legally entitled to leave him. She might forgive him, but there is no divine obligation for her to return to a cruel or a dangerous environment.

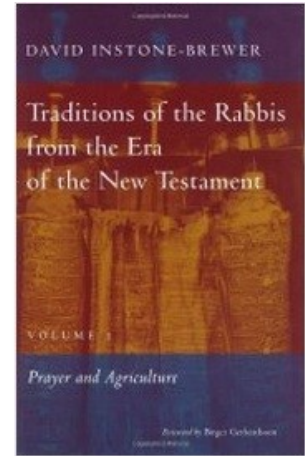
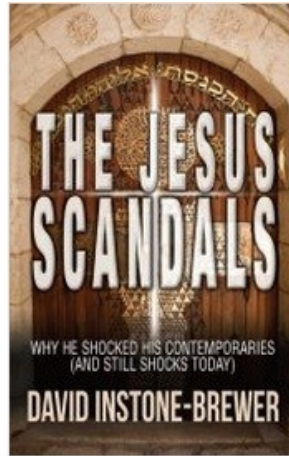
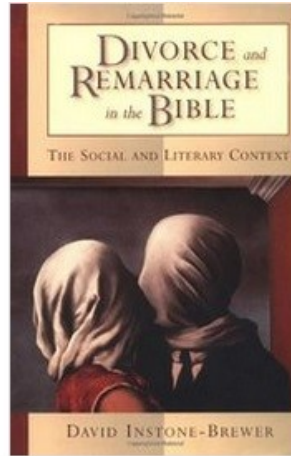
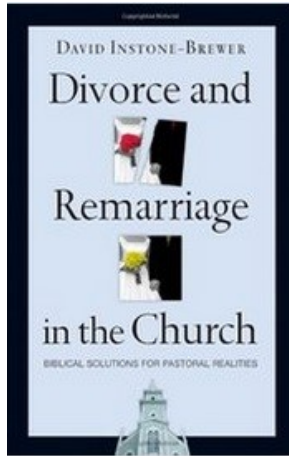
Also, the moment a wife shares her body with another man, she has broken the contract. Her husband might forgive her, they might by prayer and counselling and talking things through rebuild their marriage, but search as you will, you will find no demand for the contract to be reinstated.

In every facet of this walk of faith, we have a choice to make; we can live with the small-minded, religious god we grew up with, or we can surrender to our Abba who is compassionate and merciful, slow to anger and filled with unfailing love. The one who does not accuse us, who does not punish us for our sins, the one of whom it can be truly said, 'There is nothing we can do to make him love us more, and there is nothing we can do to make him love us less.'

Make the right choice. Choose the big God!

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