



# Minutes With Messiah

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## *THE DREADED GRAMMAR*

Most people don't like studying grammar. Even those of us who call out those who use improper grammar don't necessarily like studying it. After all, most of the grammar of our native language was learned through speaking it rather than studying it. English grammar is simple, though, compared to some other languages. Teachers of biblical Greek, for instance, insist their students have a basic understanding of English grammar because they are going to add onto that when studying Greek. Even English grammar can get complicated at times. Take the genitive case. (OK, so you never heard of the genitive case. It is probably the second most used case, next only to the nominative, which you may not have heard of either.) In English, the genitive case is mostly the possessive case. It indicates ownership, such as "the boy's dog" or "the dog of the boy." In Latin and Greek, however, one web site lists nine separate uses of the genitive, including possession. Knowing this we can wonder about the meanings of certain passages of the Bible that sometimes we thought were pretty straightforward.

Four phrases in particular stand out. "The day of the Lord." "The angel of the Lord." "The gift of the Holy Spirit." "The gifts of the Spirit."

The phrase "the day of the Lord" appears 23 times in the Bible, including 6 times in the New Testament. (Two of those are quotations from the prophets.) This phrase is distinct from "the Lord's day" in Revelation 1:10, which probably refers to the Sabbath and not Sunday as it is commonly used today. The day of the Lord almost always refers to a day of judgement. Thus it is not a possessive, but a descriptive genitive. It is similar to the phrase "day of salvation." The day of the Lord doesn't just belong to the Lord; every day does. Instead it is a day in which the Lord's presence is the most telling characteristic. It is a day in which the Lord will dispense judgement.

A little more complex is the phrase "the angel of the Lord." Does the angel belong to the Lord? Is the source of the angel the Lord? Or is the angel actually the Lord? All three are possibilities. The first is least likely because it implies that the Lord uses one angel to communicate to man. Most often, he does use Gabriel, but this phrase is never used to describe Gabriel. The context

of the phrase may sometimes imply that the angel came from God, but even these contexts are ambiguous. Perhaps the clearest is that of the burning bush. In Exodus 3:2 "the angel of the Lord appeared to him [Moses] in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush." Two verses later, "God called to him out of the bush." In Acts 7, Stephen recounts the incident, saying "the angel of the Lord" was in the bush, but God called to him out of the bush. It is not definitive, but it appears that most times the phrase is used it means the angel which is God himself.

Peter promised those who would be baptized would receive "the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38) Some, apparently mistakenly, confuse this with the "gifts" Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 12-14. (Actually, Paul never uses the phrase "gifts of the Spirit", but people today do.) Both use the genitive form "of the Spirit," but they appear to have two different meanings. In the letter to the Corinthians, Paul specifically uses the plural word, gifts. These gifts have as their source the Holy Spirit. There are several gifts, but one Spirit. The gifts are given "by the same Spirit." Thus, "of the Spirit" is a genitive of source; the various gifts come from the Spirit. Peter's use of the "gift of the Holy Spirit" is distinctively singular. There is one Spirit and one gift. This is what grammarians call an "appositive genitive." It could as easily be rendered "you shall receive the gift, the Holy Spirit." The Spirit is the gift itself. That Spirit may or may not grant one or more of several gifts. The promise that many people miss is not the ability to speak in languages one has not learned in the normal way (the least of the gifts), or miraculous knowledge, or interpretation of languages. The promise to every Christian is the Holy Spirit living in us. "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" (1 Cor 6:19)

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# DIVORCE

There is an issue that may have done more harm than good in the church. Not that it is not an important issue, but so many people have made it into a greater issue than it should be. That is the issue of divorce. Along with that issue ride such questions as marriage, eldership, and even qualification to teach others. Disputes and misunderstandings abound to our hurt, even dividing congregations. An analysis of the scriptures shows that we have added much that is not in the Bible. A practical look shows that we have, in some cases, made divorce into an issue of salvation where none should exist.

I don't believe that divorce is proper in most instances. My personal belief is that I find it difficult to trust any person that initiates a divorce, because that person has a history of breaking promises. The reason God "hateth putting away" (Mal 2:16) is because it is dealing treacherously with the wife. It is a form of lying.

The Bible often speaks of a man "putting away" or divorcing the wife. Under Jewish law, a wife cannot

tie divorce to "fornications," most of the time when we talk about divorce in the church the question comes up about who is the "guilty party." That is, was there infidelity involved, and who was the unfaithful person? If there was no infidelity, then the divorcer is assumed to be guilty.

There is some question about the meaning of "for fornications" (the word is plural in the Greek) in these passages. Some believe that it refers to the bride not being a virgin (or misrepresenting her virginity) at the time of the marriage. Others say that it means any unfaithfulness in marriage (although Jesus should have used "adulteries" rather than "fornications" if that is what he meant). Still others say that a person must be unfaithful more than once before the spouse can divorce him or her. While I lean toward the first or the third, I admit that it is not crystal clear what Jesus meant.

Since most of what Jesus says about divorce comes down to a question of somebody committing adultery (sometimes only if they marry someone else) as a result of the divorce, after each scripture I will include a table showing who it is that becomes the adulterer/adulteress. These tables will show that we often get things backwards in our view of divorce. In these tables, a "yes" indicates that the person is called an adulterer. A "no" indicates they are clearly absolved of adultery. A question mark indicates that no conclusion can be made from that scripture.

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 committeth adultery. (Matt 5:32)

	Divorcer	Divorced	Marries Divorced
Not for fornications	?	Yes	Yes
For fornications	?	?	?

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. (Mk 10:11-12)

	Divorcer	Divorced	Marries Divorced
Any reason	Yes, if marries	?	?

There is some question about the meaning of "for fornications" (the word is plural in the Greek) in these passages.

divorce a husband. (If she asks for a divorce, however, the husband is obligated to give it to her.) In many countries now it is possible for either spouse to initiate divorce proceedings. Perhaps in the analysis of what the scriptures say about divorce it doesn't matter who is the divorcer and who the divorcee.

## Jesus on Divorce

After the book of Malachi, Jesus and Paul are the only ones in scripture to say anything about divorce. This may show how truly minor an issue it should be. In the overall scheme of things, divorce is right down there with foot washing as an issue for the church. More is written about how the church treasury should be spent or about church discipline, and not much is written about either of those topics.

Jesus makes three statements in response to questions about divorce. Since some of these statements

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. (Matt 19:9)

	Divorcer	Divorced	Marries Divorced
Not for fornications	Yes, if marries	Yes*	Yes
For fornications	No	?	?

\*Only because one party cannot commit adultery and the other not do so.

Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery; and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery. (Lk 16:18)

	Divorcer	Divorced	Marries Divorced
Covetousness (see below)	Yes, if marries	Yes*	Yes

\*Only because one party cannot commit adultery and the other not do so.

A careful look at these scriptures shows some interesting things. The most obvious is that our legalistic views of divorce and “remarriage” (technically not remarriage but instead marrying another) do not necessarily square with what Jesus said. We talk about the “innocent party,” the one who did not commit fornication, being able to marry but the guilty party not. In reality, no conclusion can be reached about the status of a person divorced “for fornications.” Can the so-called “guilty party” marry another, or would doing so be adultery? The scriptures are totally silent. On the other hand, a person who was divorced for any other reason, who marries another, commits adultery. The person who divorced that person also commits adultery if they marry another. It seems that if a man really wants to make life difficult for his wife he should divorce her for reasons other than “for fornications.” Moreover, the person who divorces the other may become an adulterer regardless of the reason for the divorce, but only if the passages in Mark and Luke can be considered independently from the others. Otherwise, both are free to marry if the divorce was for fornications.

The really interesting thing about the passages in Matthew and Luke is that a person who had no part of the divorce itself may, especially if fornication was not a reason for the divorce, become guilty of adultery by marrying the divorced person. Perhaps the reason for this is that it takes two people to commit adultery. If the divorced person becomes an adulterer/adulteress when they marry again, the new partner must necessarily become guilty. The same thing applies even more so if they marry the one who initiated the divorce.

One may also ask why the passage in Luke is placed where it is. The context of the entire chapter is concerning rich people. The immediate context is the covetousness of the Pharisees. The verse is immediately followed by the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Between these two is a single verse on divorce, seemingly out of place in the discussion. But Luke rarely puts a single statement out of place. Why does he mention “putting away” a wife in this context? Perhaps Jesus is limiting the reasons for divorce in that context to the person who divorces another for covetous reasons. These might include so that he can marry another that he desires. It might include that the person who subsequently marries her paid the man to divorce her. Whatever it includes, the

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context limits the reason for divorce to covetousness and not every reason.

### Paul on Divorce

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. But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. ... But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. (1 Cor 7:10-15)

Paul’s discussion of divorce reveals some things that contradict the traditional view of divorce. First of all, he says that a couple in which both are Christians should not divorce for any reason. Secondly, he says that a person who becomes a Christian and is divorced because of that can marry another. Thirdly, he indicates that a divorce, for whatever reason, truly dissolves a marriage. That is, a person who is divorced cannot be considered as still

(Continued on next page.)

# ***DIVORCE (CONT.)***

married to the original spouse, even if it was not “for the right reason.”

Divorce violates God’s intent for marriage. God wants man and woman to “cleave to” one another, not “cleave from” each other. Nevertheless, there may be reasons (fornications, religious incompatibility) for divorce. In any case, many people have been guilty of teaching their own views on divorce, wrongly thinking that they squared with what the Bible says about it.

The point of this discussion, ultimately, is not about divorce. Paul used his own name and those of Peter and Apollos to make a point to the Corinthians about division. I have used our misconceptions about the biblical statements on divorce to, I hope, make a point about the need to study with an open mind. We need to read what God says, not what we think God should have said.

## **Side Issues**

Several issues may hinge on the scriptures concerning divorce. Actually, several issues hinge on interpretations of these scriptures, but in some cases should not be issues at all.

Can a man who has been divorced be an elder? Would divorce, in and of itself, be grounds for denying a man that office? The qualities of an elder in 1 Timothy 3 say that he must be “the husband of one wife.” A man who is divorced and not married again is clearly ineligible, because he is no longer the husband of a wife. (Or, he is eligible, though living single, under the traditional view that his divorce was not valid.) If he has married again, Paul says that divorce ends the former marriage.

Therefore, he is still the husband of only one wife, even if it is not the same wife as at some time past. It would be up to the congregation to decide whether the divorce, and the events leading up to it, would be sufficient to disqualify the man.

Another side issue that often comes up is whether an abused person can divorce an abuser. Jesus acknowledged it was possible to divorce someone for reasons other than fornications. If neither party married again there could be no adultery (because adultery requires two people). Furthermore, if saving a life is more important than a Jew keeping Sabbath, surely it is more important than some legalistic interpretation concerning divorce.

There is at least one brother in the church who takes the position that everything that Jesus said before his crucifixion is part of the Old Testament, and relates only to the Jews of his day. It appears that his adamant stance on this is primarily so that he does not have to deal with what Jesus said about divorce. What this position shows is that some people will go to great lengths to try to make the Bible say what they want it to say about divorce. This may be the most vital side issue to the question. When people want what they want, and are willing to “wrest, unto their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:16) the scriptures to justify themselves, then scripture loses its value and authority. This is the real danger in disputes over divorce; that people are forced to take sides in splitting the church. When the scriptures are essentially vague, is it all really worth the damage?

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