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## Chapter 1. Preface

These are notes first used to teach a Sunday School class on 1 Corinthians 7 (and thus necessarily on divorce and remarriage) in late 2000. Several members of the class asked me for written notes. Not having any at the time, I typed my class materials over the next several weeks. As the writing caused me to focus more closely on the material, I supplemented my work with additional research.

After distributing the original notes to the class, I've continued to do research and to add to the text as time has permitted. Ultimately, I've learned that I'm no Greek scholar, and so I'm forced to lean on the conclusions of those far more knowledgeable than I. Unfortunately, even the best scholars disagree on many, many points. Indeed, even a cursory review of the many commentaries on divorce and remarriage show just how little agreement there is on this subject, even (or especially!) among the experts.

To me, the test of truth must ultimately be based on trueness to the heart of God. As a highly left-brained individual, I will always look first for a sound analytical answer to any scriptural question, but my analytical nature tells me that objective textual analysis—in isolation—does not always reach the right answer. I mean, there are countless scriptures that we instinctively understand correctly, realizing that a law-based interpretation would entirely miss the point. For example—

*Matt. 5:29-30* “If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”

This passage comes immediately before—

*Matt. 5:31-32* “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.”

I'm sure you can't help but notice that we vigorously enforce our law-based interpretation of verses 31-32 while we have never even seriously considered enforcing verses 29-30! And yet they are part of the same sermon, even the same argument.

We correctly interpret verses 29-30 as hyperbole—an exaggeration for effect—understanding that the underlying principle is the point Jesus is truly insisting on. What should we conclude is the underlying principle of Matthew 5:31-32? And what is its underlying principle?

I must also note my reliance of John Edwards' book, *An In Depth Study of Marriage and Divorce*.<sup>1</sup> I've borrowed liberally from his research and have not consistently footnoted to this book.

I really have only two complaints with Edwards' work. First, I think he has failed to argue his case has persuasively as he might have. While Edwards argues the case well from 1 Corinthians 7:27-28, he fails to make this the centerpiece of his case, as it should be. It really is his strongest argument.

Second, Edwards centers his case on the argument that "commit adultery" in Matthew 5:31-32 is, in the Greek, in the passive voice, but this argument has come under fire. Gary Collier—who is far from being a legalist and who is clearly a very capable Greek scholar—has seriously challenged Edwards' arguments.

I should also note my reliance on David Instone-Brewer's *Divorce & Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context*.<sup>2</sup> This book is very, very important. I don't attempt a thorough review and critique of this work. Rather, I commend it to the reader's reading.

I was really hoping to make this all a simplified, more direct summary of Edwards' book for the benefit of my class, but—alas—the subject just doesn't lend itself to simplicity.

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<sup>1</sup> (Revised edition. Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publ. Co., 1990).

<sup>2</sup> (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co. 2002) (hereinafter "Instone-Brewer").