

Understanding  
**DIVORCE**  
and  
**REMARRIAGE**

*by* David C. Pack

Herbert W. Armstrong led the Worldwide Church of God (formerly The Radio Church of God until 1968) until his death in 1986. Hundreds of millions heard his voice and read his literature. God called him in the fall of 1926 and he was converted in the spring of 1927. Over the course of Mr. Armstrong's ministry, God revealed through him a great many true biblical doctrines, which had been lost to the Church through the centuries. After his death, his successors ceased to believe and teach these doctrines. Although copyright law prohibits The Restored Church of God from reproducing and distributing literature produced while he led the Worldwide Church of God, we are committed to the preservation and teaching of all of these truths!

**THIS BOOKLET IS PROVIDED FREE OF CHARGE AND IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST BY THE RESTORED CHURCH OF GOD.**

It is made possible by the voluntary, freely given tithes and offerings of the members of the Church and others who have elected to support the work of the Church. Contributions are welcomed and gratefully accepted. Those who wish to voluntarily aid and support this WORK OF GOD around the world are gladly welcomed as co-workers in this major effort to preach the gospel to all nations.

Copyright © 2008, 2017 The Restored Church of God®  
All Rights Reserved.

Printed in the United States of America

---

Over fifty percent of marriages now end in divorce. But does *God* permit divorce? If so, on what grounds? Are divorced people ever free to remarry?

Are all marriages bound by God for life? If not, why? Under what circumstances does God bind a marriage?

Millions are confused. False teaching and human reasoning abound. What does the Bible teach about divorce and remarriage?

This booklet reveals the plain answers to these and related questions!

---



**D**ivorce and remarriage is a fact of life in today's world. Millions routinely engage in this practice. But this was never what God intended!

Almighty God is the Author of marriage. The laws, which bind and loose marriages, derive their authority from the One who created this *divine institution*. Of course, men have also created many laws governing the physical union of marriage. But none of the governments of men understand the supreme PURPOSE of marriage and, therefore, how to apply God's laws to this relationship.

In a world cut off from God (Isa. 59:1-2; Jer. 5:25), governments, and even the many supposed Christian denominations, do not understand how and when marriages are either bound or annulled, or when a divorce, with the possibility of remarriage, is permissible.

The institutions of this world—religion, education, science, government, industry, commerce, society as a whole—follow the god of this world (II Cor. 4:4), instead of the true God. The result has been misery, unhappiness, confusion and every imaginable human woe. Marriage is no exception!

### **The First Marriage**

At the beginning of Genesis, God records the description of the world's first marriage, stating, "And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And

they were both naked, the MAN and his WIFE, and were not ashamed” (Gen. 2:22-25).

In the New Testament, Jesus confirmed the permanence of marriage, directly quoting the Genesis account. Notice: “And He answered and said unto them, Have you not read, that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?” (Matt. 19:4-5).

While Christ was obviously quoting Genesis 2, He continued by adding this in verse 6: “Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, *let not man put asunder.*”

As the God of the Old Testament (I Cor. 10:4), Christ would not have disagreed with His own statements recorded in Genesis. It was JESUS CHRIST who was the true Author of marriage, and He is the only one qualified to tell us the laws governing divorce and remarriage!

Ever since Adam and Eve, in the garden, rejected God’s government—His RULE over their lives—mankind has no longer taken God into such relationships as marriage or business partnerships, or into education and its institutions responsible for teaching right knowledge. People do not want God entering or becoming part of their lives—but they *do* want His blessings. Yet, so many marriages today lack those blessings!

### Conditions Today

Countless millions today are not interested in what God says—about anything! Most people are completely willing to get a divorce based on nothing more than the *feeling* that they should do this. These same millions give no consideration to what *God* says—to what marriage *is*, and to when or whether they are permitted to divorce and remarry.

Some people, claiming to be Christians, manufacture a reason to get divorced—often on little more than a whim. Most give not the slightest thought to what God instructs in His Word about either divorce or remarriage. Of course, most of these also have *no idea* what God actually does or does not instruct.

But some few others will look for a scripture to support their actions, yet declare, “We must all decide for ourselves. And I have a *feeling* that I should get a divorce—and it’s a really strong feeling, particularly since I don’t want my wife (or husband) anymore. God is showing me I should get a divorce.”

This is no exaggeration!

The state of marriage is so bad that it has become the brunt of jokes, such as the observation that “The greatest cause of divorce is marriage.” (Sadly, *it has* almost come to be this way.) This kind of thinking has also caused millions of couples to simply live together believing, “If we don’t get married, we don’t have to worry about divorce.”

There is even a growing endorsement now coming from certain churchmen and religionists, claiming that the Bible allows for cohabitation outside

marriage, as long as the couple “loves” each other. Such blind human reasoning!—with awful, even catastrophic, results for those who practice it! On the other hand, for those who do get married, one author about the family, Maggie Gallagher, states, “We now live in a society where it is legally easier and less risky to dump a wife than to fire an employee.”

Wherever marriages are occurring, divorce is still a tragic fact of life—in almost every part of the world. Consider these statistics:

The average American marriage lasts only eight years, with 41% of first marriages, 60% of second marriages, and 73% of third marriages eventually rupturing. The average age for couples in a first divorce is 30 years old. A divorce occurs in the United States approximately every 36 seconds. In addition, many nations have seen a sharp decline in the percentage of those who ever marry, when charted from the 1980s through the early 2010s.

William J. Bennett’s book *The Broken Hearth* states, “Since 1960, a forty-year period in which the marriage rate has declined by a third, the divorce rate...has more than doubled. The year 1974 was a landmark of sorts. In that year, divorce replaced death as the principal cause of family dissolution.”

Not long ago, one of every two couples getting married (whether their first, second or third marriage) would be divorced in five years! In recent years, one in two marriages just in California ended in divorce, and one in three in the rest of the United States. Therefore, if you attended two marriages five years ago, one of those marriages would be now spiritually and emotionally bankrupt. While the number of divorces has decreased, the situation has actually gotten worse. The improvement comes from people living together instead of marrying, but such “partnering” has led to great numbers “divorcing” without affecting the divorce statistics.

These statistics will almost certainly continue to accelerate.

### Removing Confusion

All of this creates tremendous confusion about what God teaches regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage. Yet, there are those who *do* want to know what God says, who *do* want to be in harmony with His laws governing marriage and divorce. They do not know where to turn for answers.

Do *you* feel that you have an acceptable—a good—understanding of divorce and remarriage? Do *you* know what God teaches, what Moses wrote, what Christ said, and what Paul explained, about this subject? As with so many things God makes clear in the Bible, the world usually explains away basic, simple truths. Based on man’s approach of explaining away basic verses, this subject *could* appear to be quite technical, and dismissing it might seem easy. But it is not difficult to understand!

This booklet presents God’s teaching concerning divorce and remarriage—from His Word! It will remove all doubt about how He expects His people—*true* Christians—to approach this subject. But it is intended to teach

the *doctrine* of divorce and remarriage, not to address all the administrative *specifics* that would only be applicable to individuals in actual divorce cases, which would be handled through personal counsel.

### Morals Collapsing in a Blind World

As never before in history, morals all over the world are in a state of collapse. Pornography, adultery, premarital sex, pedophilia, incest, prostitution (continually growing more open), usually found alongside gambling, and now same-sex marriage, are on the rise. This is because general corruption always breeds *more* immorality, which contributes to further moral collapse, including the institution of marriage.

Making matters *much* worse, modern liberal educators, politicians, actors, pop stars, the media and even the clergy promote “political correctness,” in regard to accepting every form of “alternative lifestyle.” People, like nations, can morally collapse and corrupt others. Today’s liberal concept of mercy and tolerance, as the solution to every form of immorality and wrong conduct, promotes sin and perversion.

God has a much better plan—the RIGHT SOLUTION!—in store for the recovery of those who have self-destructed in this life. He can and *will* eventually redeem the vast majority of humanity, which will learn to honor God’s ways.

But God is not working with *today’s* world. He is only working with a selected few that he is *calling out* of this world (John 6:44, 65; 17:14, 16). He is revealing His Plan and purpose—including the awesome purpose for marriage—to only a few.

### When Judgment Begins

The only way to address the subject of divorce and remarriage is to determine the point at which God holds people truly accountable for sin—of any kind. Another way of asking this would be: Does God forgive *all* sins that were committed prior to baptism, or just some?

James 4:17 states, “. . .to him that *knows* to do good, and does it not, to *him* it is sin.” This verse reveals that people are judged by what they *know*.

This passage is similar to Hebrews 10:26: “For if we sin willfully *after* that we have received the *knowledge of the truth*, there remains no more sacrifice for sins.” To be held accountable for sin, one must *know* “the truth”!

It is only after a person learns the spiritual knowledge of God—the truth—that God holds that person responsible for obeying it. Consider for a moment. No more than half of the people on Earth have even heard the name of Jesus Christ, let alone who He was, what He did, what He taught or His purpose for living a physical, human life. Yet, many believe that, even though the vast majority of mankind is cut off from and has never known God, these billions are still being judged, and have possibly even lost salvation.



But I Peter 4:17 states, “For the time is come that *judgment* must begin at the *house of God*: and if it first begin at *us*, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?”

Again, once a person comes into the truth, that person is held accountable for what he *does* with it. We must state this plainly: Human beings are only held accountable by God for sins they commit after learning the truth.

But what does this have to do with divorce and remarriage?

### “Sins That Are Past”

When counseling a person for baptism, a minister asks several questions regarding whether the person is *acting on* the new knowledge he is gaining. For instance, “Are you now keeping the Sabbath?” The person generally answers, “Yes.” By the time one is baptized, he has already been keeping the Sabbath. But we cannot tell him to go back and keep all the Sabbaths he missed for twenty, thirty, forty or more years. How would he do that?

We then ask, “Are you tithing?” Individuals also usually answer, “Yes.” However, while such people must practice the law of tithing from that point forward, they are unable to pay God the tithes they neglected to pay Him throughout their lives! Obviously, this would be almost impossible.

We might then ask these same people, “Have you proven the understanding of the Bible’s definition of clean and unclean meats? Have you stopped eating pork, shellfish and other unclean flesh?” Again, generally, they say, “Yes.” But they cannot go back and disgorge—*uneat*—all the unclean foods eaten over a lifetime.

The point should be clear. People cannot undo the past, the period *prior* to when God was working with them in preparation to forgive their sins and give them His Holy Spirit at baptism.

God is not involving Himself in the lives of people in the world. Since Isaiah 59:2 and Jeremiah 5:25 show that sin cuts humanity off from God, and that the world is now blind, not being judged *now*, He is not entering or involving Himself in the marriages of this world. He is not binding marriages occurring in the jungles of Brazil between cannibals or headhunters—or people who worship at the feet of a stone god—or atheists who do not even believe there is a God.

On what basis could God judge people regarding right knowledge—biblical truth—of which they know nothing? Most do not know the truth about the permanence of marriage, and when divorce and remarriage may be permissible. People cannot possibly be held accountable for marriage laws they never understood—that God had not revealed to them.

People come into the knowledge of the truth often having been married one, two, three, and—in one case I recall—eight times! How would such a person unscramble all of that, and get to the facts of which one of the marriages that was supposedly bound by God? This would include identifying all unions that were fraudulent to exclude them from consideration.

Romans 3:25 states that Christ died for “sins *that are past*.” This includes Sabbath-breaking, lying, stealing, swearing, dishonoring parents, hatred—or marrying one, two or even three times—before God begins to judge us, starting when we learn the truth.

This is a world filled with imperfect human beings, wrought with flaws, sin, evil, “hardness of heart,” unfaithfulness and irresponsibility. Although God “hates putting away” (Mal. 2:16) in marriage, divorces do happen. In ignorance, people routinely break the laws of God in all areas of their lives. Yet, God calls many such people into His truth.

What can a person do if he or she has already been divorced prior to being called? Upon repentance, baptism and conversion, all of one’s *past* sins are forgiven (Acts 2:38; Psa. 103:1-3, 10-12), including divorce. The individual would be allowed to consider remarriage.

Although unconverted minds cannot understand Christ’s teachings (Rom. 8:7), all who *are* converted, all who *have* the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9, 14), must obey God in the letter *and* spirit of the Law (Rom. 2:29; I Cor. 6:20). This means husbands and wives should not only avoid the spectacle of divorce, but work at building marriages into relationships mirroring Christ’s relationship with His Bride—the Church (Eph. 5:25-26; Rev. 19:7-9)!

### A Wrong Assumption

We have seen that many assume God enters every marriage everywhere on Earth. If this is true, then why in the New Testament record was this not a big issue? Why are there not mentioned at least a few case histories of divorce and remarriage? An examination of the entire New Testament reveals that this matter was never an issue in the first-century Church. Try to imagine the problems that would have been plaguing the Church if this had been the case. But the record is silent.

It becomes obvious that the early Church was not constantly breaking up families, thinking that all marriages, for all time, and in every culture and society, regardless of what people knew, were bound by God. The early Church knew that people would also not be accountable for what they did not know on *this* doctrine, as well as not being accountable for what they did not know about the Sabbath, tithing, salvation, judgment, the Ten Commandments, clean and unclean meats, or any other doctrine of God.

### The Starting Point

How then does the new convert, called of God, specifically address his or her present circumstances? I Corinthians 7:20 plainly states, “Let every man *abide* in the same calling wherein he was called.” This passage is repeated almost identically, four verses later, in verse 24: “Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein *abide* with God.”

These scriptures follow directly on the heels of 23 verses describing marriage, separation, reconciliation and other kinds of marital issues. This is the context for these two statements.

The apostle Paul is saying that, whatever your *present* situation—whatever state in which you are called—leave the past behind, determined to “abide” as you are. This is basic New Testament instruction. A person is to accept whatever present state of marriage he or she may be in at the time of conversion, recognizing that judgment has begun. Remember, judgment is “now on the house of God”—those who “know to do good.”

We are now ready to ask the overall question: Once people are converted, are there circumstances in which a marriage can be dissolved, leaving one or both parties free to remarry? Or are all marriages between *converted* people (those who know the truth), regardless of circumstances, permanently bound by God?

### The First of Two Reasons

There are TWO scriptural reasons—and *only* TWO—why a marriage could end, where both parties knew God’s truth.

The first reason a marriage may end—and it is really an annulling of a marriage that God never bound—is FRAUD. An annulment is an official acknowledgment that a marriage simply never occurred.

What is fraud?

In a business contract, fraud is very simple. If two parties strike hands and agree to a matter, entering into a contract, and one cheats the other—does not live up to the bargain—either by adding something to or removing something from the contract without the other party’s knowledge—*fraud* has been committed.

For example: A building contractor agrees with a bank and a client that he will build a house in three months, knowing there is no possible way he can do it. He may want to merely achieve a “housing start.” Technically, he has already defrauded the bank, not to mention the client. Similarly, if one sells a car and tells the buyer it is a *new* car when it is *not*, the buyer has been defrauded.

Consider. If two people are entering a marriage and one tells the other, “I’m in perfect health,” but the person knows he has terminal cancer, with only four months to live—that is fraud. It is not the kind that you will find specifically described in Scripture, but it *is* a form of fraud.

Likewise, if two people get married and one is a closet alcoholic who has been drinking for years, and somehow managed to hide it during the courtship, but, after marriage, bottles suddenly appear all over the house—fraud has been committed.

If someone has filed for bankruptcy, but states that he is a millionaire, and the new spouse finds out that he is broke, drowning in bills and without a paycheck—fraud has been committed. Similarly, if one was a drug addict or was

convicted of a crime and been to prison, or has other children, not revealed prior to marriage—fraud has been committed.

Each of these circumstances involves a fraudulent situation or condition that could end a marriage, *if* the offended party chooses to act upon it.

Fraud simply involves two people entering into an agreement and one gets the proverbial “pig in a poke”—something other than what he thought he was bargaining for. This *general definition* of fraud must be understood before examining God’s provision for ending a fraudulent marriage.

The subject of divorce and remarriage can be generally understood by examining five basic passages. First, we will examine two passages in Deuteronomy to set the stage for questions Christ addressed in two passages in Matthew. This will allow us to understand the first of two reasons a person could divorce and remarry.

### Deuteronomy 22:13

The Old Testament describes circumstances under which the populace of Israel obtained divorces. First, notice Deuteronomy 22:13-17. This passage sets the stage to further discuss fraud, always discovered *after* a marriage has occurred.

Notice: “If any man take a wife, and go in unto her, and *hate her* [the husband, ready to consummate the marriage, finds something wrong with his new bride], and give occasions of speech against her [he is upset with her, raising some issue], and bring up an evil name upon her [slanders her reputation], and say, I took this woman, and when I came to her, I found her not a maid [virgin]: then shall the father of the damsel, and her mother, take and bring forth the tokens of the damsel’s virginity unto the elders of the city in the gate: And the damsel’s father shall say unto the elders, I gave my daughter unto this man to wife, and he hates her; And, lo, he has given occasions of speech against her, saying, I found not your daughter a maid; and yet these are the *tokens* of my daughter’s virginity. And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city.”

Though the Bible is not clear as to how this was done, Numbers chapter 5 indicates that these tokens may have involved a kind of litmus test, or “water test,” in which a determination could be made about the woman’s virginity. It may have also been something supernatural, used to determine if a woman was a virgin on her wedding day.

Continuing in Deuteronomy 22: “And the elders of that city shall take that man and chastise him [because he was wrong!]; and they shall amerce him in an hundred shekels of silver, and give them unto the father of the damsel, because he has brought up an evil name upon a virgin of Israel: and she shall be his wife; *he may not put her away all his days*. But if this thing be true, and the tokens of virginity be not found for the damsel: then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father’s house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that

she die: because she has wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father's house: so shall you put evil away from among you" (vs. 14-21).

These are the basic instructions on the major type of fraud—where one party thought he or she was marrying a virgin and found out otherwise after marriage! (If the husband made false accusation, he kept the woman and the marriage continued.) If either party had lied, the marriage was fraudulent. It was over—annulled!—and the guilty party was put away, and in the Old Testament stoned to death. God takes this matter very seriously!

Moses was plain about this. However, there is no room in this passage for someone claiming, ten, fifteen or twenty-five years later, "I got a pig in a poke, something I did not bargain for," trying to devise a case for fraud.

Keep this in mind. The above instruction is not technically describing a divorce, but rather an *annulment*. God never bound the marriage, because one partner lied from the beginning! If there is a major problem, hidden from the beginning, and the person that learns it raises the issue, the marriage would be annulled.

#### Deuteronomy 24:1-4

We are ready to discuss the second passage in Deuteronomy. The Pharisees were very familiar with this passage and quoted it to Christ in Matthew 19, seeking to pin Him down with a trick question.

Now for Deuteronomy 24, which should first be read in its entirety: "When a man has taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find *no favor in his eyes*, because he has found some uncleanness in her ["some unseemly thing" or "some matter of nakedness"—in other words, perhaps she has been naked in front of another man]: then let him write her a bill of divorcement [better translated, "THAT HE write her a bill of divorcement"], and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and you shall not cause the land to sin, which the LORD your God gives you for an inheritance" (vs. 1-4).

The beginning of the passage is a kind of "what if" situation. It neither forbids nor commands divorce, and does not really give *grounds* for divorce. These verses simply deal with *when* divorce happens.

God plainly states that He hates divorce (Mal. 2:16). This has always been His perspective of it! But, by the time Moses was teaching Israel (2,500 years after Genesis 2), men were obtaining divorces without regard to God's will. As a result, God inspired Moses to explain, in effect, "*When* this happens, the man can never take his wife back."

## Two Schools of Thought

Two major schools of thought arose from these verses, hinging on the phrases “because he has found some uncleanness in her” and “she find no favor in his eyes.”

One Jewish scribe, sometimes referenced as a Rabbi, Shammai, took a very conservative viewpoint, one probably closer to the truth. He said, in effect, that this must be referring to a *sexual* problem—*sexual* uncleanness—whenever it might come to light. But another Rabbi, Hillel, took a much broader, more liberal view, saying that *anything* causing a new wife to lose favor in her husband’s eyes—anything that in his mind is unclean or unseemly—is sufficient grounds for annulment. Taken literally, this came to mean that, if she had too many moles on her back, burned the toast, got wrinkles before her time or was stubborn, he could end the marriage. (One man I knew actually *did* try to get rid of his wife because she did not tell him she was stubborn before the marriage.)

Now notice this from a centuries-old Jewish document referring to Christ’s teaching in Matthew 19, and the two popular schools of Jewish thought: “There are several things [to be] noted about this account [Matthew 19], as the first part of the chapter makes clear, it’s very important to note that Jesus was being asked a trick question. At that time, there were two schools of thought among the Pharisees on the question of marriage. The school of Hillel was more liberal, and allowed divorce for *every* reason [as the Pharisees told Christ]. The more conservative school, in this case that of Shammai, allowed divorce only for unchastity [or adultery or some special promiscuity, prostitution].”

Another source, describing these two schools of thought, states this: “Rabbi Shammai says, ‘A man should not divorce his wife unless he has found her guilty of some unseemly conduct, as to say, because he has found some unseemly thing [sexually-related] in her according to Deuteronomy 24.’ Rabbi Hillel, however, says, ‘Even if she has merely spoiled his food she has prepared, he has found some thing unseemly in her. Even if he finds another woman more beautiful than she is, she no longer has favor in his sight.’”

Thousands of Jews obtained divorces based on Hillel’s ridiculous, liberal teaching. King Solomon said, “There is no new thing under the sun,” and this is exactly what is happening in today’s world. People get divorced because of mental cruelty, alienation of affection, incompatibility, loss of interest, adultery, death of a child, infertility, one party gained weight—and every imaginable reason human nature can devise to “put asunder what God has joined together.”

The above source, and others, explain that the two schools of thought were primarily concerned with the meaning of Deuteronomy 24. So when the Pharisees asked Jesus about divorce, they were actually asking for His interpretation of Deuteronomy 24—in other words, would he agree more with Shammai or Hillel?

### Matthew 5—The “Exception Clause”

Understanding this, recall that there are only *two* places where Christ directly addressed divorce. (There was one other obscure reference about a woman who had had five husbands, which we will briefly examine later, but that is not really about divorce and remarriage.)

The first is in the Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not commit adultery” (Matt. 5:27). The Seventh Commandment forbade adultery. This was definitely “said...of old time.”

In verse 28, Christ greatly expands the definition of adultery: “But I say unto you, That whosoever looks on a woman to *lust* after her has committed *adultery* with her already *in his heart*.” We will return to this later.

Now notice verse 31: “It has been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement.” Recall that this is best translated, “*that he* write her a bill.” Again, this was not a command by Moses, but rather something he allowed, “that he” did because *people* demanded it.

Christ continues in verse 32: “But I say unto you [He is now clarifying Moses], That whosoever shall put away his wife, *saving for the cause of fornication* [Greek: *porneia*], causes her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced commits adultery.”

This is one of two verses in Matthew, referring to what is generally referred to as “the exception clause.” These give an exception for a marriage to end, which would otherwise be bound. What does this passage mean?

Understand that Christ said a marriage could not end, “saving [except] for the cause of fornication.” This sets the stage for understanding what He referred to. But first, we must examine the second passage referencing divorce, and what Christ taught.

### Matthew 19:3-12

We can now examine Matthew 19, where the Pharisees sought to trick Christ, with the goal of getting Him to side with Hillel or Shammai. They were trying to see whether He would support the liberal or the conservative camp, planning to attack His position in either case.

A verse-by-verse approach to Matthew 19 best serves the account.

**Verse 3:** “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?” In effect, they were saying, “Do you agree with Hillel? If she’s got too many moles on her back, burns the toast, is stubborn, or has too many wrinkles when she reaches 40, can you put her away?”

**Verse 4:** “And He answered and said unto them, Have you not read, that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female.” Here, Christ is quoting Genesis 2:22, examined earlier.

**Verse 5:** “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?” He is still quoting Genesis 2.

**Verse 6:** “Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.” When the Pharisees tried to pin him on Deuteronomy 24, what did Christ do? He referred to and continued in Genesis, without referencing Deuteronomy.

**Verse 7:** They tried again: “They say unto Him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?” They misquoted Moses, because he did not *command* divorce, but rather *allowed* it.

**Verse 8:** Notice what Christ said: “He said unto them, Moses because of the *hardness of your hearts* [unable to overlook the mistakes of others, many people cannot forgive] suffered [allowed, not commanded] you to put away your wives: but from the beginning [Genesis] it was not so.”

What was it from the beginning?—leave your father and mother and *cleave to* (stay with) your mate, *and* what God has joined together let not man put asunder. But people ignored God and divorced anyway, so Moses said, in effect, “If that’s what people are going to do, then you can never take her back.” Again, what Moses *allowed*, or permitted, the Pharisees tried to say he *commanded*.

**Verse 9:** Christ continues, “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, *except it be for fornication* [porneia], and shall marry another, commits adultery: and whoso marries her which is put away does commit adultery.”

Obviously, Christ did *not* agree with Hillel, stating that only for reasons of *porneia* is divorce allowed. In fact, He was even more conservative than Shammai, who permitted it for *any* sexual problem, before or after marriage. But Christ said that only *porneia*, which is more restrictive than adultery, homosexuality or other sexual problems within and after marriage, is grounds for divorce. This will become most clear!

**Verse 10:** The discussion now involves the disciples, who were shocked: “His disciples say unto Him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.” Realize the historic setting and the disciples’ backgrounds. These were fishermen and tax collectors who had grown up believing that if their wife got old and gray, they should find somebody else. They reasoned, if one could not get rid of his wife after 10 or 20 years, he would be better off not to get married, taking the view that if he did, he was stuck!

**Verse 11:** Christ answers, “But He said unto them, *All men cannot receive this saying*, save they to whom it is *given*.” How true! The world cannot—will not!—receive this knowledge. Humanity is generally not willing to continue in a marriage “till death do us part”—to stay with a wife or husband for the rest of one’s life. Those who are called and shown the truth and understand the unity and sanctity of marriage *can* understand it—and they *will* receive it!

**Verse 12:** Christ amplifies the challenge for certain others regarding marriage: “For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb [one who can never marry because of a birth deformity]: and there are



some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men [those castrated]: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake [a man who either chooses not to marry or cannot remarry because he is bound to someone else]. *He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.*"

Again, only converted minds will receive or even grasp such instruction!

No wonder this confused the disciples. They thought marriage was similar to playing "musical chairs." But Christ told them that people have to *endure* the circumstances in which they find themselves. They have to patiently make marriage work.

Marriage is not always easy, and neither are any of the circumstances forced upon the three kinds of eunuchs described in verse 12. Today, however, most people want to take the easy path, the path of least resistance, following their feelings, only interested in pleasing themselves. If this means getting a divorce, no matter who may be hurt, most people will selfishly, and often recklessly, plunge ahead.

Again, this is not the first period in history when great numbers of people have felt that they could freely divorce and remarry. The Romans, like the Jews, divorced and remarried in great numbers, as did other civilizations that eventually collapsed from moral decay, often directly coming from the breakdown of the basic family unit. These are facts of history!

### Mark 10 Adds More

Let's briefly examine the parallel account of Matthew 19, found in Mark 10. It adds an important element, because Christ's last instruction (regarding eunuchs, and being able to receive this condition) was not said to the Pharisees. By this point, Christ and His disciples had left their presence.

**Verses 9-11:** Christ also references Genesis here: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder. *And in the house His disciples asked Him again of the same matter. [This took place later, in private, "in the house.]"* And He said unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, commits adultery against her." So this latter instruction (Matt. 19:10-12) Christ explained again, this time with only His disciples present. Notice that He did *not repeat* the exception clause in Mark. This is because, once the hardness of the hearts of Christians is softened by conversion, many would no longer seek to leave a marriage—even when they might be permitted to "for the cause of fornication." Deciding to seek annulment is not automatic.

### The Meaning of *Porneia*

The obvious question arises: What is the meaning of the all-important phrase "saving for the cause of fornication" (Matt. 5:32)? Remember, whatever Christ had in mind when He referenced *porneia* is the only thing that can take place before a marriage could be annulled.

Once again, the word translated “fornication” is the Greek word *porneia*. Some have claimed this word means or includes “adultery,” and that *this* is what Christ had in mind. We will see FOUR PROOFS that it is not! Before understanding what *porneia* DOES mean, understand this. If Christ had wanted to say “adultery”—if He had *adultery* in mind—He would have used a different Greek word, *moicheia*. This is the FIRST PROOF!

This is most crucial to understand because, in this same verse, Christ *did* use the word *moicheia* when He meant adultery. He obviously had something *different* in mind when He used *porneia*—right alongside *moicheia* (adultery)—in describing the “exception clause.” Be sure to get this straight!

Christ is saying that unless one’s marriage ends because of *porneia*, this causes the accused party to commit adultery (*moicheia*), if remarriage occurs. This makes understanding *porneia* of utmost importance. After all, a marriage can end for no other reason—and without PORNEIA occurring, one claiming this clause pushes the other party into a future adulterous “marriage”!

We must understand!

*Porneia* can be translated various ways, depending on the context in which it is used. (The word PORNOGRAPHY derives from it.) So, we must discern how Christ meant to apply it, recognizing that God would not leave a definition that is so paramount in importance open to idle speculation.

### Fornication Only

Now, what *was* Christ talking about? We know that He did not mean “adultery,” or He would have just used *moicheia* a second time. He did not. Why?

Christ must have been talking about FORNICATION, something *prior* to marriage. This is partly because Deuteronomy 22 addresses the issue of virginity. But how do we know that He was *only* talking about fornication? How do we know that Christ meant sex *prior* to marriage, and that no *other* reason, such as unfaithfulness *after* marriage, would permit the offended party to divorce?

Understand the SECOND PROOF! Nowhere in the New Testament is *porneia* used where the meaning in context is *adultery*. Nowhere! This would be the only place (of 26 times), if indeed Christ meant adultery. This word *always* means “fornication”—a mistake *prior* to marriage. It involves sins that were hidden, only coming to light after marriage, thus resulting in fraud.

Consider: Let’s suppose that Christ meant, “Whosoever shall put away his wife except it be for *adultery* [not just fornication] and shall marry another commits *adultery* and causes her to commit *adultery*.” Why would there be a concern about *adultery* resulting from putting away a mate, if *adultery* was the issue as the cause of the putting away? This would make no sense.

This is the THIRD PROOF!

### Removing All Doubt

Two points must be driven home, so that no doubt remains as to what Christ had in mind when he used *porneia*.

First, ask again, if Christ did not want to see a party thrust into a future adulterous marriage, why would He focus on adultery, in the existing marriage, as the cause to end it? Remember, if *that* is the reason the marriage ended in the first place, why the concern that one party would commit more adultery? Then: Why would a husband be concerned about his wife committing further adultery when *that* is the very reason he would be putting her out? He would not!

Only if there has been undisclosed *fornication* (sexual relations prior to marriage), can one end what would be the then actually fraudulent non-marriage! Otherwise, ending a bound marriage would force one person to commit adultery. Adultery simply *could not* be what Christ had in mind!

Now think further about this second point. If Christ *had* meant adultery, and recall that He said *lust* is adultery, then, if a woman catches her husband watching another woman along the street for too long, she can say, “You’re lusting! I am leaving you for adultery—lust of the heart!” Again, if Christ had included adultery in the exception clause, and He had defined adultery as lust, both parties *in every marriage* would have to sit down at the end of *every day* and discuss whether either had lusted that day. Presumably, if both answered no, then they could remain married for one more day. Of course, this is ridiculous, but it does help to see through the kind of thinking that some, looking for a way out of a marriage, fall into, convincing themselves that Christ authorized it.

Finally, if Christ included adultery as a reason for divorce, then He would have absolutely destroyed the marriage institution—because He had specifically defined it to include lust! Do you see this? It is the **FOURTH PROOF**.

Remember, God says, “I hate putting away [a mate]” (Mal. 2:16). When there is adultery in marriage, the offending mate does not necessarily have a deep character weakness. This would be demonstrated if the mistakes are *repeated*, creating an open wound, wherein the offending party continually pours salt.

The basic Christian principle is to forgive! This is the plain teaching of the Bible. However, if a person *continues* to commit adultery, then that person has a much bigger problem. If adultery becomes a chronic weakness—one that will keep a person from the kingdom of God—at some point, we will see that the marriage can become secondary. (But the *pattern* of adultery *could* permanently end the marriage based on the second reason for divorce, which will be covered. We will later see exactly how *repeated* adultery ties in.)

Christ taught that adultery does not automatically end a marriage. While there may be reasons that a couple could no longer *live together*, we will see that such marriages remain bound in God’s sight until the death of one spouse.

### An Analogy

Some have attempted to claim marital fraud years, or even *decades*, into a marriage. The following analogy helps to explain *why* this is wrong, and not what Christ intended:

Suppose you buy a used car and the odometer reads 20,000 miles. Now suppose you ask the dealer how many miles are on the vehicle. He says 20,000, when it really has 120,000 miles. (Of course, it is illegal to alter the odometer of a car.) You drive the car off the lot and the engine is functioning fine. You think you have a 20,000-mile automobile. After six years, you have driven another 100,000 miles, now thinking it has 120,000 miles on it. At this point, you learn the car has actually been driven 220,000 miles.

Can you return six years later claiming you were cheated—defrauded? Certainly you were *not* treated fairly. But the car was serviceable for six years, and you drove it 100,000 miles! While not perfect, this analogy makes the point.

Christ was *not* opening the floodgates to allow *any* reason for divorce. In reality, He was *closing* the floodgates—returning marriage to the original sanctity that God had given it in the Garden of Eden. He was saying, “Unless there is fraud, just like Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 22, in which the woman is not a virgin, the marriage is BOUND.” While the Pharisees might have been hard of heart and unable to forgive or overlook, a Christian must forgive. But Christ understood and taught that this knowledge is only “given” to certain people—those who have the Spirit of God and are able to understand and forgive—*not* those looking for an easy way out of a lifelong commitment.

### Christ’s Clear Meaning Understood

In a May 1980 letter to the Worldwide Church of God, Herbert W. Armstrong explained what we have just covered in the following way:

“Now to Matthew 19. Granted, the Greek *porneia* has more than one meaning. So does the English word, ‘saw.’ It may mean ‘did see,’ or it may mean an instrument with jagged teeth for cutting through wood. We determine by its use in the sentence IN THE CONTEXT OF THAT SENTENCE, which meaning of the word applies.

“So it is in the case in which Jesus used the Greek word *porneia*. The translators of the King James Bible in 1611 knew that Jesus intended the definition ‘fornication’ as an act prior to marriage.

“Consider what Jesus said in Matthew 5:32, ‘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.’

“Consider that! If in this case porneia should have been translated ‘adultery’ instead of premarital fornication, then, in English look how absurd would be Jesus’ statement. He would have said, whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of adultery, causeth her to commit adultery. In other words, he divorced her for the sin of adultery, and causes her to commit again the same act for which he divorced her. THAT WOULD NOT MAKE SENSE!

“Further, same sentence (verse 32): ‘whosoever shall marry her’ (that is put away for adultery) ‘committeth adultery.’ He who would marry this particular divorced woman would be committing adultery ONLY BECAUSE SHE IS STILL THE WIFE of the man who divorced her!

“To say that Jesus gave ADULTERY as grounds for divorce introduces CONFUSION, and misrepresents what Jesus said to be RIDICULOUS!

“The only way that a man marrying a divorced woman commits adultery is if the woman is STILL the bound wife of the man who divorced her. But when Jesus gave the ONLY grounds as premarital FORNICATION, that can mean ONLY that the marriage WAS NOT BINDING—God had never BOUND that marriage in the first place. The woman had committed fornication prior to marriage, had not told the man, and therefore HE WAS DEFRAUDED—the marriage was never binding! Why? Because GOD KNEW, but the man did not. God NEVER BOUND that marriage. The man was unknowingly defrauded. If she had told him, and he forgave and married her anyway, then the marriage would have been BOUND by GOD. In that case if he divorced her he did not do so legally in God’s sight, and he CAUSED HER, by marrying another, to commit adultery.

“In both Matthew 5 and Matthew 19, both the translated English words ‘fornication’ and ‘adultery’ are mentioned. In the original Greek the word translated ‘fornication’ was porneia, and a different Greek word was used for adultery, moicheia. If Jesus had meant ‘adultery’ to be the only grounds for divorce and remarriage, he would have used the word moicheia instead of porneia. The very fact he did use the Greek porneia in the same sentence with moicheia shows definitely he did not intend porneia to mean adultery-unfaithfulness after marriage.

“In other passages on the subject, such as Mark 10:5-9, we find Mark’s version of the same conversation recorded in Matthew 19. There Jesus gave NO grounds for divorce, once bound in marriage—‘What therefore God hath joined (bound) together, let not man put asunder.’

“Here Jesus spoke of a marriage BOUND BY GOD. He gave NO grounds whatsoever for divorce or remarriage. In Matthew 19 He was speaking of a case where God had NOT BOUND.

“In Luke 16:18 Jesus gives NO grounds for divorce and remarriage in the case of a marriage bound by God.

“It is therefore plain that the passages in Matthew 5 and 19 are speaking of marriage NOT bound by God.”

## The Second Reason

The Bible also describes a situation in which a *valid* marriage, one accepted by God, could end. In I Corinthians 7, Paul addresses a whole series of circumstances that can arise within marriages involving believers, or believers married to unbelievers. This is often referred to as the “marriage chapter,” but it could as easily be called the “marriage, divorce and remarriage chapter.”

As with previous passages, this chapter is best studied through a verse-by-verse approach.

**Verse 1:** “Now concerning the things whereof you wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.” *Paul* is not saying it is not good for a man to touch a woman. He is merely quoting a letter, saying, “*You* wrote that to me!”

**Verses 2-3:** Paul continues, “Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.” This is basically a command to married couples to fulfill their sexual responsibility—to not “defraud” one another.

**Verse 4:** Now notice: “The wife has not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband has not power of his own body, but the wife.” All married partners should take note: Paul is explaining that the wife’s body belongs to her husband, and the husband’s to his wife. In other words, “Husbands, what you think you are doing with your body, you are really doing with your *wife’s* body, and vice-versa. You own one another’s body.”

**Verse 5:** Paul goes on to explain what it means to ignore one’s sexual responsibility: “*Defraud* [not *fraud*] you not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency [or inconsistency.]” Paul is saying that couples may wish to avoid sexual relations for a time, while drawing close to God and examining themselves spiritually.

**Verses 6-7:** “But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment. For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man has his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.”

Paul had become, in effect, a eunuch for the kingdom’s sake. There is evidence that he had once been married. How do we know this? He had previously been on what was called the Sanhedrin—the Jewish Supreme Court. By comparison, in his day, he had been the equivalent of one of the nine justices of the U.S. Supreme Court. Only *married* men could receive such an appointment. In light of verse 7, and since we never hear about his wife, apparently she had left him (perhaps at his conversion), or had died. So Paul was merely stating that he wished other men could be as he was—unencumbered by marriage in the face of particularly severe persecution, afflicting the Church at that time. He recognized that existing circumstances made it easier to be single.

**Verse 8:** “I say therefore to the unmarried and widows [the single people in the Church], It is good for them if they abide even as I.”

**Verse 9:** “But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to *burn*.” Paul understood that it is better to marry than to either burn with passion, longing for a mate but unable to have one, or to literally burn in the lake of fire, because one is tempted by and slips into sexual immorality.

**Verse 10:** “And unto the married [two converted people in the Church] I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband.”

**Verse 11:** “But and if she depart [God says, “It is not My will that they depart, but just like Moses said, *if it happens*], let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband [you are bound whether you live under the same roof or not]: and let not the husband put away his wife.”

The city of Corinth was rife with divorce and remarriage problems and abuses. Paul needed to clarify that God’s standards were much different than the city in which the Corinthian brethren lived. He explained that, if a converted couple divorced, they were *not* free to remarry, or they would be in violation of Romans 7:1-3, and guilty of adultery. Their only recourse was reconciliation, where husband or wife could take back the separated spouse.

From this point forward, the THIRD and only other possible category of marriage circumstances within the Church is addressed. This requires important explanation and clarification.

**Verse 12:** Paul continues, “But to the *rest* speak I, not the Lord: if any brother has a wife that believes not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.” Who are the “rest” addressed here?

What possible third category could Paul be addressing beyond those married and those single (including widows and widowers)? While there are only two categories in society at large, this neglects the third group within the *Church of God*—those cases where a *believer* is married to an *unbeliever*. In such cases, and this is common, one party has the knowledge of the truth, but the other does not. What happens if such a marriage cannot continue—the unbelieving mate no longer wishes (for any reason) to remain with the believer? Such mates would not feel bound by, nor probably be aware of, God’s marriage laws.

Paul is not quoting Christ from some other place in the Bible. Prior to this time, God had never addressed such unprecedented circumstances. Clarification became necessary and God used Paul for this purpose. Therefore, he writes, “speak I, not the Lord” or “This is what *I’m* saying now.” Some will argue, “No, this is merely *Paul’s theology*.” By such human reasoning, everything Paul wrote can be reduced to what has been called “Pauline theology.” Understand that Paul was writing under inspiration from God. What he says is binding scripture (John 10:35). God would never allow Paul or anyone else to record a human opinion, leaving us, in effect, not required to follow it. This would be licensing people to say, “I don’t like Pauline theology. I like Peter’s theology better”—or “I like John’s”—“and I’ll do as I please.”

God is not the author of confusion (I Cor. 14:33), so He would never offer human reasoning such an entrance into the scriptures. Paul is simply acknowledging that Christ—"the Lord"—had never addressed such circumstances.

The question arises: When did such a "brother" (vs. 12) get married? II Corinthians 6:14 forbids believers to marry unbelievers, so this has to be a marriage that existed when the "brother" was converted. His conversion could have thrown the marriage into difficulty, causing the wife to question whether she wished to continue with him. Verse 12 describes the man whose wife is a non-member, but who says, "I love you even though I don't go to your Church, I don't keep the Sabbath, I don't believe the things you believe, but I still want to live with you." Paul instructs him not to put her away.

**Verse 13:** "And the woman which has an husband that believes not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him." Obviously, the same applies to the married man whose wife is not converted.

**Verse 14:** "For the unbelieving HUSBAND is SANCTIFIED by the wife, and the unbelieving WIFE is SANCTIFIED by the husband: else were your CHILDREN unclean; but now are they HOLY."

This passage introduces vital understanding, revealing that God has entered the family and marriage of every believer, regardless of the status of the mate. Children of the union become "holy" to God.

**Verse 15:** But some unbelievers leave the marriage: "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God has called us to peace." If the baptized member of the Church finds himself or herself married to someone not in the Church, and who is not pleased to continue the marriage, Paul explains that the marriage can be over. If the unbeliever (not the believer) says, "I'm leaving, goodbye!", the marriage can end. (There is usually nothing that can be done to stop this, anyway.) The result, from God's perspective, is "A brother or a sister is not under bondage [the marriage bond] in such cases." The subject in context is the MARRIAGE BOND. Paul is saying that the MARRIAGE BOND is ended by the unbeliever's departure.

There is a second way one can, in effect, "say" he or she is "not pleased to dwell" with a believer. Consider. If a husband says, "I'm pleased to dwell with you, as long as you take your daily beatings"—*or* "as long as you let me regularly cheat on you"—*or* "as long as you let me bankrupt the family and not feed the children," he is *not* pleased to dwell with his wife by fulfilling his proper role.

If, by OBVIOUS CONDUCT—and this must be most serious and continual—a partner demonstrates he or she is not pleased to dwell in the marriage, verse 15 can be similarly construed. One may *say* that he or she wants to remain with a mate, but actions can speak louder than words!

**Verse 16:** So that no one will look for or try to contrive or orchestrate the above scenario, Paul explains what is at stake, if the couple remains together: "For what know you, O wife, whether you shall *save* your husband? Or how know you, O man, whether you shall *save* your wife?"



What does this mean? A non-member mate, who *was* cut off from God, is *no longer* cut off, because this person is now married to a Christian—a believer. Non-baptized mates of believers are neither cut off from, nor called by, God. Rather, they are in a special category, in which they are free to seek God, or not. In effect, God will let them come to Him, and they *may* obey or they may *not*.

The same applies to children of a converted member. They are neither cut off from God nor automatically to be called. But God does call some directly, while others are in a category where, if they CHOOSE to seek God, they can.

If the converted mate sets a wonderful, beautiful Christian example, he or she may be able to “save” the unbelieving spouse. If the example of the one called is clear, strong and Christ-like, it may be able to affect the unbelieving mate. (Of course, only God can actually *save* a person.) If those who are called in a situation in which God says, “Abide wherein you are called”—perhaps one in which the mate is not in the Church—it may mean that if one gives a good example, the mate might say, “I appreciate and respect that. I want to know more about your religion.” Conversion could result.

All brethren—the begotten children of God—should be most careful of taking a high-handed, high-minded attitude of “I’m holier than thou—because you are unconverted!” In this regard, the believer must be *very careful* that he or she does not *push* the unconverted mate out of the marriage, placing them in a cut off condition, unable to seek the true God, then sealing this wrong action by declaring, “She was not pleased to dwell with me.”

There could be a case, however, where a BELIEVER *falls away* from God, loses the Holy Spirit, degenerates into terribly wrong conduct—including repeated adultery or other grievous sins—leaves the Church, becomes hostile, and seeks to leave the marriage. Though rare, this *could* happen. Such a one has *become* an unbeliever, making verse 15 applicable once again. If such a one departs, the believer really has no choice but to let this happen. Obviously, the marriage is over.

If lifted from context, certain other passages can cause confusion. On the other side of the coin, some people use the following passages to “prove” that God binds all marriages in every circumstance, meaning whether or not He calls couples into the truth and gives them the opportunity to know and understand His marriage laws.

Now that we have examined the subject of divorce and remarriage, we can easily understand these laws.

### **Romans 7:1-3**

Some refer to Romans 7:1-3, attempting to demonstrate that every marriage is until death, which of course is true, *where God has bound a couple*. This is not a difficult verse to understand.

Notice: “*Know* you not, BRETHREN [Paul qualifies to whom he is speaking], (for I speak to them that *know* the law)...” Recognize that Paul is speaking to

converted Romans—BRETHREN—stating, in effect, “What I’m about to say to you is said to people who *know* the Law, who understand the truth, who are Christian.”

Paul continues, “...how that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman which has an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he lives; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.”

As with the woman at the well, and the beheading of John the Baptist, which will both be examined momentarily, people take Romans 7 out of context. Some say, “See there? You are bound until death!”, forgetting the all-important qualifier, “For I speak to them that *know the law*.” This phrase places Romans 7:1-3 in perfect harmony with everything explained in this booklet.

Recall: “To him that *knows* to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin”—and also “For if we sin willfully *after* that we have received the *knowledge* of the *truth*, there remains no more sacrifice for sins.” These passages, coupled with “judgment must begin at the *house of God*,” qualify Romans 7. However, Paul, because people might forget those verses, qualifies it *again*.

This passage has no application to, nor does it reference, people who do not know God’s truth or laws of marriage.

#### Matthew 14:1-4

Matthew 14:1-4 records the beheading of John the Baptist as the result of what he had told King Herod: “At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, and said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him. For Herod had laid hold on John [this had happened previously], and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias’ sake, his brother Philip’s wife. For John said unto him [in the past], It is not lawful for you to have her.”

The question has arisen: How is it that, if Herod’s previous marriage was not bound, John could say to him that what he was doing was wrong? If God is not entering into the marriages of people in this world—Herod certainly *was* of the world—then how could John make this statement?

Let’s understand. Since Herod was breaking the Sabbath, John could have said to him, “You’re breaking the Sabbath.” Was he being *judged* for breaking it? Was sin being imputed? Did he *know* that it was the Sabbath? Of course not. But anytime someone breaks the Sabbath—he *is* breaking the Sabbath!

John could have said, “Herod, you’re not tithing. You’re stealing from God.” Did Herod *know* he was stealing from God? No. Did he *know* tithing was in the Bible? No. Was he held accountable by God? Was he being *judged*? No. But, if anyone does not tithe, he is still stealing from God.

John could have told Herod, justifiably, that he should not marry someone who had been divorced. But John's statement did not mean that Herod's wife's first marriage had been bound by God.

Romans 3:23 states, "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Sin is sin. But the world is not now being *judged* for sinning, because the world generally does not *know* what sin is. While sin is not being imputed, people are still committing sin. It was in this way that John the Baptist could tell Herod it was not *lawful* for him to have his brother's wife.

No scripture stands alone. *All* related passages on a matter must be examined for a complete picture to emerge. Like Romans 7, Matthew 14 becomes clear when held up to the backdrop of the entire subject.

### John 4:15-19

The same is true in John 4, when Jesus was talking "to the woman at the well."

It is best to start this longer account in verse 15: "The woman said unto Him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come here to draw. Jesus said unto her, Go, call your husband, and come here. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, You have well said, I have no husband: For you have had *five husbands*; and he whom you now have is *not your husband*: in that said you truly. The woman said unto Him, Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet" (vs. 15-19).

This woman had been married five times. Jesus acknowledged it. The question arises: To which husband was she bound? Some have said, "Christ was saying to the woman at the well, 'The man you are with is not your husband because you are bound to the first of your five husbands.'"

This is not what Jesus is talking about, because this is not a discussion or dissertation about divorce and remarriage. Understand that Jesus was speaking rhetorically, more correctly saying, "You've been with five husbands, and now you're living with another person (cohabiting outside marriage—what is commonly called "shacking up")."

This was His reference. Read the full account. Divorce and remarriage is not the subject under discussion, and Jesus makes no comment about *which* husband she was bound to—about *which* of her five marriages was valid. How sad that so many try to force the scriptures to say what they want them to say.

### Work at Your Marriage

I repeat: God is the Author of marriage! Proper understanding of this supremely important human relationship is vital to achieving happiness in your marriage! No matter your circumstances, and no matter what has previously occurred in your marriage, you can still build a wonderful, happy union. But it may take work—and persistence!

In contrast to the few verses about divorce and remarriage, the Bible is filled with passages giving instruction to those who truly wish to build a joyful marriage!

In one, Ephesians 5:22-23, Paul compares marriage to the relationship between Christ and the Church: “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church: and He is the Savior of the body.”

This is a profound statement! The husband must strive to conduct himself toward his wife as Christ does toward His Church, nurturing, guiding, encouraging and providing for his wife.

Verses 24-25 and 28 further explain this analogy: “Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, *love* your wives, even as Christ also *loved* the Church, and gave Himself for it...So ought men to *love* their wives as their own bodies. He that *loves* his wife **LOVES HIMSELF.**” How true!

You can overcome even the most severe marriage problems. I encourage you to read the following literature: *You Can Build a Happy Marriage, The Purpose of Marriage – Ever Obsolete?*, and *Sex – Its Unknown Dimension*. For those considering marriage for the first time or remarriage, request our book *Dating and Courtship – God’s Way*. You may also wish to read our thorough brochure on the family, *Assault on the Family*.

They will make a difference!

### **Only in God’s Church**

Earlier, under the heading “A Wrong Assumption,” we addressed vital points that should be reviewed before concluding this booklet. To set the stage for what follows, we will revisit them.

Again, many assume God enters every marriage everywhere on Earth. If this were true, then why in the New Testament record was this not extensively discussed? I repeat, the entire New Testament reveals this was never an issue in the first-century Church.

The early Church was not constantly breaking up families, laboring under the assumption that all marriages were bound by God. It knew people would not be accountable for what they did not know on this doctrine, as well as not being accountable for what they did not know about any other doctrine of God.

In view of these issues, everything you have read has no application if you are Catholic, Protestant or in any other branch of established religion. It has application only to someone within God’s true Church—who understands the truth according to the following two scriptures: (1) “Therefore to him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin” (Jms. 4:17); (2) “For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 10:26).

Consider this before moving to the conclusion. People write The Restored Church of God on a regular basis asking for help in solving marriage problems. Some belong to various branches of professing Christianity, some come from other religious backgrounds, and a few have been atheists or agnostics. Some present theoretical situations much like the Sadducees presented to Christ in Matthew 22:23-30. That hypothetical puzzle was the ultimate “what if” situation. Without sorting out all the contrived complications presented to Him, Christ simply replied: “You do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matt. 22:29).

Understand that God is *not* at this time judging those outside His Church.

The biblical doctrine of divorce and remarriage as taught by the *one* Church built by Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:18) has application only for those who are part of that Church. God is not binding marriages in the world at large or holding parties accountable as He does those currently under judgment. God is now judging His Church: “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God” (I Peter 4:17). At a later time in God’s Master Plan of salvation, when the minds of all peoples are opened to the truth, the aforementioned standards will apply to everyone.

### The Big Picture

In a May 1974 letter to the Worldwide Church of God, Herbert W. Armstrong wrote the following:

“God has led His Church into the TRUE KNOWLEDGE and UNDERSTANDING of the PURPOSE and MEANING of marriage. God has revealed to His Church that marriage is actually a GOD-PLANE relationship, bestowed on NO OTHER form of life created by God. Animals do not have the blessing of marriage with HOME and FAMILY RELATIONSHIP. Angels do not have it.

“God’s Church has the UNDERSTANDING that God is a FAMILY; that man is formed in the shape and image of God; that he can be born into the FAMILY of God, being changed by a resurrection from mortal to immortal—from human to divine—from flesh-and-blood to SPIRIT composition.

“And *when* the CHURCH—*this Church*—is BORN of God at Christ’s coming and the resurrection, it will be the BRIDE of Christ and become MARRIED to Christ. The Kingdom of God then will be composed of God the FATHER, Christ the SON, and Christ’s WIFE—a FAMILY relationship.

“No other church...has this wonderful knowledge!”

## **The following literature expands on topics discussed in this booklet:**

- Dating and Courtship – God’s Way
- Sex – Its Unknown Dimension
- The Purpose of Marriage – *Ever Obsolete?*
- You Can Build a Happy Marriage
- Assault on the Family

112217  
UDA

### **The Restored Church of God**

1000 Ambassador Drive  
Wadsworth, OH 44281  
USA

P.O. Box 4064  
St. Catharines, ON L2R 7S3  
CANADA

Phone: (330) 334-2266  
Fax: (330) 334-6513  
E-mail: [info@rcg.org](mailto:info@rcg.org)  
Web: [rcg.org](http://rcg.org)