

The Truth
About
Marriage
and
Divorce

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The Truth About Marriage and Divorce

Whoever you are, the doctrine of marriage and divorce affects you! Marriage is intimately related to the gospel of the Kingdom of God. To pervert the truth regarding the sanctity and permanency of marriage is to begin denying the true gospel that Christ preached.

It behooves each of us to know God's laws regarding marriage and upon what grounds, if any, a marriage may be terminated, because every called and chosen servant of God—single, married, widowed, or divorced—is destined, ultimately, to become married to Jesus Christ at His second coming. We must know and live by God's laws regulating human marriage here and now in order to prepare for the future divine marriage to Christ.

When two eligible people sincerely and solemnly covenant with each other, in the presence of witnesses, to take each other as husband and wife, and, upon consummating that covenant agreement by becoming "one flesh," they are bound by the Eternal God as long as they both shall live. God is witness to all marriage covenants. It is God alone who binds marriage. Man cannot unbind what God has bound.

Before a marriage has been bound by God, however, it may be annulled due to the discovery of fornication or other sexual activity (*porneia*) committed by one of the partners before marriage, and, hitherto unknown to the other. There is no such thing in the Bible as a "divorce" in the sense of unbinding a marriage that God has bound. Divorce for adultery, desertion, or incompatibility is not allowed by God. Anyone who marries someone wrongfully put away also commits adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). When one becomes a Christian and discovers that he or she is living in an adulterous union because of past divorces and remarriages, he should separate, and either be reconciled to his true mate or live a single life. God is not a respecter of persons. Being in the church or out of the church makes no difference. Ignorance of God's law is no excuse.

Purpose of Marriage Precludes Divorce

The rise in the divorce rate is one of America's national sins, affecting nearly every third home. Today's libertine society believes marriage is without purpose. Society believes marriage customs evolved. Therefore, no laws bind one in marriage except for those of the state.

God holds His ministry responsible for directing His people in His revealed truth. Yet God prophesies that many of His ministers would forget that responsibility and instead, actually cause His people to forget His laws (Jer. 50:6). God orders His ministers who remain true to Him to "Cry aloud, spare not," and show His people their sins (Isa. 58:1).

God's purpose in man is to reproduce His own kind (Gen. 1:26). He wants man to repent of rebellion against Him, receive the Holy Spirit and grow and overcome in this physical life. Then, finally, man will be changed and born into the family, or kingdom, of God (I Cor. 15:50–53). At the time of the first resurrection and Christ's return in power and glory, the Church of God, as the affianced bride, will marry Christ (Eph. 5:22–33, Rev. 19:6–9).

God married Israel at Mt. Sinai when He entered into a covenant relationship with her (Jer. 3:14, Ex. 24:7–8). This set her up as wife, church, and kingdom. When Christ, the Lord of the Old Testament, was crucified, Israel's husband died, legally ending that marriage (Rom. 7:2). Today, spiritual Israel, the church (Gal. 6:16) is the wife of Christ, although the marriage has not yet occurred (betrothed as were Joseph and Mary, Matt. 1:18–20, 24).

The message of Christ—the messenger of the covenant (Mal. 3:1)—is that the new covenant will establish the marriage of the church to Christ, constituting it as the Kingdom of God on earth. That marriage is the gospel. Therefore, those who pervert the Bible teachings about marriage are—in effect—teaching "another gospel" (Gal. 1:6–10).

The new marriage covenant is necessary because Israel, through continual adultery and harlotry, was unfaithful (Heb. 8:7–8, Jer. 31:32). The coming divine marriage is founded on better promises than the old, most important of which is the gift of eternal life (Heb. 8:6; 9:15). This marriage to Christ will last forever. The "wife," composed of spirit-born members of the family of God, will live forever and will not sin as ancient Israel did (I John 3:9).

Mortal human marriage is a type of the immortal divine marriage to occur at the resurrection. That divine marriage will be bound forever. There will be no divorce or remarriage. Therefore, neither should human marriage, once bound, be subject to divorce and remarriage. If we as the church are unfaithful to God and continue in unrepentant rebellion, then Christ, the husband, can put us away before the marriage, never allowing us to be born into God's kingdom. Likewise, before a man and woman are bound in the sight of God, there is the possibility of one putting the other away (Matt. 1:18–20, 24). But once bound by God, there is no putting away—no divorce—for any reason.

Romans 7:1–3 negates any chance of finding a "loophole." It does not make any sense to think we can prepare to be eternally faithful in the divine marriage to Christ by being unfaithful now—divorcing and remarrying. The very gospel message involves learning faithfulness in the marriage relationship now, for it is the preparation for the eternal spiritual marriage to Christ. To allow divorce and remarriage is to deny the necessity of faithfulness to Christ. To do that is to deny the gospel! It would nullify the entire Bible and call God a liar. Christ created human marriage that He might develop a people—the church—who will gloriously fulfill the role of His faithful mate for eternity (Eph. 5:27).

How submissive is God's church today to God's laws relating to marriage? Is she, like ancient Israel, playing the harlot?

Marriage Law Applies to All Mankind

Down through history people have said that the Sabbath and the Holy Days are "Jewish," and that the rest of mankind is not responsible for keeping them. Jesus Christ must have anticipated this deceitful thought of man, because He said, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath" (Mark 2:27–28). No, the Sabbath was not made for the "church in the wilderness" only (Acts 7:38) or the New Testament Church of God, but for all mankind. Man left to himself cannot determine how to observe the Sabbath. Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath and He determines how it should be kept (see Isa. 58:13–14). The Sabbath is not "Jewish" or "Christian." It was instituted by God at the creation of man, for all mankind, before there ever was one converted human being (Gen. 2:1–3). When a person repents and is baptized, he repents of having broken God's laws—because those laws are binding on his life and it is sin not to obey them. In becoming a true Christian, one has to repent of breaking the Sabbath. At that same time, he must begin to observe the Sabbath as God directs in His Word.

The Sabbath is directly related to marriage in this same manner. Marriage was also created at the time when man was (Gen. 2:18, 24, Mark 10:6–9). It was instituted before there was a church, before there was one converted person. As with the Sabbath, marriage was also made for all mankind. As the Scripture says, "Therefore shall a man [any man, not just the converted] leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Furthermore, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery" (Matt. 19:9). God alone can bind couples together. Man is not allowed to put any marriage asunder (Matt. 19:6). Marriage was made for all mankind, not just the converted. Since God, not man, joins husband and wife together, only God could "unjoin" what He has joined—but no Scripture provides for that! When a person repents, he must repent of breaking God's marital laws if he is in violation of those laws. He should quit living in an adulterous union if one exists. The wife is not to depart from her husband. And the husband should not put away his wife (I Cor. 7:10, 11).

But some say that God's laws do not even apply to the converted. They demand that God in heaven bow to the dictates, whims, and lusts of puny mankind, that He must recognize the "present" marital state of those who come into His church regardless of how many past marriages they may have had. Are God's laws for the unrighteous? What does the Bible say about whether or not God's laws (including the many relating to marriage) are for the unconverted? Paul's first letter to Timothy explains that some in his day were teaching a different doctrine (1:3), having ". . . turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to

be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully" (vv. 6–8). Yet how many today seek a way to interpret the Scripture to justify removing the penalty being suffered by "the injured party"?

Paul goes on: "Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane . . . For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind . . . and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine" (I Tim. 1:9, 10). Yes, the righteous man, knowing God's plan and the indissolubleness of marriage, does not seek a way out of marriage. God's laws which prevent the putting asunder of marriages, were made for the unrighteous, those hardhearted individuals who would attempt to do this very thing. Against the acts of the righteous man "there is no law" (Gal. 5:23). Truly, God's marriage laws were expressly made for the unconverted. They were given to man to show him what sin is (Rom. 7:7), so he can know of what he must repent. If there were no such laws, then the unconverted would have nothing to repent of, when called to God's truth.

To say that the unconverted do not have to obey Matthew 19:9, is to say obedience to the Ten Commandments is not necessary. Likewise, to use I Corinthians 7 to say that God does not bind marriages of the unconverted is to say that He is not consistent, and that He is a respecter of persons (Mal. 3:6, Rom. 2:11).

Attempting to get around God's laws by saying, "I'm not responsible because at the time of my past marriages and divorces, I didn't understand God's laws, and I wasn't converted," is simply an excuse of human nature to justify rebellion against God. The book of Hosea contains a prophecy for the people of God (2:23), "in the latter days" (3:5). One of the pivotal texts of the entire Bible is Hosea 4:6, in which God shows that His very people "are destroyed for lack of knowledge." It wasn't that they didn't have the knowledge of God at one time. They did! But they rejected and forgot God's law. As a result, God will reject and forget them until they repent. This is not referring to the people of God of old, but His people "in the latter days." And God says, ". . . therefore the people that doth not understand shall fall" (4:14). They are guilty of committing adultery and have the "spirit of whoredoms" (4:2, 12; 5:4). As a result, God is going to withdraw Himself from them until they repent in their affliction and punishment.

In Hosea 8:12, God says: "I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing." The *Living Bible* states: "Even if I gave her ten thousand laws, she'd say they weren't for her—that they applied to someone far away." Notice! In the last days someone will be saying that God's laws apply to a limited number of people, under certain circumstances, whereas all others are excused from obeying them! Yet God says His laws are for all who have human nature and sin (I Tim. 1:9, 10). And if we say we do not sin, we are deceiving ourselves (I John 1:8, 10; Hos. 12:8).

When the knowledge of God is revealed, He commands us to quit sinning—to change, to repent! God does forgive sins committed in ignorance as long as they are not continued. "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Why? "Because he [God] hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man [Christ] whom he hath ordained . . ." (v. 31). So if God's laws do not apply to the unconverted, He could not judge them, He could not hold them accountable for breaking His laws (Rom. 4:15).

Ten Commandments Protect the Home

The purpose of God's laws, summarized in ten basic rules, is to keep people in the right relationship with God and their fellow man. They protect marriage and the family relationship, the human types of the divine marriage and family relationship to be experienced in the Kingdom of God.

"Honour thy father and thy mother" is a two-edged commandment. Children must respect and obey their parents. Parents must be honorable, not provoking their children to wrath, but bringing them up in God's way (Eph. 6:1–4). How can children honor parents who have divorced if they are able to see them only infrequently, if at all? A parent, to be honorable to his children, must faithfully and peaceably live with his mate.

"Thou shalt not commit adultery" is broken by many through divorcing and remarrying (Matt. 5:32), breaking up God-ordained homes and forming adulterous unions. God hates this splitting asunder of homes (Mal. 2:16). A strong family and home is the building block for "the godly seed" that God wants to develop among mankind (v. 15).

"Thou shalt not covet . . . thy neighbor's wife" is a commandment which is broken when one is not satisfied with the wife of one's youth, and therefore goes seeking someone else's wife. Watering down God's law of marriage by allowing divorce opens up a Pandora's box of nefarious activities, such as wife-swapping, which must have been prevalent in the days of Noah and in the time of Sodom and Gomorrah. These same circumstances were prophesied to happen again in the end time (Matt. 24:38).

Those who understand that God is love will see that His laws protect the marriage and family relationship. Divorce is a hardhearted action destined to produce hate and unhappiness. It is contrary to the very purpose of human existence.

Christ Magnified God's Laws

Jesus Christ is consistent. He is unchanging in purpose and perfection. He came to magnify God's law (Isa. 42:21), to make it more binding by enlarging it from the physical

letter of the law to the spiritual principle. He said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matt. 5:17). He came to perfectly fulfill and expand the meaning of God's law. He did not destroy, loosen, or water them down. Christ is the example. We are to live our lives the same way He lived His (I John 2:6).

The "Sermon on the Mount" summarizes the principles of Christian living. Jesus magnified God's law, making it more strict, more binding, giving it a much broader application. For with God's Spirit, as promised under the New Covenant, His laws are to be kept in the spirit, not just the letter.

Jesus said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:27, 28). The seventh commandment was now much more difficult to obey. Instead of just the physical act of adultery, the *thought* of adultery was now also forbidden. Instead of relaxing God's laws, Christ made them more comprehensive, more inclusive.

In Matthew 5:31, 32, Christ addresses the subject of divorce and remarriage. As He did with the other laws of God, He revealed that the marriage laws are more strict and more difficult to keep. "It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: 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."

Christ Did Not Contradict Himself

In addition to His statement regarding divorce in the "Sermon on the Mount," Jesus again expanded the spiritual intent of God's marriage law in Matthew 19:3–12. Here we see the Pharisees coming to Him and tempting Him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to put away [Greek: *apoluo*] his wife for every cause?" Christ answered, "Have ye 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? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

Jesus plainly showed that God's instruction concerning marriage means that when a man and a woman 1) leave father and mother and, 2) cleave together and become one flesh, they are bound by God. What God has joined in holy matrimony "let not man put asunder." Man is not allowed to break apart the indissoluble bond of marriage that God has bound. There are no exceptions!

Like some today, Jesus' plain answer in verses 4 to 6 did not satisfy the Pharisees. They questioned Him further: "Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?" Jesus knew their trickery in trying to make Him contradict Himself. If He did in fact go on to contradict Himself in verses 8 and 9 by making an exception to what He had just said in verses 4 to 6, then Jesus was a liar, and you and I would have no Savior! But He did not give an exception whereby man may put asunder a marriage that God has bound. He answered the Pharisees, "Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so." The Pharisees were specifically referring to the statute found in Deuteronomy 24:1–4 which permitted a "bill of divorcement" under certain circumstances.

Whatever this statute allowed or did not allow is of secondary importance, because, "from the beginning it was not so." From the very beginning of Creation there was no such provision for "divorce." And there is no such provision now. The message of the New Covenant is for us to not be stiff-necked, hardhearted, and rebellious. We are told to ". . . harden not your hearts, as in the provocation" of Israel in the wilderness (Heb. 3:15). Even in the Old Testament, we are exhorted to: "Now be ye not stiffnecked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the Lord . . ." (II Chron. 30:8). We are not to hardheartedly put away our mates for any cause.

Here is Jesus' expansion to the spiritual intent of God's law in Deuteronomy 24, "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." Whatever was allowed by Deuteronomy 24:1–4 is something we are not to hardheartedly follow today. And further, Jesus' instruction—for Him to be consistent—was more strict than what was "allowed" under Moses. He magnified, but did not destroy, the law in Deuteronomy 24. As we shall see, the rival schools of Judaism misused this Scripture (Matt. 15:3).

But most importantly, whatever Jesus said in Matthew 19:9 did not contradict what He said in verse 6. Man is not to put asunder what God has bound for life. Man may, however, because of fornication, put away what God has *not yet bound* (v. 9). Any other explanation is tantamount to making Jesus a liar!

The Greek Word *Porneia*

God's law of marriage is plain. Once *bound* there is no way out except by the death of one of the marital partners. That law has no exceptions! But what did Jesus mean by "except it be for fornication [Greek: *porneia*]"? Some would like to find a way around God's law so that they may follow their own fleshly desires.

God's law has no provision which allows it to be broken. Christ never said, "Thou shalt not steal, unless it is imperative to feed your family." He did not say, "Remember the Sabbath, but you may do a little work to prevent losing your job." The ox in the ditch, Jesus' examples of healing, the disciples picking of corn in order to eat—these are not circumstances under which we are permitted to break the fourth commandment. They merely define actions which the fourth commandment does not cover—does not prohibit.

Likewise, the same is true with the clause, "except it be for fornication." It defines actions which the law of marriage does not cover. It defines cases where the marriage has not yet been bound by God. Therefore, the possibility exists that the marriage may be "annulled," as the term is used today.

The Greek word *porneia* has been used by some to allow divorce due to adultery. But *porneia* does not mean adultery! Lexicons written by men give men's interpretations of Hebrew and Greek words used in the Bible. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*, page 532, defines *porneia* as "illicit sexual intercourse in general." *Unger's Bible Dictionary* adds, "It is distinguished from adultery." The Greek word for adultery is *moicheia*. Now what does the Bible say about the meaning of *porneia*? What does it mean in the context of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9? Let's examine Matthew 5:32 again. "But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication [*porneia*], causeth her to commit adultery [*moicheia*]" Now, how could she be caused to commit adultery? By entering into a second marriage! ". . . and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." So if she remarried, both she and her new "husband" would be committing adultery.

How could this be? If, and only if, she were still the bound wife of her first husband. But if she had not been bound—if she had been put away for fornication—then, if she remarried, she would not be committing adultery. Some would like Matthew 5:32 to mean, "whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of adultery, causeth her to commit adultery." But Jesus Christ, the Word, differentiated between adultery and fornication. He did not permit annulment for adultery, but only for fornication.

Porneia in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 means Biblical fornication! Fornication is defined in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged* as "human sexual intercourse other than between a man and his wife; sexual intercourse between a spouse and an unmarried person; sexual intercourse between unmarried people."

Not the same as adultery, fornication, as used in the Bible, means illicit sex committed prior to marriage but can include a continuing sexual activity after marriage, providing this activity began as a habit or lifestyle prior to the marriage (Ezek. 16:8, 15; 23:2–5, 7–8, I Cor. 5:1).

Now consider I Corinthians 7:2, 3: "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 [sexual dues, in marriage]: and likewise also the wife unto the husband." Fornication is avoided by becoming married and engaging in lawful coitus with your mate. Thus, fornication is often committed by the unmarried prior to a marriage ceremony. To "be fruitful and multiply" is not the only physical reason for marriage (Gen. 1:27, 28). Another reason is to avoid fornication.

Porneia, and the verb form *porneuo*, are used repeatedly in the book of Revelation. The words constantly refer to the fornication of those that are supposed to be the affianced bride of Christ—those who are unfaithful prior to the bound marriage (Rev. 2:14). Will we be unfaithful to Christ by divorcing and remarrying contrary to His word?

In both Matthew 5 and 19, *porneia* cannot mean adultery. It generally means premarital sex, prior to a marriage, but does include sexual activity which continues after marriage. Once bound by God, the marriage remains bound for life!

No Divorce for Adultery

Among the statutes contained in the Old Testament are civil codes relating to the civil government of the nation of Israel. In ancient Israel, the church and state were one under God's theocracy. Today, Christians in God's church have to obey the civil statutes of whichever human government is over them. They cannot enforce the civil penalties contained in God's laws. Not until Christ returns will church and state again be united under God's direct rule. However, these civil statutes contain spiritual principles which reveal how the eternal and unchanging mind of God views various human actions.

Deuteronomy 22:22 states, "If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel."

Some try to say that divorce for adultery is allowed in the Bible. This statute does not provide for divorce. Death is the judgment rendered by God for both of the guilty ones involved in adultery. In God's eyes, marriage is sacred! That is why adultery is considered a capital sin (Lev. 20:10).

Jesus Christ knew and upheld this statute regarding death for adultery. Under the New Covenant, the ultimate penalty for adultery is still death—death in the Lake of Fire. Sin is still sin! But grace, mercy, and unmerited pardon are tendered, for a time, to those found guilty of such sins in order to grant them opportunity to repent, to cease committing such sins.

The scribes and Pharisees brought to Christ a woman caught in the act of adultery (John 8:1–11). But where was the guilty man? It was an attempt to get Jesus to condemn Himself by going against God's law. Jesus' answer to His accusers was: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." One by one, they all left. Were they also implicated?

Although He did not condone what the woman had done, Jesus also did not condemn her, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." He did not allow divorce for adultery; but instead He required repentance. If one repeated the same sin, the "space for repentance" would be considerably shortened. The same ultimate penalty of death still holds for the sin of adultery, unless atoned for by the blood of Christ.

Penalties for Adultery, Rape, and Fornication

Deuteronomy 22:23, 24 describes the case of a virgin who is betrothed to a husband. A man, other than her betrothed husband, has sexual relations with her in the city. If she was able to cry out for help but did not the result was death for both!

Verses 25 to 27 present a similar case. But in this instance, it happens in the field, where the woman's cries for help would go unheeded. This is rape! The result: Death to the attacker; no punishment for the victim. This is a just law that would prevent much pain and suffering if adhered to in this land today.

Finally, what about a case of fornication in which both people consent? Verses 28 and 29 describe such a case where a man finds a virgin that is not betrothed and lies with her. They are found. The result: He must pay her father a dowry, ". . . and she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled her, he may not put her away all his days." They must marry, with no provision for divorce, ever! (Ex. 22:16, 17).

Spiritual Eunuchs

Jesus' message, the gospel of the Kingdom of God, magnified these statutes of God, continually stressing the importance and sanctity of marriage. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:32) and in public answers to the Pharisees (Matt. 19:9), Christ emphasized the permanency of marriage.

Jesus also wanted to be sure His disciples understood the truth regarding marriage and divorce. Mark records the occasion when Christ was confronted by the Pharisees concerning this matter of divorce (Mark 10:2–9). Later on, "And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. 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" (vv. 10–12).

Bound mates are forbidden to divorce and remarry. There are no exceptions. Once bound to a mate by becoming one flesh (v. 8), there is no divorce and remarriage. This Scripture stands true. The "except it be for fornication" of Matthew 19:9 cannot and does not refer to a wife who is bound by God to a husband. For if they are bound, they are bound for life—for as long as they both shall live (I Cor. 7:39).

Matthew records the reaction of the disciples to Christ's private elaboration of His public teaching. They were awestruck! Marriage was far more binding than even they had realized. "His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry" (Matt. 19:10). One should think twice before marrying because once bound in marriage, there is no way out except by death! Even if one has cause to separate, he cannot remarry someone else.

Jesus' answer to His disciples' statement was: "All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it" (Matt. 19:11, 12).

Because the context of this whole section of Scripture is about divorce and remarriage, not celibacy, we can assume the third classification of eunuchs mentioned above includes those who remain single because they are bound to an estranged mate and cannot remarry. All virgins are "eunuchs" in the sense of not having experienced sex until adulthood and marriage. But one cannot "make himself" a "spiritual eunuch" unless he was once engaged in sexual activity either in or out of marriage. No, Jesus was not supporting celibacy. He was emphasizing the necessity of remaining faithful to "the wife of one's youth" even if one has to live alone. He commanded the keeping of oneself from marrying and engaging in sexual activity where it would be adultery because the true mate is still alive.

Divorce—an Abomination in the Sight of God

In the Gospels according to Mark and Luke, the "except it be for fornication" clause is absent (Mark 10:11–12, Luke 16:18). Certainly Luke illustrates a different occasion than the two previously mentioned passages in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9.

The Pharisees had derided Christ. "And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15).

There are some individuals who want to do those acts which God's Word condemns. Yet they want to justify themselves before men. They seek to please themselves and other men, for such actions are highly esteemed in the sight of men. Yet to God, their sins are an abomination!

What kind of sins? The first one Christ mentions, in direct reference to His statement in Luke 16:15, is this: "Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery . . ." (v. 18).

Divorce is accepted, even by many religious people. Some ministers think nothing of marrying people who have been married many times previously. Divorce and remarriage may be "dressed up" and "sanctified" by a church, but to God, it is an abomination. Unless the practice is repented of, the result will be death.

The Case of Joseph and Mary Shows Meaning of "Except It Be for Fornication"

Christ was very careful to answer the Pharisees in exact accordance with God's law. This is especially true because the statement "except it be for fornication" directly involved His own conception and birth. The Pharisees knew Jesus was not the literal son of Joseph. Falsely claiming to be following their physical father Abraham, they chided Christ, "We be not born of fornication [*porneia*]; we have one Father, even God" (John 8:41).

They were accusing Christ of being born illegitimate. They were accusing His mother Mary of engaging in *porneia*—fornication prior to being bound to Joseph in marriage. A true understanding of the facts, however, conclusively proves the exact meaning of "except it be for fornication" in Matthew 19:9.

Jesus' mother, Mary, was a virgin; she had never engaged in sexual relations (Luke 1:34). She became espoused—formally engaged, or betrothed—to Joseph. But ". . . before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy [Spirit] . . . Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily" (Matt. 1:18–19). There were at least two statutes which Joseph could have resorted to in order to put her away. Because as far as he could tell, Mary had engaged in premarital sex—fornication. These statutes are found in Deuteronomy 22:13–21, and 24:1–4. A just and righteous man like Joseph could have put away a betrothed wife for fornication unknown to him. But the angel came and told Joseph in a dream, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy [Spirit] . . ." (Matt. 1:20).

The Bible refers to a betrothed woman, prior to the marriage ceremony, as the "wife." And the betrothed man, prior to being bound in marriage, is referred to as the "husband." The church, not yet bound forever as the wife of Christ, is nevertheless called the "wife." And as that wife, the church must make herself ready for the marriage ceremony to occur at the return of Christ (Rev. 19:7). We must keep ourselves "chaste virgins." We are not to commit fornication with this world. This is commanded by God in order that we might be presented spotless before our husband, Jesus Christ (II Cor. 11:2).

Joseph was a just man who knew God's law. Suspecting fornication, *porneia*, prior to their marriage, he contemplated putting Mary away according to the provisions of God's law. He would have then been free to marry another woman. This is the Bible explanation of "except it be for fornication." Only Matthew records this "qualifying clause." Why? Because Matthew is the only Gospel writer to record Joseph's thoughts concerning the putting away of Mary, his betrothed wife.

For those contemplating marriage today, the case of Joseph and Mary is a prime example. Even engagement is serious! It is an agreement to marry between two parties. It is a serious matter to break an engagement. An engagement is not the time to decide whether or not you will marry; it is the time to seriously prepare for marriage. It is the time to make sure there is nothing that would impair the coming marriage, such as *porneia*.

In our Christian life, we are now engaged to Christ. Are we seriously preparing for that coming marriage to Christ? Or will He find *porneia* in us? Make no mistake about it, the individual church member can be put away if he does not come out of *porneia*.

Deuteronomy 22 and Fornication

The statute Joseph knew he could apply is found in Deuteronomy 24:1–4. In principle, it is also found in Deuteronomy 22:13–21. Close examination of these will further explain Christ's inspired teaching regarding marriage and divorce. In Deuteronomy 22:13–21, a man takes a wife, goes in unto her, and claims, "I took this woman, and when I came to her, I found her not a maid [virgin]." It then became a public case, to be decided by the elders of the city. If the "tokens of her virginity" (proof that she was a virgin, that she had not committed fornication) could be presented, then she was innocent. In the case of her innocence, the husband was fined for giving her "an evil name." God, knowing his false claim, did bind the marriage. Once bound, the statute states, "he may not put her away all his days" (v. 19). Once bound, there was no divorce.

But on the other hand, what if she was found to be guilty of fornication? What if she did "play the whore in her father's house"? Under the statutes, the civil penalty was death

by stoning. Fornication, like adultery, is a capital sin in the sight of God under these circumstances.

By engaging in sex before her wedding ceremony, she had committed fornication. It was unknown to the husband until the wedding night. God, knowing this, did not bind the marriage. Since there was sexual fraud, the man was free to marry if he refused to accept her as his wife. The wife presented herself to be a virgin, but was deceiving him. Upon proof, he did not have to take her as his wife.

Only during a limited period of time did Israel follow this statute literally and punish the guilty one by death through stoning. The Jews were not enforcing the death penalty at the time of Jesus. However, for a man to reject and put away his wife upon discovering fornication, was to "make a public example" and disgrace her for life. Joseph wanted to put Mary away privately, lest she be stigmatized.

Deuteronomy 22:13–21, describes the case where sexual fraud (fornication) is discovered on or shortly after the wedding day. There is obviously a time limit. In Matthew 1:18–19, Joseph learned of Mary's pregnancy even prior to the formal wedding, and was at once going to put her away privately.

Deuteronomy 24 and Divorcement

Closely related to Deuteronomy 22:13–21 is God's law found in Deuteronomy 24:1–4. This is the law about which the Pharisees were specifically questioning Jesus. It is a major part of the "trunk of the tree" on the divorce question. What does it say?

In reading the *King James Version*, the feeling given is that divorce was a required function under certain circumstances. It says, "let him write her a bill of divorcement." This is the way the Pharisees interpreted the law, "Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement and to put her away?" (Matt. 19:7).

But the literal Hebrew is more correctly rendered in the *Jewish Publication Society Translation*:

When a man takes a wife, and marries her, then it come to pass, if she find no favor in his eyes, because he has found some unseemly thing [Hebrew, *ervah dabar*, 'a matter of nakedness'] in her, that he [some translations have 'if he'] writes her a bill of divorcement, and gives it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife and the latter husband hates her, and writes her a bill of divorcement, and gives it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; or if the

latter husband die, who took her to be his wife; her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the Eternal, and you shall not cause the land to sin, which the Eternal your God gives you for an inheritance.

Moses did not command divorce. What he did command was that the man who put away "his wife" under the provisions of Deuteronomy 24:1–4 could not take her back. If she were given a bill of divorcement, then God's law prevented further pollution. God knew the stubborn, hardhearted nature of Israelites. God's law severely limited their carnal intentions, making it impossible to take the divorced woman back.

As we have seen, *porneia*, or fornication, is committed prior to marriage, but is not discovered by the husband until after the betrothal or after the wedding. Thus the principle Jesus expressed was the spiritual application of the law found in Deuteronomy.

God does not change! He does not give one law for one group of people, and an entirely different law to others (Rom. 2:11). Neither is He a respecter of persons favoring men over women. The exception clause applies equally to both. The law is spiritual, unchanging, unalterable. Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8).

But the application or administration was different for unconverted Israelites in the Old Testament. Moses allowed the putting away of what God had not yet bound. Jesus magnified the law by urging Christians to "harden not your hearts," don't put away your wives. Be merciful, forgiving and loving, not hardhearted.

Jewish scholars in Jesus' day were divided as to what this "matter of nakedness" meant. The Hillel School interpreted Deuteronomy 24 to mean that divorce was permissible for any and every reason. If a wife burned her husband's food, that was permissible grounds for divorce. Those of the Shammai School, however, allowed divorce and remarriage only on grounds of adultery or other sexual perversion, and even then, only immediately after the marriage ceremony.

The Pharisees wanted to know of Christ: "Which side are you on?" But Jesus knew they were scheming to ensnare Him, for both Jewish schools were wrong. Jesus sided with neither, for they did not understand God's laws.

The "matter of nakedness" (margin) cannot mean adultery. The key to understanding Deuteronomy 24 is that it is not speaking of a bound marriage. If the husband and wife in Deuteronomy 24:1 were originally bound by God, and the "matter of nakedness" meant adultery, then the penalty for this act could be none other than death by stoning (Deut. 22:22, Lev. 20:10). If the bill of divorcement severed a marriage, they would each be free to marry any eligible person, even each other for the second time. Yet verse 4 specifically states that

the husband could never take her back. She was free to be another man's wife, but was forbidden to return to her former husband if her second husband died, or she was divorced from him.

Consider how merciless God would be if indeed the couple in Deuteronomy 24:1 were bound. The wife's uncleanness was discovered, and the husband sent her away with a bill of divorce. She became another man's wife. He died. The first husband missed her, his first love, and wanted her back. She had amended her ways, and desired to return to her first love. God's law supposedly would not allow mercy and forgiveness, would not allow a couple once truly bound to return to each other and live together as man and wife for life as God intended. This is indeed preposterous.

Why then did God forbid the reunification of the original couple? Christ answers, "because of the hardness of your hearts" (Matt. 19:8). In order to discourage the quick, flick-of-the-wrist practice of divorcing at will, God put severe restrictions upon Israel. Far from allowing for human weakness, the law was instituted to restrict and prevent human sin and desecration of the sacred marriage relationship. It would force the male Israelite to think twice about putting away his wife for "a matter of nakedness." For once the decision was made, it was irrevocable. Joseph deeply loved Mary. He knew God's law. That is why he thought deeply about his actions, lest he make a hasty decision (Matt. 1:19–20).

Once bound by God, a couple is bound for life, as long as they both shall live. Neither one can ever marry any other person. There is no restriction against taking back an adulterous mate after he or she has a change of heart (I Cor. 7:11, Rom. 7:1–3, Mal. 2:14–16). Deuteronomy 24 is not describing a bound marriage. Neither does it describe a divorce which is permitted because of adultery.

The time setting of the bill of divorcement of Deuteronomy 24 is when "it come to pass." When "the matter of nakedness" is discovered, the innocent party must take action. "And it come to pass" does not set a specific limitation on the time the couple live together prior to the discovery, but it does imply a time limit on how soon the innocent party must act upon this knowledge. He (or she) cannot wait to "see how things will work out" before deciding. The innocent party must act immediately.

Sexual fraud—fornication—is covered in Deuteronomy 22:13–21. If the woman was guilty, she was stoned to death. What is covered in Deuteronomy 24 are unusual situations in which a woman would not come under the death penalty. Possibly these would include sexual deformities or inadequacies unknown before entering into the marriage. It may also include the presence of non-virginity that cannot be positively proven one way or the other to be the result of deliberate fornication. A raped woman (Deut. 22:25–29) who was innocent could be hardheartedly rejected at the time of marriage because she was not a virgin. Such a woman could become another man's wife if he would accept her.

Joseph had no positive proof that Mary had played the harlot in her father's house. Yet it was discovered that she was pregnant. Their marriage could have been permanently annulled, had not the angel of God intervened to change Joseph's mind.

When the "matter of uncleanness" is discovered, action must be taken immediately or the marriage will be bound. The context of Deuteronomy 24 shows that when the discovery of the uncleanness occurs legal action must be initiated as soon as possible. God's inspired statute of Deuteronomy 24 forced the men of Israel to "count the cost" before rejecting a woman after the marriage ceremony. The rightful, allowable use of Deuteronomy 24 was not hardheartedness. But the law was instituted to prevent hardhearted, rampant divorce for any cause, and treatment of women as chattel.

The *porneia* of Matthew 5 and 19 includes this matter of fornication as covered in Deuteronomy 22, as well as other matters of sexual uncleanness covered in Deuteronomy 24.

God's word is consistent. If there is no fraud involved, once a marriage is consummated it is bound by God for life. A marriage may be annulled only under certain limited circumstances due to hitherto undisclosed sexual uncleanness. Such a "marriage" was never bound by God in the first place. And once the rejection was made, the marriage could never be bound in the future.

Numbers 5—Suspicion of Adultery

Numbers 5:11–31 gives further proof that Deuteronomy 24 is not speaking of divorce in a bound marriage as the result of adultery. If a woman committed adultery but was not caught in the act (if they were caught in the act, both would have been stoned), and her husband suspected her of being unfaithful and became jealous, then he was to take her before the priest. A ceremony was conducted which included an appeal to God to manifest innocence or guilt. The husband could not divorce her for suspected adultery. Rather, the woman was set before God who would render the judgment. If guilty, her belly would swell and her thigh would rot (fall) and she would be accursed. If innocent, she was completely exonerated and conceived seed. Thus, adultery was not the grounds for divorce in the Old Testament.

Jeremiah 3 and God's Divorcement of Israel

So far, it has been shown that the "bill of divorcement" of Deuteronomy 24:1 was actually an annulment of what God had not bound. Did God violate this statute in Jeremiah 3, when, after divorcing Israel, He pleaded with her to return?

Jeremiah 3:1 states, "They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted?" This would be confusion, great pollution. The verse continues, "but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the Lord." Yes, God said for Israel to quit playing the harlot, and return to Him. This would not be pollution, but repentance of harlotry, and forgiveness in taking back the true wife.

God was bound to Israel at Mt. Sinai; whereas in the case of Deuteronomy 24, the couple was not bound. The husband in Deuteronomy 24 rejected and sent away the wife before becoming bound, not because of adultery, but because of the "matter of uncleanness." In Jeremiah 3, the bound wife rejected and left her husband after being bound (see Ezek. 16:32, 38). She refused to live with him (see Ezek. 16:15–59). The Deuteronomy 24 "bill of divorcement" was a cutting off prior to being bound in marriage due to the discovery of some matter of nakedness. In Jeremiah 3, the "bill of divorcement," verse 8, was a divorce. And thus to prevent pollution, the divorce forbade her to return unless, she repented. After God gave the "bill of divorce," He said, "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you" (Jer. 3:14).

This should be the attitude of those today who must live separate because their bound mate will not return but obstinately continues to live in adultery. This should be their prayer. Plead for repentance! Be ready to render mercy. This is the principle stated in I Corinthians 7:11. The wife should seek to be reconciled to her husband.

God did not put away Israel. She left Him and played the harlot. God did not force her to remain, but pleaded with her to quit sinning and be reconciled to Him. Christ set the perfect example of fidelity, patience, mercy and a love that is willing to forgive. Christ believed in the permanency of His marriage to Israel—unto death itself. Will we follow His example? Or will we hardheartedly divorce and remarry? He waited hundreds of years for His unfaithful mate to return. How long will we wait?

Christ wants to prove the faithfulness of those who will enter the New Covenant marriage for all eternity. You must prove that you will be eternally faithful to God's way of life. How? By faithfulness in your human marriage now. You must become of one mind and spirit with God, even as you are one flesh in your human marriage.

Those who wrest God's word to allow divorce and remarriage now are having their sole reward—a few years of "physical enjoyment." They will have proven themselves unfaithful in their betrothal to Christ which occurred at conversion. Is it worth it to obey God now, even if you may have to endure physical suffering? Remember, God's laws do not produce suffering, but the breaking of them does. Sometimes we have to live with the scar of a penalty, a penalty incurred because we broke one or more of God's laws.

***Porneia* Continued After Marriage**

But what about *porneia* committed after marriage? Does God allow divorce for this?

Clearly distinguishing between adultery and *porneia*—Biblical fornication—is essential for understanding the "exception clause" of Jesus, "except it be for fornication" (Matt. 19:9).

Adultery is illicit sex involving married persons that takes place after the marriage ceremony and is not preceded by the habit of sexual sin.

Fornication is sexual sin in general which is initiated prior to marriage. It can include harlotry, sexual deviations, bestiality, or homosexuality. A mate can utilize the "exception clause" to put away the other for *porneia* committed prior to the wedding.

But what about *porneia* which is not discovered until after their coming together? If indeed there has been the habit of *porneia* prior to marriage, it almost surely will be discovered sooner or later. The "exception clause" may be used if (1) deception has taken place—sexual purity was claimed when in fact there was *porneia*, (2) action is taken soon after the discovery of *porneia*, and (3) the one putting the other away is "pure" himself. In such a case God knew that there was *porneia* involved. If *porneia* is so discovered, the offender may be put away and the marriage was never bound. It is null and void. However, if *porneia* is discovered and forgiven with acceptance of the other, then the marriage is bound, and there is no divorce for any reason.

God's wife Israel committed whoredoms when still in Egypt (Ezek. 23:3). God was not deceived; He knew what Israel was like when He married her. She abstained from her former habits only momentarily. Then she relapsed into gross harlotry.

Israel left God (I Sam. 8:4–9, Jer. 3:20). God did not leave her. Years later, after sending many prophets who pleaded with Israel to return, God gave her a bill of "divorcement" (the Hebrew word means 'separation' or 'cutting off'). First, the kingdom of Israel was put away by God (II Kings 17:18–24), and then later the kingdom of Judah. For years after this separation, God continued to plead with her to come back. "Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord . . . Only acknowledge thine iniquity . . . Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you . . ." (Jer. 3:12–14).

Once bound by God, the woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives (Rom. 7:2). *Porneia*, adultery, bestiality, and perversion notwithstanding. However, this does not mean one must continue to live with a mate guilty of such things.

God wants us to prove our faithfulness to Him. And marriage is a major area in which we are tested. Each will stand individually before God to account for his or her actions (Rom. 14:12).

Who May "Bind" and "Loose"?

Perhaps the most formidable assumption concerning the issue of marriage and divorce is the claim that the church has the authority to "bind" and "loose." Therefore, decisions of the church must be accepted by the membership without question. Once made, these dictums are binding in heaven and earth. And the individual members are not responsible for their actions.

The support given for this belief is the often quoted text of Matthew 16:19, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." This has been interpreted in at least two ways: 1) The church has the authority to make binding decisions regarding the doctrines and laws of God, 2) The church and the ministry have the authority to determine which marriages are bound, and which are loosed (not bound). Is this what the Bible really says?

If the church could decide which laws are to be obeyed today, and how to obey them, would it not have greater authority than God? If the church could decide which marriages are binding, and which are not, then it—the church—and not God, would bind and loose marriages. But this contradicts Matthew 19:6 which clearly proves that only God has this power. God's word is explicit: "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deut. 4:2). The church has no God-given authority to change His laws!

What then did God mean in Matthew 16:19? The Williams translation gives a more clear rendition of this verse: "Whatever you forbid on earth must be what is already forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth must be what is already permitted in heaven." No one, not even an apostle, has power to bind or loose anything unless it is clear that God has already bound or loosed it!

A major principle regarding the matter of authority is: One who gives another authority cannot give more authority than he already possesses. This is plainly shown in I Corinthians 15:27, "For the rule and authority over all things has been given to Christ by His Father; except, of course, Christ does not rule over the Father Himself, who gave Him this power to rule" (*Living Bible*). The church cannot overrule Christ, just as Christ cannot overrule His Father.

The binding and loosing passage is repeated in Matthew 18:18. From the context of the entire chapter, "binding" and "loosing" has nothing to do with doctrinal decisions or deciding which marriages are bound. It relates to internal problems between members of the church, the binding and loosing of obligations or the solving of problems and arguments. It has nothing to do with giving anyone authority to alter the seventh commandment or any other law of God.

Thus, the church cannot overrule the laws of God. It must act in accordance with those laws. Each individual in the Church of God is required by God to prove whether or not the church is obeying the laws of God (Acts 17:11, I Cor. 11:1, I Thess. 5:12, 21). It is your responsibility to know and prove what the truth is on all doctrine!

Many Erroneous Assumptions

God did not give ministers authority to bind or loose a marriage. How much less do the carnal human governments of this world have authority to do these things? No, it is God alone who binds a marriage. And what God has bound for life, He plainly states that man is forbidden to unbind. God will not allow any marriage to be severed until death.

That man may divorce and unbind a marriage is a common but false assumption. In the Bible, there is no such thing as a divorce in the sense of unbinding a marriage bound by God.

Further, many falsely assume that Deuteronomy 24 is speaking of a bound marriage being unbound by a bill of divorcement. They also assume that Jeremiah 3 shows a "divorce" that ended a bound marriage.

Another erroneous assumption is that the word "wife" always means a married woman bound to a husband, or that "husband" always refers to a married man bound by God to a wife. But the word "wife" in the Bible refers both to a betrothed woman and to one that is later bound in marriage.

Finally, many have assumed that a bound marriage is the result of a vow or legal contract. Therefore, when one of the parties utterly fails to live by the terms of the contractual agreement, and is irreconcilable, the marriage may be dissolved. But what they fail to realize is that the Bible does not limit the binding of marriage by the word "vow" or "contract." Malachi 2:14 shows that marriage is more than merely a contract or vow. It is a covenant between husband and wife with God.

A covenant is defined as "a binding and solemn agreement made by two or more individuals, parties, etc. to do or keep from doing a specified thing; compact" (*Webster's New*

World Dictionary). And the term of marriage is "as long as you both shall live." Not "as long as there is no adultery, desertion, or incompatibility." It is for life! God is part of every bound marriage.

What Constitutes Marriage?

The very purpose of marriage is to establish and maintain family life. This in turn prepares humans for family life as spirit beings in the Kingdom of God, which is the divine Family of God.

There are three basic elements of the marriage law revealed in Genesis 2:24:

(1) Marriage involves the intent of leaving the parents' home and authority to establish a third family. It is the beginning of a new husband and wife relationship from which children shall be born. Thus the statement, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother."

(2) Next, the man "shall cleave unto his wife." They are to be joined together in a binding covenant relationship between each other and God.

(3) Finally, the last major element of the marriage law is that "they shall be one flesh." This includes sexual intercourse, which in marriage is an honorable (Heb. 13:4) and commanded relationship (Gen. 1:28, I Cor. 7:3–5). It is holy and sacred to God when rightly used in marriage, but a sin to Him when misused outside of marriage. Sex in marriage cements a couple together more firmly as the years go by.

Who May Marry?

Marriage is not for everyone. There are certain Biblical qualifications for a valid marriage.

(1) The couple must be male and female (Gen. 2:24). So-called "marriages" between two men or two women are an abomination in the sight of God (Lev. 18:22, Rom. 1:26, 27, I Cor. 6:9).

(2) The couple should be of marriageable age. If still under the authority of their parents, they should at least have both parents' implicit approval. Marriage is not for children. The two should be able to establish an independent third home (Gen. 2:24). In Numbers 30, we see how the vow principle applies to a young woman in her father's house. He may disallow her vow, but if he holds his peace, her vow shall stand. In principle this

would apply to the vow or covenant of marriage. For in a covenant, as in a vow, God requires us to live up to the words of our lips (Deut. 23:21–23).

What is the age of accountability? Perhaps the events that transpired after Israel left Egypt may give us a clue. Israel rebelled against God again when they refused to believe the good report of Joshua and Caleb. They wanted to return to Egypt. As punishment they had to wander in the wilderness for forty years. All those from age 20 and upward who had murmured against the Lord died in the wilderness (Num. 14:29). Those under that age were not yet responsible for making their own decisions. It was those who "had no knowledge between good and evil" who entered the promised land (Deut. 1:39).

This demonstrates, in principle, that it would be best for young people contemplating marriage below the age of 20 to have approval from their parents. This is not necessarily intended to be a hard-and-fast rule. Unusual circumstances would demand special considerations. Every such case must be individually resolved. Nevertheless, guidelines have been established by God in principle as explained in the previous verses.

(3) According to Leviticus 18:6–17, the couple is not to be within the prohibited degrees of marriage within a family.

(4) The couple should be of similar racial stock. This is true from both the physical and the spiritual point of view. God's word is against miscegenation (Ex. 34:16, Deut. 7:3, 4, Josh. 23:12, Ezra 9:2, 13–15, Neh. 13:23–27). God similarly states that if one potential mate is a Christian, the other should also be. A Christian should marry "only in the Lord" (I Cor. 7:39).

(5) Both potential marital partners should be eligible to marry, that is, must not be previously bound to someone else. To marry when still bound to someone else is adultery (Rom. 7:3).

(6) There should not be any undisclosed *porneia* (sexual defilements) that could void the marriage. In this immoral age, a large proportion of young men and women entering marriage have experienced premarital sexual intercourse. If a young man marries a girl without first questioning her regarding virginity, he could not later claim fraud for *porneia*. If he desires only a virgin, he should discretely question the girl before marriage. Then, if she lies and deceives him, he could reject her after discovering it. But it is best not to be so hardhearted but rather to forgive and forget. All the above principles apply to the woman also.

What Is a Valid Marriage?

What then constitutes a valid marriage? When two eligible people sincerely and solemnly covenant to take each other as husband and wife, then they are bound by the Eternal God for as long as they both shall live. To be subject to the civil powers, the marriage should have a legal marriage license, or fulfill whatever the legal laws of the land may require. God is the "silent witness" to every marriage. He alone has the authority to bind. Man cannot put asunder what God has bound.

Because this Satan-inspired world has so perverted the marriage relationship, there has been rampant divorce and remarriage, a horrible evil in God's sight. Many who come to understand God's truth will find that they are existing in an adulterous union. God's true church and ministry will provide them with the knowledge of what God's word plainly says. Then it will be up to them to follow God. Some may come to see that they must separate, making themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake (Matt. 19:12, Luke 14:26).

Can you receive this saying? (Matt. 19:11). The true followers of God will not be praised and lauded by men. Will this be your motto? "But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets" (Acts 24:14). It is eternally more important to obey God rather than bow to the dictates of the self. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

Fraudulent Marriages

It has been assumed that since there is no New Testament example of a divorce and remarriage decision, Jesus did not really mean what He said in Matthew 5 and 19 concerning marriage. I Corinthians 7, then, is widely interpreted to justify divorce, thus making the Bible contradict.

As has been clearly demonstrated, Christ never gave His church the responsibility of judging "divorce and remarriage cases." Here is an area so intimate that only God is fully capable of discerning hearts and minds. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the ministry to make known God's truth on the subject of divorce and remarriage, and the parties involved must make their own decision as to the disposition of the case.

Porneia, as a basis for annulling a "marriage," has been clearly proven. Where fraud was involved (deception has taken place), the injured party is free to "put away" the guilty one. But what about fraud in areas other than *porneia*?

There are matters that affect the character and mental orientation of the individual. Such defects as homosexuality (both male and female), alcoholism, drug addiction, demonism, etc., affect the basic character of the marriage. Few knowingly would enter into a marriage relationship with a person of such defective character. But what if one enters into a marriage not knowing the character of the mate because he or she has been led to believe differently—led to believe that the potential mate is normal? By the term "led to believe," one must understand certain significant factors were diligently withheld in all previous conversations, observations, and contacts. Would God bind such a marriage? The answer should be obvious!

God would not bind any marriage which has had fraud and deception as a force of influence behind a consenting decision. God is just and fair. He holds no conscientious person to an agreement or covenant when the very basis of the agreement was fraud! But once the fraud is discovered, the innocent party must act. He cannot acknowledge the fraud and continue in the relationship. To do so waives his right to annul the marriage. If he forgives or "tolerates" the fraud and continues to live with his mate, God then binds the marriage. In most cases, a Christian led by the Holy Spirit and where the marriage has not been permanently damaged by the specific defect, should forgive and continue the marriage relationship (Col. 3:12–14, Eph. 4:31–32, I Cor. 6:9–11).

I Corinthians 7 Does Not Allow Divorce and Remarriage

Jesus Christ said in Matthew 12:36, 37, "That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Teachers of false doctrines bring up the very same Scriptures which refute what they say. Out of their own mouths they condemn themselves.

God's Word is holy. Those who twist Scripture in turning away from what God revealed to them originally will have much for which to answer. That is why we should be "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (II Tim. 2:25).

Chorizo and Aphiemi

Shocking as it may seem, I Corinthians 7 does not once use the Greek word contained in Matthew 5 and 19 which refers to divorce. In Matthew, the Greek word for "put away" is *apoluo*. This word is not used in I Corinthians 7 at all! *Apoluo*, is the putting away of what God had not yet bound. When one "*apoluo*-ed" his wife according to the law, he could remarry and not be called an adulterer.

In I Corinthians 7 there is no mention of divorce. There are references, however, to "depart" (*chorizo*—vv. 10, 11, 15), and "put away" or "leave" (*aphiemi*—vv. 11–13). What do these Greek words mean? Why do some attempt to equate these two words with the *apoluo* of Matthew 5 and 19?

Chorizo is used twelve times in the New Testament (see *Englishman's Greek New Testament*, p. 805). ". . . Paul departed from Athens . . . because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome: . . ." (Acts 18:1, 2, see also Acts 1:4, Philemon 15). *Chorizo* means "to leave a physical location." *Chorizo* is translated "separate" in Romans 8:35, 39 and Hebrews 7:26.

In I Corinthians 7:10, 11, Paul states God's command to the married: ". . . Let not the wife depart [*chorizo*] from her husband: But and if she depart [*chorizo*], let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband . . ." Thus, God's own Word plainly states that *chorizo* is not the same as *apoluo* which means a "divorce" or the putting away of what God has not yet bound. *Chorizo* refers to a separation unless or until there is a reconciliation. If one remarries after "*chorizo*-ing" his mate, he would be an adulterer. Paul was quoting the law expressed by Christ in Matthew 19:6 and Mark 10:9, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man separate [*chorizo*]." By "put asunder," Christ meant the leaving or deserting of one's mate in an attempt to end the marriage. God does not allow this.

Matthew 19:5 shows how a man is to physically leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. Verse 6 adds that the husband and wife are to be one flesh. God has joined them, they are not to leave the one-flesh union. Matthew 19:9 gives the only circumstance where a man not bound may *apoluo* or put away his wife and remarry if he wishes. Jesus unequivocally states that once God joins, there should not be any *apoluo* (divorce) or even *chorizo* (separation). *Apoluo* and *chorizo* cannot mean the same thing, or else Matthew 19:6 and 9 are contradictory.

Paul knew what he was talking about in I Corinthians 7:10 and 11, for he was inspired of God. He said the converted mate was not to *chorizo* (separate). Even if the unconverted forced a *chorizo*, the converted mate must remain unmarried until, if possible, a reconciliation can be worked out with the same mate. This is merely a reiteration of Matthew 19:6 which forbids any divorce of a God-joined marriage.

Now in I Corinthians 7:15, *chorizo* is used again: "But if the unbelieving depart [*chorizo*], let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. . . ." The original Greek is revealing. It states (*Englishman's Greek New Testament*), "But if the unbeliever separates himself, let him separate himself . . ." Notice, the believer in verses 10 and 11 is to do his best to prevent a separation between himself and his mate. But in verse 15, if the unbeliever separates himself, the believer is not to resist but allow or let the

unbeliever depart. That is why the rest of the verse (according to the Greek) states, ". . . is not under bondage the brother or the sister in such, but in peace has called us God" (ibid).

Aphiemi means much the same as *chorizo*, but it is more emphatic. It often means simply to leave a physical location or person, "Then the devil leaveth him . . ." (Matt. 4:11); ". . . I leave the world, and go to the Father" (John 16:28). *Aphiemi* is also translated "forsook" in Mark 1:18 and elsewhere; and "forgive" in Matthew 6:12 and many other places. In at least two verses, *aphiemi* refers to a person leaving, ". . . the men, leaving the natural use of the woman . . ." (Rom. 1:27). And ". . . thou hast left thy first love" (Rev. 2:4). The Ephesus Church "left their first love"—God. But they were still bound to Him. In no sense is either *aphiemi* or *chorizo* ever used in connection with *apoluo*, the "putting away," or "divorcing" of a mate.

I Corinthians 7:11 shows that *aphiemi* is essentially an equivalent of *chorizo*, "But and if she depart [*chorizo*], let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away [*aphiemi*] his wife."

To "the rest," those with unconverted mates (v. 12), Paul says that the believing husband is not to "put her [his unbelieving wife] away [*aphiemi*]." And in verse 13, the Christian wife is told not to "leave" (*aphiemi*) her unbelieving husband. What kind of "putting away" is this talking about? It is not *apoluo* (divorce), but an ordering away, *aphiemi*. In Matthew 13:36 and Mark 4:36 the same word *aphiemi* is used. The former is translated, "Then Jesus sent the multitude away. . . ." He did not divorce the multitude. He ordered them away. A Christian should not send his mate away. His good example might lead to his mate's conversion (I Cor. 7:16).

Apoluo (putting away), as allowed by God (Matt. 19), is not once mentioned in I Corinthians 7, but separation and desertion are. *Aphiemi* and *chorizo* never mean divorce. Only the separating, deserting, or leaving of the true mate. God hates those deeds which are in opposition to His instructions in marriage (Mal. 2:15, 16) and will punish those who teach such things (Mal. 2:12).

Who Are "the Rest"?

Numerous writers cite the fact that in I Corinthians 7 Paul addresses several different classes of people with regard to the subject of marriage. In verse 8 he speaks "to the unmarried and widows." In verse 10 he addresses "the married," while in verse 12 it is "the rest." These "rest" in verse 12, just like the "married" in verse 10, are wives (*gunee*) and husbands (*aner*).

The word "rest" is the Greek *loipos*, which means "others of the same kind." In Acts 2:37, the same word is used in reference to "Peter and to the rest of the apostles." In Romans 1:13, it is translated "other Gentiles" (for other references see *Englishman's Greek Concordance*, pp. 464, 465). Consistently, *loipos* means "the remnant" or "others of the same kind," not those in some kind of limbo.

"The rest" in I Corinthians 7:12 refers to other married people. In this case, those in which one partner is not a Christian. Those mentioned in verse 12 are just as much "married" as those in verse 10, exactly in the same manner as Peter was just as much an apostle as the "others" in Acts 2:37.

"Has been sanctified" has nothing to do with God binding a marriage. And "has not been under bondage" has nothing to do with whether the marriage was or was not a "bound marriage." "Sanctified," the Greek word *hagiazō*, means "set apart for holy use" (Matt. 23:17, 19) or "under God's special protection and blessing" (I Thess. 5:23). The unbelieving mate, being part of the family, is sanctified by the conversion of the Christian mate; that is, he or she is "set apart" and along with the whole family, comes "under God's blessing" because the one mate has become a Christian and is now special to God. Likewise, the children, which would otherwise be "unclean," are now "holy" (*hagios*). They, like the unconverted mate, are now special to God because one marital partner is a begotten child of God. Paul did not say the marriage is sanctified, but the unbelieving mate and the children are sanctified.

Children being now holy, having been spiritually unclean before the conversion of one parent, shows that God did bind the marriage of the parents when both were unconverted. If God had not bound the marriage of the two unconverted parents, then Paul would have stated, "else were your children illegitimate; but now are they holy." But God did bind their marriage! The children are legitimate.

Does God bind the marriages of the unconverted? He says He does in Proverbs 2:16, 17, "Saving you also from the loose woman, the harlot with her words so smooth, who leaves her own husband, forgetting her married troth before God" (*The Bible, A New Translation*, by James Moffatt). The very use of the words "has been sanctified" shows that "split marriages" are not "unresolved" until the unconverted makes up his or her mind to stay. There is no such thing as marital limbo. A man either has a wife or he has none. And the Bible is very clear on when a marriage is bound; it is when the two become one flesh (Matt. 19:5, 6).

"Not Under Bondage"

Is a bound marriage ever spoken of in the entire Bible as being similar to a condition of enslavement? No! Slavery is the very antithesis of the loving, giving relationship in

marriage as expressed in Ephesians 5 and elsewhere. Then why do some insist that "has not been enslaved" (literal Greek) or "not under bondage" (KJV) in I Corinthians 7:15 means that the marriage "has not been bound"?

"Bondage" in verse 15 is a conjugation of the Greek word *douloo*, which everywhere in the Bible refers to servants or slaves, never to the binding of a marriage. A different word, *deo* (I Cor. 7:27, 39) is used to refer to the binding relationship of marriage. *Douloo* is used in Romans 6 to state that one is the servant of either unrighteousness or righteousness. Christ said that God's truth makes one free (John 8:32). The scribes and Pharisees retorted, "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage [*douloo*] to any man . . ." (v. 33). But Christ explained, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant [*douloo*, slave] of sin" (v. 34). "Even so we [in an unconverted state], when we were children, were in bondage [*douloo*, slavery] under the elements of the world" (Gal. 4:3). What Paul is referring to in I Corinthians 7:15 is this same type of bondage to sin. If the unbelieving separates himself, the Christian is not under bondage in such cases. He is not under bondage or in a state of slavery which requires him to follow the unconverted mate in his or her sins.

The individual who has now become a Christian has not been under bondage to the unconverted mate, nor is he now, Paul says. Consider what it would imply if "not under bondage" did mean "not bound." The "injured party," the Christian, would be free to remarry. If the Christian did remarry, and the unconverted later did repent and wanted to come back, the Christian, being married to someone else, could not accept him back! There would be no commanded provision for patience, longsuffering, and mercy on the Christian's part; the Christian would not have to wait for the unconverted to come back or plead for him to return.

How unlike God! Our God is our example. After God gave a bill of separation to Israel (because she was not pleased to dwell with Him) in Jeremiah 3, He pleaded with her to come back, "Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord . . . for I am married unto you" (Jer. 3:12, 14). Christ, the God of the Old Testament, pleaded with Israel for hundreds of years to return. He finally appeared as a man and had to die to end that marriage to His unconverted wife, physical Israel, and pave the way for the coming eternal spiritual marriage to the church—spiritual Israel (Gal. 6:16). How can Christians learn to be like Christ if they are hardhearted toward their unconverted mates?

Recall, *chorizo* means to depart or separate, not to divorce. In I Corinthians 7:15 the unconverted mate has not divorced the Christian (*apohuo*-ed the Christian according to the provisions of Matthew 19:9), but has left—deserted and gone off after another just like the Ephesus Church "left [*chorizo*] her first love" in Revelation 2. With a faithful mate, "the husband must give the wife her conjugal [sexual] dues, and the wife in the same way must give the husband his" (I Cor. 7:4, Moffatt). Sexual dues are commanded, but if an unconverted mate deserts, the Christian is not under bondage to give the other sexual dues

if he or she decides to come back from time to time. Likewise, according to the Bible, not the laws of man, the Christian husband is not under bondage to provide for the unconverted wife that is not pleased to dwell with him (Hos. 2:9).

Slaves are not their own; they must do the bidding of their master. A servant would have to go wherever his master goes. But if the unbelieving departs and is not pleased to dwell with the Christian, the Christian woman is not forced to follow or give her unconverted husband conjugal rights. This would, indeed, be bondage! And the Christian husband should not force his unconverted wife to stay. Why? The rest of verse 15 explains, "but God has called us to peace." He is no longer under leadership responsibility in the home. He should not strive or force his will on her if she leaves.

The *Living Bible* renders the proper sense of verse 15: "But if the husband or wife who isn't a Christian is eager to leave, it is permitted. In such cases the Christian husband or wife should not insist that the other stay, for God wants his children to live in peace and harmony."

Verse 16 further explains why there should be no striving if the unconverted is not pleased to dwell with the Christian: "For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" Notice, the unconverted one who left the Christian is still called "the husband" or "the wife." And even after this leaving (*chorizo*) the Christian is not to give up, but be peaceable and loving, pleading for the other to return, peradventure God would lead him or her to repentance. The Christian is told to "let him depart," but not to give up, for they still might save their mate. If the Christian remarried, how could he "save" his unconverted mate who deserted?

Contrary to what some would like to think, God's word and His law have no exceptions. "The wife [not just 'the converted wife'] is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord" (I Cor. 7:39).

Does the Bible Teach by Omission?

But why does not verse 15 repeat the requirement of verses 10 and 11, to "remain unmarried or be reconciled"? God does not reveal all His truth on any given subject in every verse relating to that subject. The Bible must be searched, here a line and there a line (Isa. 28:10–13).

Those who ask the above question must answer another: Why does not verse 15 repeat the allowance indicated in verses 27 and 28? "Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned . . ." Verse 15 does not say the Christian

is free to remarry; it also does not say the Christian is not free to remarry. Why does it leave these clauses out? Because verse 15 is not talking about being unbound (*deo*) to a wife (as does v. 27), but about not being enslaved—*douloo*, a different word with a different meaning—to a deserting unconverted mate.

Using the "Bible teaches by omission" theory throughout the Bible can result in a multitude of doctrines suitable to the unconverted mind. Take Acts 15, for example. The decision concerning circumcision of Gentiles was "that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication [*porneia*], and from things strangled, and from blood" (Acts 15:20). If the Bible teaches by omission, then since it does not say to abstain "from clean animals strangled," it would supposedly follow that properly bled pork would be proper for a Gentile Christian to eat. Yet this contradicts other plain verses. Thus is shown the folly of those who maintain that the Bible teaches by omission. The true Christian must live by what God's word does say—not what it does not say (Matt. 4:4).

The Bible does not teach by omission. I Corinthians 7:16, when considered with all other clear verses, shows that the Christian is not to give up on an unconverted mate who has deserted, and furthermore is not to remarry and forget the spouse.

The whole of I Corinthians chapter 7 is devoted to the question: "Should one be in the marital state or should one remain single?" Paul explains that the married should remain married, rendering sexual dues and not leaving their mates (unless they have an unconverted mate who decides to leave). He also states that it would be best for the unmarried and widowed to stay unmarried, for they would have trouble in the flesh; but, if they did marry they have not sinned.

I Corinthians 7 does not say, "Are you called married to your sister, remain in that state," or "Are you called in a homosexual marriage (which is legal in some states), continue therein." Or, "Are you called married to several wives, therein abide." None of these wrong marital states are allowed in God's word. Any person who is called of God must come out of sins such as these. Likewise, so must one who is called come out of living in an adulterous second or third marriage, "legal" in the eyes of the state, but "null and void" by the higher laws of God. It is ridiculous to assume that these verses allow a person to continue to live in a marital state that is set forth as sin everywhere else in the Bible!

What God is saying through Paul in these verses is that the Corinthians should be encouraged to remain in one of two states: 1) the proper marital state (as described in this very chapter and the whole Bible) in which one was called, or 2) remain single because of the "present distress." As verses 8, 9, 27, and 28 show, marriage was not forbidden, but for the time being it was thought best for the unmarried to stay that way.

Bound and Loosed

In verses 8 and 9, Paul was speaking to the unmarried and widows, in verses 10 and 11 to the married with both partners in the church, in verses 12 to 16 to "the rest" of the married—those with an unconverted mate and in verses 25 to 40 to the virgins and parents with marriageable girls. Not once does Paul address "the divorced." This is because Christ had already explained their status. And the law of marriage found in Romans 7:1–3 and I Corinthians 7:39 also covers their situation. What do the words "bound" and "loosed" of verse 27 mean?

"Art thou bound unto a wife?" Here the Greek word for "bound" is *dedesai*. It is from the root word *deo* which means to tie or bind. The same word is used in verse 39 ('The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth') as in Romans 7:2. *Deo* refers to the binding of a marriage. It is not the same word as *douloo*, bondage, in verse 15.

"Seek not to be loosed." Here the antonym of *deo* is used, *luo*, which means untied or not bound. The fact that *luo* is the antonym of *deo* is shown in John 11:44 where Lazarus, who was dead and "bound [*deo*] hand and foot," was resurrected and "loosed [*luo*]," or untied. *Luo* does not mean divorce. Verse 39 (I Cor. 7) plainly shows this by stating that one is bound, *deo*, by the law as long as the mate lives—not until desertion, divorce or anything else, but as long as they both live. *Apoluo* is the word which means divorce. The only divorce allowed in the Bible is the putting away of what God has not yet bound. This has been explained in relationship to Matthew 5 and 19. The husband in verse 27 is bound to a wife; he is not to seek to be loosed as there is no provision for divorce. If this were not true, then I Corinthians 7:39 and Romans 7:2 would be contradictions!

Together, these verses show the only way a bound marriage can be broken is by death. *Luo* in verse 27 can only mean "loosed by death," not "loosed by divorce." That *luo* can and does mean "loosed by death" is shown in John 2:19, "Destroy [*luo*] this temple [Christ's body] and in three days I will raise it up," and Acts 2:24, "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed [*luo*] the pains of death."

Now, continuing in verse 27, "Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife." This time the Greek word for loosed is *lelusai*, which is from the word *lulis*. It also is an antonym of *dedesai* (bound) which is used in the first part of verse 27. In this case, both of these words are of the same tense, the perfect tense, and should be rendered "have you been bound" and "have you been loosed." Paul is about to give inspired advice for virgins to remain single because of the present distress. Not wanting those who are already married to think they must also seek to live a single life, he inserts the thought contained in verse 27—a repetition of verse 24—that it is indeed permissible to remain in the proper marital state in which God has called them. This is why the statement is made, "Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed." Then Paul goes on to state, "Art thou loosed from a wife?"

seek not a wife." This means, "Have you been loosed from a wife by death?" Please take notice, there is no connection whatsoever with *apoluo*, the only Greek word used in the Bible for divorce.

Again, remember that the context of verses 17 to 24 is that Christians are to remain in the state in which they are called. If they are properly bound to a wife, they are to stay that way. If they are loosed from a wife—that is widowed—it would be best to stay unmarried. The point made in verse 27 is that God did not require those who were already married or unmarried to change their marital situation because of the present distress mentioned in verse 26.

Rest of the Verse Proves It!

In reference to verses 25 to 28, the passage includes, ". . . Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you." Continuing in verse 29, "But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none."

The man loosed from a wife by death or never married has not sinned if he marries. Likewise a virgin has not sinned if she marries (v. 28). Paul is addressing virgins, male and female (v. 25), "Now concerning virgins, I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, that it is good for a man so to be" (v. 26). The middle part of verse 28, "and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned," does not return to discussing those who have never been married (virgins) after speaking of divorced persons. The entirety of verses 25 to 40 is addressed to the subject of virgins; it has nothing to do with divorce. Paul continually includes both sexes in the discussion of marriage in I Corinthians 7 showing that God is no respecter of persons.

Some lexicons written by "scholars" who do not even know which day is the Christian Sabbath, say that *chorizo* means divorce, and that *luisis* means "loosed by divorce." But the Bible, which interprets itself, proves otherwise. If Paul meant divorce, then why did he not use the same word for divorce, *apoluo*, that Christ did?

Modern Translations

Several newer translations have caught the essence of verse 27 and the first part of 28 in I Corinthians 7 much more clearly in the modern English than the *King James Version*.

The *Modern Language Bible* renders verses 27 and 28 as follows: "Are you united to a wife? Do not seek release. Are you unattached to a woman [Greek word *gunee* means

either 'wife' or 'woman']? Do not seek a wife. But in case you marry, you do not sin; nor does the unmarried woman sin if she marries."

The *Revised Standard Version* states, "Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage. But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a girl marries she does not sin."

The *Living Bible*, including verse 26: "Here is the problem: We Christians are facing great dangers to our lives at present. In times like these I think it is best for a person to remain unmarried. Of course, if you already are married, don't separate because of this. But if you aren't, don't rush into it at this time. But if you men decide to go ahead anyway and get married now, it is all right; and if a girl gets married in times like these, it's no sin."

And finally, the Moffatt translation: "Are you tied to a wife? Never try to untie the knot. Are you free? Never try to get married. Of course if you are actually married, there is no sin in that; and if a maid marries there is no sin in that."

Four modern translations concur that Paul is speaking of unmarried men and women, not those who are divorced. Paul is not answering the question of whether one can divorce or not. The question which was asked and is answered is whether it would be best for unmarried men and women to seek to be married during the distressing period of history in which they found themselves.

What "Old Things" Are Dissolved at Baptism?

The statement has been made that at baptism, the marriage with the unconverted mate is dissolved, but may be reconstituted if the unbelieving partner so chooses. II Corinthians 5:17 is cited as "proof" of this, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

Now what are these "old things"? Surely it is not every previous business contract or obligation the newly converted person entered into when unconverted. The state says nothing concerning the marriage when one partner is baptized into the Church of God. So, according to God's laws and even man's laws, the marriage union is totally unaffected by the baptism of one partner. But Paul states the unconverted mate and the children are now sanctified, "set apart," and under God's special blessing and protection (I Cor. 7:14).

The "old things" that are buried in baptism are the old sinful ways of the new Christian. He is to keep them buried (Rom. 6) and not to go back and again be in bondage to the ways of the world (Gal. 4:3-9). Our sins are the old things which are supposed to stay buried, not a marriage still legal in man's sight and forever bound by God.

Can Man Void a Covenant?

Marriage is a covenant, not just a contract or vow (Mal. 2:14). But notice in this second chapter of Malachi how God reprimands husbands for leaving "the wife of your covenant" and marrying another (v. 11). God holds them accountable. In His sight they are still married to the "wife of their youth" (v. 15). God hates putting away—the divorcing of the wife of one's youth, the only true wife in His sight (v. 16). Whether one applies this to "physical Israel" or "spiritual Israel," it still shows above all else that God holds people to their marriage covenant. God witnesses against those who would "deal treacherously" with their wives and marry another. Even the harlot, "who leaves her own husband, forgetting her married troth before God" will be punished for doing so (Prov. 2:17, Moffatt).

The house of Israel treacherously departed (Jer. 3:20) from God, but He was still married to her (v. 14). Israel broke the terms of her covenant with God. But, according to God, the covenant was still in effect. He was still her husband.

Man cannot void a covenant, just as carnal Israelites were forbidden to disallow a vow (Num. 30, Deut. 23:21–23). But some, in direct opposition to these Biblical instructions, dare to make the statement that any covenant is null and void when one partner fails to perform the terms of the covenant.

Israel vowed that they would keep God's laws (Ex. 19), but they later rejected His ways. Nevertheless, God will yet "make them to dwell in tabernacles" (Hos. 12:9) and He will "require" their offerings, etc. (Ex. 20:40) in the coming kingdom, God will yet require them to fulfill their vows, for they are still valid in His sight.

God made King Zedekiah live up to a covenant he made with the pagan King of Babylon! In Ezekiel 17:11–21, the account is given of Zedekiah, King of Judah, making a covenant (Heb. *brith*, same word used in Mal. 2 for 'wife of your covenant') and an oath with the King of Babylon. The King of Babylon made Zedekiah king on the condition that Zedekiah would submit to Babylonian rule. But Zedekiah rebelled against him in sending ambassadors into Egypt to get horses and an army to back him against the Babylonians. God said through Ezekiel, "Shall he prosper? Shall he escape that doeth such things? or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered? As I live, saith the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die" (vv. 15–16). And further God said, "As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head . . . and will plead with him there [in Babylon] for his trespass that he has trespassed against me" (vv. 19–20).

Some people today, like Zedekiah, feel that God is not a part of their covenants and oaths. But God said in Ezekiel 17:19 that the covenant between two unconverted

people—King Zedekiah and the King of Babylon—was "my covenant" and "my oath." God was a part of their covenant, regardless of whether they acknowledged Him or even recognized His existence. God held Zedekiah responsible for living up to the covenant. When Zedekiah broke the covenant, he had also trespassed against God (v. 20). For God required him to keep his word.

Do Analogies Prove Anything?

I Corinthians 7, verse 39 is a summary verse for the entire chapter, for it says "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth." It does not say "the converted wife." In ignoring the universality of verse 39, some attempt to explain Romans 7:2 as "only an analogy."

The statement has been made that "analogies don't prove anything." If this is true, then the public utterances of Christ also prove nothing. For Matthew 13:34 states, "All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them." Analogies do prove much, for even God's way as defined by Christ is set forth in parables, stories, and analogies (Matt. 13).

Paul specifically states in Romans 7:2 that the only way out of a bound marriage is by death. In verse 3 he reiterated what Christ had said, that if a married individual "marries" another, he is committing adultery. Likewise, as stated in verse 4, the only way we can become married to Christ is by becoming "dead to the law" through baptism (Rom. 6:4). The "law" that we must become dead to is not the Torah (Matt. 4:4 makes this interpretation impossible), nor the Roman civil law (Rom. 13:1 limited by Acts 5:29 negates this), but "the law of sin" which dwells in our members (Rom. 7:23).

There have been no exceptions, and there never will be. If your "old self" does not die, you will never be married to Christ. Jesus is not a fornicator or an adulterer! He will not marry those who are still wedded to their old sinful ways. Right now, converted Christians are espoused—but not yet bound in marriage—to Christ. When the "marriage of the Lamb" occurs, the "wife" will have made herself ready (Rev. 19:7). Christ will only marry those who have made themselves ready by overcoming the self—those who have spiritually crucified themselves. Christ will cause these individuals to shed their corruptible nature which they have overcome and give them immortality (I Cor. 15:51–54).

Romans 7:2, I Corinthians 7:39, and all of God's laws, stand immutable, unchangeable, inviolate. Those who teach others to break them, placing the "legal decisions of man" above the laws of God, have a fearful fate awaiting them.

"Only in the Lord"

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote, "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord" (I Cor. 7:39). What does "only in the Lord" mean?

"In the Lord" means those that are in the body of Christ—converted and led by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:9–10). A Christian whose mate has died is free to remarry anyone that is "in the Lord" (Phil. 4:1), any eligible person that is "of the same mind in the Lord" (Phil. 4:2)—only another Christian.

Several modern translations make I Corinthians 7:39 easier to understand:

- 1) *The Amplified New Testament*: "A wife is bound to her husband by the law as long as he lives. If the husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she will, only [provided that he too is] in the Lord."
- 2) *The Living Bible*: "The wife is part of her husband as long as he lives; if her husband dies, then she may marry again, but only if she marries a Christian."
- 3) *The Bible, a New Translation*, by Moffat: "A woman is bound to her husband during his lifetime; but if he dies she is free to marry anyone she pleases—only, it must be a Christian."

What does this tell us regarding divorce and remarriage? It tells us, in effect, that God does bind pre-conversion marriages! They were bound when both were unconverted, and since then, one or both have become Christians. Yet, only when one dies is the other free to remarry. The Christian widow or widower is free to remarry only another Christian. God does bind pre-conversion marriages; but when a converted person is contemplating marriage, he or she should not marry an unconverted person.

Two people of the same mind is a crucial necessity for marital happiness and proper spiritual development. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). That is why we are instructed to marry "only in the Lord."

What Kind of God Do You Worship?

What kind of God do you worship? As an individual, are you yourself responsible to that God? The answers to these key questions provide irrefutable proof as to how God views marriage and divorce.

The Eternal God in heaven has supreme power, knowledge, wisdom, righteousness, perfection, love, justice, mercy, and truth. His character is unchanging. He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, the Lawgiver, the Source of life, Sustainer, and Designer. He brings all prophecies to pass, answers prayers, and His presence is everywhere. There is nothing equal to the personality called God!

And this great God is not a Trinity but a Family of persons. At this time, the God Family is composed of God the Father and Jesus Christ, the Word, who became His begotten Son and was "born again" by a resurrection. Many begotten sons, living and dead, await their resurrection or change from mortal life to immortality at the return of Jesus Christ. Upon Christ's return, He will marry His bride, the church, who will then be born sons forever in the Family of God.

There will be no end to the glory and increase of that Family and Kingdom! And there will be no divorce in the divine marriage between Christ and the church! This is the only God worthy of worship!

The responsibility of all Christians is to prepare to meet their God (Amos 4:12), to prepare to be God (I John 3:1–3). If we do not prepare for that awesome purpose now, we are destined to receive God's promised cursings and ultimate eternal punishment.

A primary way to prepare for the Kingdom and Family of God is to prove oneself faithful and loyal in human marriage. This is God's way! Yet some are now saying that divorce and remarriage is permissible, which means that they actually think such actions can prepare Christians to be faithful to Christ. They point to "happy" second or third "marriages" saying that God can bless such unions. Have we forgotten that "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil?" (Eccl. 8:11)

What kind of God do you worship? Is He faithful? (I Cor. 10:13) What about you? Are you faithful to your true mate until death, even if your mate is not faithful to you?

Is God merciful? (Psa. 136) Again, are you merciful? Would you show mercy to your true mate—forgiving even harlotry as God did—and if she repents be ready to take her back? Or would you be unmerciful and unfaithful by "marrying" someone else? How you act in the matter of divorce and remarriage determines and depicts what kind of God you believe you worship. You need to ask yourself if your actions reflect the true God or a false one!

It is your responsibility to know, prove, and act upon the truth. You have seen the facts from God's Word as to how the living God in heaven views marriage. How will you act upon this knowledge?

God says to each individual, "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deut. 30:19).