

Divorce and Remarriage

What Should Christians Know?

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Reprinted 2000

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Divorce can be described only as the American tragedy. The United States leads the world in divorces; the national average is one out of two marriages. In some localities the rate is even greater. The moral, economic, and emotional costs can hardly be calculated. And, along with the great civilizations in the past whose dominance in world leadership declined as the divorce rate went up, the United States, the bulwark of the West, is rapidly following suit. The present generation can be likened to that of the time of Christ when divorce was so rampant. He labeled it "an evil and adulterous generation" (Matt. 12:39).

In any group—club, society, lodge, association, fraternity, or church—will be found divorced singles and remarried couples. This is an inescapable fact of life which cannot be altered. It is a major concern for the conscientious Christian, not only because of the effect divorce has on society in general, but because of its potential harm to the church. Some churches, in order to protect themselves against this possible moral intrusion, have set up administrative apparatuses designed to prevent the divorced from tainting the Body of Christ—ministerial machinery which calls for a committee to evaluate all prospective members for the purpose of determining who is and who is not legally married in the sight of God. Those found to be "living in adultery" are required to separate in order to enter into church fellowship. Of a certainty these committee decisions are based on "doctrinal" considerations—what constitutes a marriage in God's sight and what conditions must be taken into account in order to determine one's marital state.

Old-time members of the Church of God are well aware of what was both spoken and published regarding the sanctity of marriage. They knew from the Old Testament that divorce was permitted and that a betrothal was considered a marriage even though it had not been consummated. A betrothal was a completed contract legalized by a payment called the *mohar*. Once this payment was made the girl was legally married, which explains why one who violated a betrothed woman was regarded as an adulterer. Marriage, then, from the Old Testament teaching was a type of the covenant relationship God made with ancient Israel, clearly demonstrated to be a marriage (Ezek. 16:8; Jer. 3:14). Church members knew that the New Testament teaching expands and amplifies that of the Old Testament. Christ made it clear that marriages were bound for life and that the only justification for divorce was "fornication" (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). These are the Bible teachings the laymembers of Church of God were told, but there was a vast amount of information having to do with the administration—deciding who was married and who was not—they were not told. They were not informed of these technicalities for obvious reasons. Since it was the "duty" of the ministry to determine who was married and who was not, these matters were not the laymembers' concern, unless they were members or prospective members directly involved in a divorce and remarriage situation. This leads to a number of questions. If divorce and remarriage cases were determined by the ministry in the past, why should not this be done today? If not, why not? Does the failure of the ministry to decide divorce and remarriage

cases constitute a dereliction of duty? And what is necessary for the laymember to know regarding the subject of divorce and remarriage?

One thing can be said about the past church administration of the divorce and remarriage doctrine. It gave the membership a sense of security, a feeling that somehow the church was free from the corrupting influence of "adulterers." But there was one thing wrong. The decisions reached regarding divorced persons were entirely predicated upon the evaluations of fallible men, and when the doctrinal changes occurred in the early 1970s all confidence in the ministry and in the truth regarding divorce and remarriage ended. In fact, this loss of confidence in the doctrine of divorce and remarriage, which was generated by a faulty administrative system, was a *fait accompli* long before any doctrinal changes took place. It occurred because of an utter failure on behalf of the leadership to recognize that the problems involved in the entire divorce and remarriage matter were administrative, not doctrinal.

The New Testament makes plain that the church is not the continuation of the Old Testament monarchy—the letter-of-the-law administration. Obedience under the terms of the New Covenant is to be from the heart, not predicated upon a fear of men in authority who have the "power of life and death" at their disposal. The power of life and death is in the hands of God alone. It is God and His Truth men should come to fear and respect. It is the duty of the ministry to shepherd the flock, to preach the truth, to set the example. It is the duty of the membership to live up to what is taught, according to the best of their ability. Church government is for the purpose of carrying out God's intent for the body as a whole, for preventing the spread of heresy, to maintain peace and brotherhood. Christ did not place government in His Church for the purpose of exercising authority over the personal lives of the membership. There are many matters of conscience that must be left to each individual to decide. Paul said, "Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself before God" (Rom. 14:22). Of the ministry he stated, "Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand" (2 Cor. 1:24). It is not the responsibility of the ministry to involve itself in the myriad decisions required in each laymember's life. It is the duty of the ministry to preach the truth, but it is the duty of each laymember to decide how to live that truth based on his or her own level of faith.

How personal and subjective is one's involvement in a divorce and remarriage situation? Is it really possible for any outside party, apart from God, to be able to truly ascertain what was initially in each individual's heart and mind at such a crucial period in life—a time and event that often goes back years or decades? It has been correctly stated that there is no example in the entire New Testament of any divorce and remarriage decision. Wisely so. This absence can mean one thing only. The apostles and ministers of the New Testament church did not involve themselves in divorce and remarriage decisions. This was the responsibility of the parties involved, just as were all other spiritual matters. A church ministry choosing to assume this responsibility is asking for many problems and much

sorrow. Men simply do not have the capability and discernment of God to read hearts and minds. The many technicalities involving divorce and remarriage decisions were held in confidence by the ministry of the Church of God. From their viewpoint, when the doctrine itself was discarded there was no need to make this information known. Since the New Testament makes it obvious that the responsibility to decide the disposition of divorce and remarriage cases is left up to the parties involved, it is imperative that these technicalities be made known. This is the purpose of this article.

Divorce in Christ's Time

That divorce was common in Christ's time can be seen by His remarks regarding divorce and remarriage. He stated, "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" (Matt. 5:31–32).

Christ's statement challenged the commonly accepted Jewish practice. Immediately the Jews responded to this challenge. When Christ said, "It hath been said . . ." He was referring to a precedent. This precedent is found in Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-four. The Jews said to Him, ". . . Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?" (Matt. 19:7). Notice in Matthew, chapter nineteen, the Jews had asked Him, ". . . Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" (v. 3). This was a loaded question, intended to drag Jesus into the divorce and remarriage controversy between the rival schools of Hillel and Shammai. In Deuteronomy it states, "When a man hath taken a wife and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness [matter of nakedness] in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house (Deut. 24:1). The School of Shammai interpreted this uncleanness or indecency to mean unchastity, a breach of conjugal fidelity, or adultery. The School of Hillel emphasized the clause, "that she find no favour in his eyes," and interpreted the verse to mean one could divorce his wife for any cause, no matter how trivial. Jesus refused to be dragged into the controversy but instead went back to the very beginning of marriage. He said, ". . . 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" (Matt. 19:4–6). Jesus knew the first question was loaded and quickly saw that their following question was inaccurate. "They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?" (v. 7). Moses did not command a writing of divorcement. Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-four, is the Word of God, not the permission of Moses (Ex. 21; Deut. 6:1; 11:1; 12:1). What God permitted, by adding additional restraints, was a long prevailing practice too deeply entrenched to be

set aside. Divorce was taken for granted (Lev. 21:7). God's intention was to prevent even greater evils by a people who, by reason of contact with Egypt's practice of trial marriages and divorce, would stop at nothing to rid themselves of unwanted wives. This law required a written document which involved legal formalities. It was to be given into the repudiated wife's hand either privately or publicly in the presence of two witnesses. And if the divorced wife remarried, under no circumstances could she ever remarry her first husband. What Moses permitted was above and beyond this Law of God in Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-four. He "suffered" them to put away their wives for every cause, and it was this practice which continued to the time of Christ. This was why Jesus said, "Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8).

So, what we see is that in Christ's day divorce was practiced for every cause. The Jews reacted to Christ's statements because they were following the Schools of Hillel and Shammai. The result of these teachings was rampant divorce. Christ's response was to go back to the foundational principle—marriage is the making of one out of two and is bound for life; divorce is the cutting asunder of this union. In order to justify their practice of divorce the Jews appealed to Moses, thus making Moses appear to be in opposition to Christ. What was given in Deuteronomy was not the permission Moses granted. The Jews failed to recognize that what Moses permitted was not the original Biblical principle ordained at Creation. What Moses permitted was above and beyond what is found in the statutes and judgments of God. Therefore, any appeal to Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-four, was not an appeal to Moses since these were the instructions of God.

In Matthew, chapter nineteen, Christ's teaching on divorce and remarriage is clear. After stating that Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of their hearts, Jesus said, "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" (v. 9). What Jesus was correcting by this statement was the wrong interpretation given Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-four, by the Schools of Hillel and Shammai. Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-four, was not the permission Moses granted. Since Christ was the God of the Old Testament (1 Cor. 10:4), Deuteronomy is Christ's instruction. He, as the Word or Spokesman, came to magnify the Law and make it honorable (Isa. 42:21). Christ referred to, as recorded in Matthew, both chapters five and nineteen, a writing of divorcement. The only text in the law that refers to a writing of divorcement is Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-four. It is this text that is pivotal in understanding the Bible teaching on divorce and remarriage.

In Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-four, we read: "When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and

be another man's wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled" (vv. 1–4). This is the only text which contains an exception clause and includes a writing of divorcement. This exception clause is ". . . that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness [matter of nakedness] in her. . . ." The Hebrew for "uncleanness" or "matter of nakedness" is *ervah*. Is Jesus Christ, the God of the Old Testament, the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8), now contradicting in Matthew, chapter five and nineteen, what He stated in Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-four? Or, is He merely repeating the same exception rule which He gave during the time of Moses? An examination of the Hebrew and Greek words involved in these texts will decisively answer these questions.

Divorce Regulations

Before examining the Hebrew and Greek words regarding "matter of nakedness" and "fornication," it would be beneficial to look at some of the divorce regulations found in the Old Testament. As noted earlier, divorce as an institution was taken for granted. In Leviticus priests were forbidden to marry divorced women (Lev. 21:7). In Exodus we find a regulation which forbids a master from betrothing a maid either to himself or to his son and then later selling her to a foreign nation (Ex. 21:7–8). She shall go out free and unmarried under such circumstances because he had dealt deceitfully with her. Since a betrothal was regarded as a marriage she is granted wife status at that time, but if her master is deceitful she is free to leave. There is no marriage tie. This text demonstrates that deceit is a basis for divorce because this deceit existed before the betrothal. Deceit in the marriage consideration means to be treacherous. This is illustrated by a wife who departs from her husband as Israel did God (Jer. 3:20), and by adulterous men who are regarded as treacherous (Jer. 9:2). Deceit involves a betrayal and includes the principle of lying and taking advantage of the good intentions of others. The clause ". . . seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her" clearly depicts a fraudulent intent.

In Exodus and Deuteronomy we find that fornication can be a cause for marriage (Ex. 22:16–17; Deut. 22:28–29). Once the fornication is made known only the "utter refusal" of the prospective son-in-law by the damsel's father can prevent the marriage. This text alone should make it clear that the word "fornication," used in the exception clause made by Christ in the New Testament, cannot only be used as a justification for divorce under certain circumstances, but equally as a cause for marriage. In the one instance, both the man and woman knowingly cohabit and are required to marry. In the other, the innocent third party who was deceived into believing his or her mate was a virgin can utilize fornication as a reason for divorce. The most apparent example of this is seen by Joseph's intention to put away Mary, the mother of Jesus. From the human standpoint she could have only become

pregnant as a result of fornication with someone other than Joseph, since they had not yet consummated the marriage (Matt. 1:18–19). Note, here she is called his wife (v. 20) because a betrothal (called espousal in the *King James Version*) was regarded as a marriage.

What *Ervah* Means

Since the only exception clause in the Old Testament uses "uncleanness" or "matter of nakedness," it is imperative that we examine all the usages of the word *ervah*. We cannot pick and choose those applications which fit our preconceived ideas while rejecting those which do not. The words "matter of nakedness" aptly describe what occurs in marriage. What is prohibited before marriage is sanctified in marriage. Physical nakedness brings to light the individual's true philosophy and reveals how one thinks. It is in this physical relationship alone that what was previously unknown can be made known.

Let us keep in mind that Christ did not come to destroy the law. He said that until heaven and earth passed away not one jot or tittle of the law would vanish (Matt. 5:17–18). He came to magnify the law and to make it honorable (Isa. 42:21). There is the tendency to think that what was written in Deuteronomy is the teaching of Moses, amplified by the Old Testament administration, but corrected by Christ. Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-four, is the teaching of Christ. Christ did not come to contradict Himself or to destroy the principles He instituted in Israel. The only thing ever abolished, according to Bible teaching, is the sacrificial system. Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-four, and Matthew, chapters five and nineteen, are all a part of the Law of God. As we shall see the Greek word *porneia* used in Matthew, chapters five and nineteen, is the New Testament equivalent of the words used in the Old Testament.

The word *ervah* has five basic definitions. It applies to homosexuality (Gen. 9:22–23). It refers to incestuous relationships (Lev. 18:6–18; 20:11, 17, 19–21). It relates to women during their menses (Lev. 18:19). It is associated with idolatry, including the nakedness and sexual activity that accompanies it (Ex. 20:26). And, it refers to filthy personal habits (Deut. 23:14). The application of these examples in the exception clause of Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-four, therefore, is quite broad and can include a number of circumstances and situations. Inasmuch as the Greek word *porneia* is used in the New Testament in Christ's reference to Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-four, its broad usage also becomes apparent. All of these usages of *ervah* demonstrate the refusal to honor the purposes of marriage in one way or another and place unlawful sexual and mental activity, as well as habits, above the Law of God. One who engages in unlawful sexual activity, such as homosexuality, incest, fornication in idolatrous rites, or relations during the menses reflects a philosophy that is bound to have a detrimental effect on any marriage. They reflect the refusal to be subject to the laws God placed here for the good of man, as well as to exemplify the relationship which exists between God and man. Filthiness of body and mind

often leads to the unlawful activities just mentioned. Major diseases which affect the world today, as well as in the past, have been the result of filthiness of body and mind.

What Is *Porneia*?

A look at *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, second edition, will quickly dispel the notion that the meaning of "fornication" is limited to sex relations between unmarried persons. It lists:

(1) voluntary sexual intercourse between an unmarried woman and a man, especially an unmarried man: it is generally forbidden by law. . . . Fornication (is) the act of incontinency in single persons; if either party be married, it is adultery.—Wharton

(2) in the Bible, (a) any unlawful sexual intercourse, including adultery; (b) a forsaking of the true God and worshiping of idols.

Most people who believe "fornication" is limited in meaning to sexual intercourse between unmarried persons do not have access to an unabridged dictionary. But since we are concerned with the Bible, it is the Bible definition, as demonstrated by usage, that is our objective. In the New Testament (*King James Version*) fornication is the English translation for the Greek word *porneia* and its cognates. In the Old Testament fornication is a translation from the Hebrew *zanah* and its cognates. In the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, *porneia* is the word translated from the Greek *zanah*. This means that *porneia* and *zanah* are equivalents. How, then, is *porneia* used in the New Testament?

One of its primary meanings is illicit sexual activity in general. This is seen in Romans 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:13, 18; 7:2; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Ephesians 5:3. Romans 1:29 cannot limit the meaning of *porneia* to premarital sex, otherwise this text does not condemn adultery or homosexuality. In 1 Corinthians 5:1 we see unlawful intercourse between a man and his stepmother. According to the definition given above in *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* this should be called adultery, yet the Bible uses the word *porneia*. First Corinthians 6:13 and 18 do not limit the meaning to premarital sex, otherwise again adultery and homosexuality are not condemned. First Corinthians 7:2 excludes the possibility of adultery if premarital sex only is intended. Second Corinthians 12:21 and Ephesians 5:3, like the texts above, fail to condemn adultery and homosexuality if premarital sex only is intended. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3 it would again exclude adultery as a sin.

Porneia refers to the worship of idols—religious perversion. In Revelation, for example, this idolatry is associated with fornication (Rev. 2:14, 20–21). In the Old Testament period literal fornication (Biblical) was very much a part of pagan worship.

Porneia is used in reference to those who are corrupt in moral conduct. See Revelation 9:21; 14:8; 17:2, 4; 19:2. While this can and often does include literal fornication, the meaning does not exclude a general lifestyle and way of life that is destructive and demeaning to all parties involved.

Perhaps *porneia* can best be defined as a way of life—a perverse lifestyle—that involves elaborate sexual activity of mind, heart, and body, as well as heathenistic philosophical tendencies. By the usage of *porneia* in the New Testament, it is easy to see its meaning is broad and not at all limited to premarital sex. Next it will be imperative to examine the Hebrew word *zanah*, the Old Testament equivalent of *porneia*.

What *Zanah* Means

Zanah is translated "fornication" in the Old Testament. Along with its cognates it is also translated "harlot," "whore," "whoring," "whoredom," "whoredoms," and "whorish." The basic idea of the word is "to commit illicit intercourse," and is used in both the literal and figurative sense (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*). The Septuagint—the Greek version of the Old Testament—translates *zanah* as *porneia*. This is significant because it is believed many of the quotes Christ used from the Old Testament were taken from the Septuagint. This means that Christ equated *porneia* with *zanah*, making the two words identical. Old Testament usage of *zanah* is quite broad. It refers to physical prostitution or fornication while in an unmarried state (Gen. 38:24; Lev. 19:29; 21:9; Deut. 22:21). It means physical fornication or whoredom *within* a married state (Ezek. 16:8, 15; 23:5; Judg. 19:2). Figuratively, it refers to a lifestyle of "playing the harlot" after married, though estranged (Jer. 3:1). Figuratively, it refers to illicit international relations between nations, and between God's people and foreign nations (Isa. 23:17, Hos. 2:2). *Zanah* can involve idolatry and an attraction to the occult (Lev. 20:5–6). *Zanah* involves a way of thinking, a fundamental philosophy and way of life—a lifestyle (Ezek. 6:9; Hos. 1:2; 4:12; 5:4). What becomes obvious by these Bible examples is that we find the same fundamental usage of *porneia* in the New Testament as *zanah* in the Old Testament. It should be clear from this why Christ equated the two. Since *ervah* has the same fundamental meaning as *zanah* and *porneia* (for example, homosexuality, incest, and idolatrous rites can certainly involve fornication), *ervah*, *zanah*, and *porneia* are synonyms. They all mean the same thing—an immoral, perverse way of life which involves elaborate sexual activity of mind, heart, and body, as well as heathenistic philosophical tendencies.

"Hath Found Some Uncleanness"

Christ's exception statement in Matthew 19:9 was a corroboration of what He said in Deuteronomy 24:1. In the New Testament period the Greek word *porneia* was used in the

exception clause. In the Old Testament period the Hebrew word *ervah* was used. Both include premarital sex, as one aspect.

In Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-four, we read ". . . that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath *found* some uncleanness in her. . ." (v. 1). He then may give her a bill of divorcement. "Found" is from the Hebrew *matsa*, meaning "to come to," i.e., "to attain to," "to arrive at," "to obtain," "to acquire," "to receive" (*Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, by Gesenius). In the context of Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-four, it means "to discover."

Note the time element, "When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass. . . ." What is the time element here? They are already married and at some point in time *after* marriage he discovers some uncleanness in her. In no place does the Bible limit this time period. What is important is not *when* the discovery occurs but what the husband does *at the time* the discovery is made. "It come to pass" denotes the passage of time without a limitation. See, for example, in Genesis and First Kings, where the very same Hebrew word is used (Gen. 4:14; 1 Kings 20:6). The interested reader may check any of the reference works available to see the usage of "found" as used in this verse. It means "to discover" or "to come to the knowledge of something that was not previously known." *Ervah* in Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-four, refers to that which under normal circumstances could not reasonably be known, but by means of some intimate circumstances is made known.

When Can the Exception Clause Be Used?

The key here is the word "found." Matthew 19:9 can be understood only in the light of Deuteronomy 24. Deuteronomy 24 means that something hitherto unknown is discovered. This uncleanness cannot refer to the obvious. It is something that has been deliberately hidden and involves the continuing attempt to keep it hidden. It involves deceit and fraud. Exodus 21:8 tells us that God does not hold the innocent party responsible for a marriage when deceit is involved. Fraud or deceit is not only an important factor before marriage (Ex. 21:8) but during a marriage as well (Mal. 2:14–15; Jer. 3:20). The Hebrew word for deceit is often translated "to betray" or "to be treacherous." The matter of nakedness or uncleanness can refer to a hidden lifestyle which occurs before marriage but which continues after marriage. This is why both *zanah* and *porneia* are used to refer to sexual conduct both before and after marriage. It is when a matter of nakedness or uncleanness begins as a lifestyle before marriage that Deuteronomy 24:1 and Matthew 19:9 apply. This was the law Joseph was contemplating exercising when he intended to put away Mary, the mother of Jesus. The correlation of *ervah* to fornication (*porneia*) is clearly seen here. Mary was pregnant prior to the time they came together. Joseph could assume only one thing: He had been defrauded. He thought Mary was pregnant as a result of fornication. As the reader is aware, fornication or premarital sex is one of the meanings of *porneia*.

In the figurative sense, this tells us why Christ, the God of the Old Testament, did not remarry after He put Israel away. He knew what Israel's conduct was before He married her (Ezek. 23:1–3). He witnessed the promiscuity with her neighbors and the idolatry with their gods while He was married to her (Jer. 3:1–3). He knew her incapacity to live up to His holy and righteous law (Deut. 5:29). Christ, by virtue of His own law, had no justification for a remarriage. He had to die first. Therefore, any "matter of nakedness" which was either known or was not practiced as a lifestyle before a marriage cannot be a valid justification for use of the exception clause.

The matter of nakedness in the exception clause implies something discovered in order for it to be known. The tie of *ervah* to *zanah* and *porneia* demonstrates a fundamental attitude of dishonesty by the guilty party. In connection with *zanah* such a flippant attitude of irresponsibility is called the spirit of whoredom (Hos. 4:12; 5:4). Any honest person who would never knowingly accept such a person in marriage but is deceived into thinking otherwise can utilize the exception clause of Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-four, and Matthew, chapter nineteen. What is important, though, is the timing. What could have reasonably been known in advance is not a justification. And once the matter of nakedness is discovered the action must soon be taken. One cannot wait until the marriage goes sour and then decide to use the exception clause. It must be utilized very soon after the discovery.

What Christians Should Know

A marriage is a covenant which contains vows. "I do" or "I will" constitutes a covenant which has stipulations and agreements. We bind ourselves by commitments. Vows should not be broken (Num. 30:2; Psa. 15:1, 4). But what if one party is an honest, sincere person of principles while the other is deceitful? Matthew 19:6 says, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." God binds a marriage when there is no deliberate deception on the part of either party. When deceit occurs the exception clause applies. Such a marriage is not bound by God, though it may be thought to be a marriage in the sight of man.

The great sin in the whole marriage scene today is that man needs a change of heart. God has overlooked man's hardheartedness in the past, but now commands all men to repent—to have a change of heart (Acts 17:30–31). The majority of people today would rather remain hard in their attitudes toward others, including their mates, than to resolve their problems. God gave the exception rule to ancient Israel, but by perverting its intent they divorced their wives for "every cause." Today, Christ allows the same exception clause He gave to Israel. This exception rule does not allow divorce for every cause. It is allowed for *porneia*, the composite of *ervah* and *zanah*. This exception clause must be applied very soon following the discovery of *porneia*. It may take some time to resolve all the problems involved in "putting away" a mate, but the mental decision must be immediate and final.

Equally as bad as the hardness of heart seen in marriages today is the hardness of heart expressed by those who judge the divorce and remarriage situations of others. This judging is often done on the basis of their own convictions and level of faith, as they attempt to force others to act in the way they evaluate the situation (most often without all the facts), demanding the others to live according to their legalistic interpretation. This hardness of heart surely is as bad as the other. It is the individual involved in divorce and remarriage situation who alone has the most facts and is therefore the most qualified to judge. Those who are sincerely seeking to do the will of God will take no chances. This is what they should do. All things will eventually be brought to light and those who are dishonest before God will surely pay for their dishonesty. Human weaknesses and faults have nothing to do with *porneia* unless they involve a hidden lifestyle. Judgment requires specific facts and the ability to read the intent of the heart and mind. One who is not involved in a divorce and remarriage situation does not have access to those facts. But this is the case in the application of all the laws of God, not just the Seventh Commandment. Judgment belongs to Christ alone (Acts 17:31). It is our responsibility as Christians to neither approve nor disapprove of divorce and remarriage situations. All that is hidden will eventually be brought to light (Matt. 10:26). It is our duty to live up to what we know is right in our own personal lives and not to judge others. It is our duty to work on ourselves to build the necessary character for the Kingdom of God and to wait for that time of revelation. We must remember God looks on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). It is God alone who can read the hearts and minds of all men, and in the day of judgment will condemn or save accordingly. The wheat and tares must grow together until the Judgment. To attempt to pluck out the tares prematurely will damage too much wheat (Matt. 13:29). Jesus said, "Leave them alone." God will judge all adulterers, but this includes spiritual adultery as well. So, we are admonished to judge nothing before the time (1 Cor. 4:5).

What we have seen is this: All laws are of God, including Deuteronomy 24:1–4. Since Israel of old had no access to the Holy Spirit and could not overcome their hardness of heart, Moses permitted them to put away their wives "for every cause." They were permitted to do those things which we are not permitted to do today. The majority of the Israelites of old could neither overcome their emotional and mental difficulties nor the temptation to demand the letter-of-the-law application and enforcement of all the laws of God.

Ervah, which is the basis of the reference to *porneia*, is not limited to simple premarital sex. As has been demonstrated, it refers to a number of things. *Ervah* implies an immoral, perverse, deceptive way of life and is the direct basis for Christ's statement regarding *porneia*—the only possible premise for Christ's exception clause. The English word "fornication" is not the proper translation for *porneia*. Its meaning is too limited and while it is included in *porneia*, it is not limited to it. Fornication can be both a cause for marriage and for divorce—depending upon conditions.

The exception clause can be applied only if one has made known that he or she is a person of principle, one who holds scruples and is sincere, and then finds that the partner has hidden significant factors. One cannot be totally unconcerned or indifferent about the background and proclivities of the other and then attempt to use some flaw as an excuse to find a way out of the marriage when it goes sour. If a marriage is entered in to knowing the weaknesses and background of the other party, these known factors cannot later be used to justify use of the exception clause. Now, some may fear others will abuse the exception clause. They did in Christ's day. They did in Moses' day. Some probably will do the same today. But, what did Christ and Moses do? Moses permitted them to put away their wives for "every cause." Christ condemned this practice but neither He nor the apostles attempted to regulate it. This will occur only at the time of the Judgment. It is in the Judgment when all will be brought to light by Christ, the righteous Judge. In the meantime let us be willing to admit what we do not know. Let us not try to take the place of the Almighty. Let us be equally aware of all of the Ten Commandments, not just the Seventh. Deceit and fraud are involved in *porneia*. Deceit means the same as treachery, as we have seen, defined as the spirit of whoredom. We must be careful not to limit the scope of *porneia* only to physical premarital sex on the basis of the narrow definition given by most abridged dictionaries.

We should recognize the limited scope of time involved in exercising the exception clause, and that its meaning has broad application. The exception clause does exist, but so does adultery, which often is the direct result of divorce and remarriage. There is perhaps one hundred times more said in the Bible about judging, gossiping, whispering, heresy, and strife than there is about the marital status of couples in the New Testament church. The Church of God does not approve of adultery. But neither does it approve of Sabbath-breaking or the breaking of any of the laws of God. We must remember unknowns will remain as unknowns until the Judgment. We believe in the sanctity of marriage, but also recognize we are not greater than the Almighty. If Jesus Christ and the apostles did not involve themselves in judging divorce and remarriage situations, should we?

While the word "fornication" was used to explain the exception clause in past Church of God literature, its understanding within the ministry, as it was applied in rendering divorce and remarriage decisions, was far broader than the limited dictionary definition. Most, if not all, of the technical information given in this article was employed in rendering these divorce and remarriage decisions—from the 1940s on. What has been written in this article completely corroborates what was known and understood for years within the ministry. The first booklet on the subject of divorce and remarriage, written in the Church of God, was published in 1953. It did not explain the technicalities given in this article. There was no need to do so because it was the ministry, not the laymembers, which was involved in rendering divorce and remarriage decisions. It was a faulty administrative system which rendered divorce and remarriage decisions that was partly responsible, at least, for the deterioration and loss of confidence in the church and in the doctrine. Let us recognize where the fault lies. Let us hold fast to the original doctrine. But, let us also recognize we

are not the Almighty. It is God alone who is the righteous Judge, and He will judge all divorce and remarriage situations when He is ready. In the meantime it is the responsibility of those involved to render their own decisions, but know for certain that they must not take this matter lightly. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:32).