

# A New Look at Marriage and DIVORCE

What does the Bible -- the Word of God -- teach about divorce and remarriage? Is marriage binding for LIFE? Are there no grounds at all for dissolving or ending a marriage, once it has been "bound" by God? What about "adultery"? What about "desertion"? Just what is "fornication," as the word is used in the Bible? Are marriages of the UNCONVERTED bound by God -- or only marriages within the church of God, between Christians? What is the unshakable, pure truth about this extremely important matter, which directly affects the majority of marriages and families, today?

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In 1972-73 the Worldwide Church of God was riven with dissension and disagreement over the issue of divorce and remarriage. For almost forty years the Church, led by Herbert Armstrong, had taught a very conservative doctrine regarding marriage which, on the surface, seemed to hold the marital union in the highest, most sanctified regard, and which deplored any and all divorce and condemned it as an abomination in the sight of God -- regardless of the cause, circumstances, when it was done, whether there were children involved or not. Technically, the church taught that NO marriage could be "unbound" once it had been "bound" by God -- not even adultery, unfaithfulness, or sexual perversion or physical abuse and beatings could sever a marital union, according to the church. The ONLY grounds the church recognized was "fornication" -- which it interpreted as sexual intercourse before marriage -- and "fornication" could be grounds for divorce ONLY if knowledge about it had been withheld from one party to the marriage by the other party. And when it was discovered to have been committed, the innocent party could have the marriage dissolved because "fraud" had been perpetrated.

According to the church, all other grounds for dissolving the marriage were false, nonexistent, and not recognized by Almighty God!

The practical effect of this teaching was that no body who had been married and divorced, or who was married to a person who had been married and divorced, could become a member of the church, unless first of all a thorough investigation were made of their previous marriage or marriages, to determine if they had been "fraudulent" in nature -- that is, if "fornication" (sexual intercourse prior to marriage which had been withheld from the other party) had been committed. Those were the ONLY grounds permitted by the church for "divorce." Otherwise, all marriages were considered as binding FOR LIFE, regardless of the circumstances,

and any subsequent marriages were viewed as ADULTEROUS LIAISONS, and "adultery" in the sight of God.

This teaching caused great anguish and suffering in people who believed the church was teaching the truth and was the church of God -- but who were living in such a union that the church would have considered "adultery." Those involved in such "second marriages" were compelled to separate, and divorce, if they wished to enter the church. The innocent victims of this approach toward the doctrine of marriage were the loving couples, who had finally found a mate they could live with happily, and most of all, the children of those unions. When the parents were forced to "split up" the children lost a father or mother in the home -- usually the father. Great strife and grievous wrongs were committed in breaking up families, which God Himself loves and says are sacrosanct, by a church which was very authoritarian, autocratic, and extremely rigid in its views of marriage. The fact of the matter is, although they never admitted it publicly, or seemed to recognize it, but the teaching of the church was EXACTLY AND PRECISELY THE TEACHING OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH!

*That fact alone should have caused them to re-examine their teaching with great care and caution! COULD ANYTHING RIGHT, ON SO BASIC A MATTER, COME OUT OF "SPIRITUAL BABYLON"?*

Then, in 1974, great changes began occurring in the church. Many ministers came to the conclusion, based on the very negative "fruits" they saw which resulted from the traditional church teaching on divorce, that something was direly wrong with the doctrine, as it was stated and practiced. More and more came to the conclusion that Herbert Armstrong had made a mistake, in his original teaching. Partly over this doctrine, scores of ministers broke away and left the church, forming their own "Associated Churches of God" organization. The conflict became so rife, that top evangelists in the church were deeply involved in the issue. Albert J. Portune, for example, left the church over this and other issues, as did David Antion. Antion, however, later rejoined the church. Ted Armstrong was in total disagreement with his father's teaching. The issue was so explosive that it threatened the very continued existence of the church!

Ministers lined up on both sides of the issue. Spiritual "war" was the result! The two groups engaged in "name-calling," with those advocating change branded as "liberals" by the others who themselves were called "conservatives" or even "reactionaries." Positions were staked out. Scriptures were marshaled to support both points of view. The disagreements were so divisive that not only did many ministers leave the church over the issue, but -- in order to save the church from further damage and destruction -- Herbert Armstrong eventually appointed a "doctrinal committee" of men to look into the issue at length and in depth. Even then, however, many ministers disagreed with the conclusions of the committee majority.

During this time, Herbert Armstrong re-published his booklet "Marriage and Divorce," in 1973, which basically outlined and reaffirmed his historic position on the subject. In a Bible Study held in Pasadena, California, on April 17, 1973, he emphatically announced to the church that God did inspire the original teaching of the church on divorce and remarriage. As was his nature, he was adamant, and made the announcement with bluster and dogmatism. The newly

expanded edition of his old booklet set the parameters for further debate on the subject squarely. Mr. Armstrong wrote in the preface of the booklet, that the booklet stood as a witness to "The guidance of the living Christ, Head of this Church, in the *teaching of the Church from the beginning*. . ." (preface, p.6).

He added: "The object was not to please people, or to please ourselves, but to prove what is the true and faithful WORD of God, to show ourselves approved unto God, and to RIGHTLY divide His Word of TRUTH."

Mr. Armstrong noted, further, that "Jesus never once compromised with God's Law. God is a God of MERCY. But He is also a God of JUSTICE, and rather than compromise one-millionth of an inch with His Law, Jesus gave His life to pay the penalty we have incurred by breaking it" (p.92).

When this booklet was issued, at first many thought the issue was settled, once and for all. Mr. Armstrong had spoken. As I recall, I believe it was about this time that many ministers gave up on expecting any change in the divorce teaching, and so they bolted the church. The year was 1974.

However, as Bernard Kelly writes, "Some ministers of the Worldwide Church of God were opposed to this booklet from the start. *They finally prevailed upon Mr. Armstrong to withdraw it*. Soon afterward, they convinced him to change the church doctrine of divorce and remarriage so extensively as to render it diametrically opposite to all that he had proven earlier."

This is the history and a little of the background to the issue, at it catapulted to the forefront of church controversy in 1972 to 1974, when the church totally revamped its teaching on the subject, going so far as to state in its new divorce doctrine that God was not even involved in marriages "in the world," between unconverted people, and so they were not at all "binding," and marriages only became "binding" when people entered the church, or were "married" while in the church. People in the church also were allowed to "divorce" on certain conditions -- adultery, if one member left the church (i.e., became "unconverted" in the eyes of the church, which viewed itself as "God's only true church"), and desertion. Eventually the new teaching led to the church sanctioning divorce on any grounds whatsoever, including "incompatibility." From being a very strict and rigid church marital code, the divorce code became a laissez faire "any-thing-goes" approach, with the new approach amounting to nothing more than the "bill-of-divorcement" that was the basis of divorce in Moses' time! This opened the gates of course, and from this time many people in the church began divorcing on a rampant, unheard of scale. It seemed that marriages which were "bound in heaven" were suddenly dissolved on earth! Divorce soon became rampant, and immorality soon flooded the newly structured church.

From extremely rigid standards, it seemed as if now there were no standards whatsoever. Couples married *in the church* were allowed to divorce a year later. Apparently ministers who in the beginning seemed to relish looking into people's secret past sexual lives, to determine whether a marriage had been binding or not, now wanted nothing whatsoever to do with making decisions on such matters, and just "looked the other way" when couples sought divorce.

The church went from an extreme right-hand ditch, to the opposite left-hand ditch -- or so it would seem! In all of this controversy, one would wonder, where was the "BALANCE"? Where was the truth of GOD? Where was that precious commodity called "WISDOM"? It seemed to be missing, somehow. It made no appearance. Herbert Armstrong admitted many, many times, as I so well remember, and even told me personally on one occasion, that God had given him knowledge and understanding, but had not given him "wisdom." It seemed to be the greatest regret of his life!

What, then, is the TRUTH about marriage and divorce? Can we get to the real bottom of this controversy? Can we know the truth -- and KNOW that we are right? Is the Scriptural teaching clear on this subject, if we approach it with open, unprejudiced, sincere minds? Or are we forever doomed to controversy, due to foggy and misleading scriptures and lack of cohesiveness on the part of the "Word of God"? Surely, the Scriptures themselves are not to blame for our lack of understanding, confusion, and strife! What, then, is to blame?

Jesus Christ said, "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). He declared, "Thy Word is TRUTH" (John 17:17). The apostle Paul added: "ALL SCRIPTURE is given by *inspiration of God [i.e., is God-breathed]*, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, that the man of God may be [or, "become"] perfect ["mature"], throughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim.3:16-17).

Jesus Himself added in plain words, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luke 4:4). Matthew records this statement more fully: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt.4:4).

Why is it, then, that the Scriptures seem to be so hard for so many to understand?

Solomon gave us part of the answer. He wrote: "There is a way that *seemeth right unto a man*, but the END thereof are the *ways of death*" (Prov.12:14; 16:25). But what "seems" right may not BE right! It may be total ERROR! The result? DEATH! Destruction! Misery! Chaos! and Confusion!

Why is the truth often so difficult to understand? Jeremiah gives us another clue to the answer to that profound question. He wrote: "The heart [of man] is *deceitful above all things, and desperately WICKED*: who can know [i.e., fathom, understand] it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

Answer? God can! We often are blinded to our *own hearts*, and our own deceitful nature, and our own wickedness, but God sees all -- He understands all -- He knows all. As Jeremiah went on: "I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to *his ways*, and according to the *fruit of his doings*" (v.10).

The apostle Paul also gave us further insight into this age-old problem of the human heart, and the reason many people have difficulty understanding the Word of God. He wrote: "For the *carnal [fleshly, human] mind is ENMITY AGAINST GOD*; for it is not subject to the LAW of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh [who are motivated by the

flesh, and carnal desires] cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom.8:7-9).

In order to understand God's Word, then, we must be Spiritually motivated, energized, and inspired -- led of God's Holy Spirit. As Paul wrote elsewhere, "This I say, then, Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. . . But if ye be LED of the Spirit, ye are not under the law [i.e., condemned by the law, on the one hand, or obligated to perform all the "halakah" obligations of Judaism]" (Gal.5:16-18).

Paul also wrote, concerning the truths of God, "But God hath revealed them unto us BY HIS SPIRIT: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the *deep things of God* . . . Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we *might KNOW the things that are freely given to us of God*. Which things we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the *natural man [that is, the carnal-minded man] receiveth NOT the things of the Spirit of God*: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know [grasp, understand] them, because *they are spiritually discerned*. But he that is spiritual [motivated by God's Spirit, and led by His Spirit] judgeth [*discerns, understands*] all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the *mind of Christ*" (I Cor.2:10-16).

If we have God's Spirit, in truth, then we ought to be able to understand this matter of divorce and remarriage. It should not be so difficult. The key to understanding this matter is, as Christ said, to "SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they that testify of me" (John 5:29).

Paul declared, also, "STUDY to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, *RIGHTLY DIVIDING the word of truth*. But *shun profane and vain babblings*: for they will increase unto more ungodliness" (II Tim.2:15-16). Can we, then, "rightly divide" the Word of truth -- the Scriptures? Can we carefully, like a master builder, put it all together, brick upon brick, so that we build a solid edifice or structure that will not come toppling down in a storm? By placing ALL the relevant Scriptures together, can we KNOW the truth about marriage and divorce? Can we put aside ALL preconceived ideas, and prejudices of men, and come at this subject with a FRESH START? Can we set aside all the "reactionary, conservative" ideas, as well as all the "liberal" ideas, and just "search the Scriptures" with an OPEN, unhostile, unprejudiced mind -- the "mind of Christ"?

God-willing, we shall do this! But remember -- we MUST keep an open mind, and not allow HUMAN opinions, or human interpretations, or ideas, to sway us, one way OR the other! We must simply let the Word of God, when it is all put together, give us its own testimony.

### ***The Word of God on Marriage and Divorce***

In going into this subject, it will be helpful to approach it by thorough discussing and analyzing an important paper written on the subject by a number of high-ranking "conservative"

ministers of the Worldwide Church of God, written in defense of Herbert Armstrong's original teaching. This "study paper" in defense of the old teaching was put together in 1973-74 and was entitled "Why the 1973 'Marriage and Divorce' Booklet Is Correct." Let us go through the arguments presented in this paper, one by one, and compare them with Scripture. Let us also compare the arguments of those pushing for changes in church doctrine, and their conclusions, with the Scriptures. *Could it be that in doing this we will discover that BOTH SIDES, having firmly entrenched themselves, ARE IN GROSS ERROR?*

The paper begins by pointing out that the rise in the divorce rate is one of America's "National Sins, affecting nearly every third home." Actually, today that statistic should be more in the range of every SECOND home -- or half the homes in America! Divorce is even more rampant, today, than it was thirty years ago, when the paper was drafted.

The writers of the paper point out also that "God holds His ministry responsible for directing His people in His revealed truth." That, of course, goes without saying. It is an obvious truth. God does hold His ministers responsible for teaching the truth. In fact, God thunders in the book of Hosea, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, *that thou shalt be no priest [or MINISTER] to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the LAW of thy God, I will also forget thy children.* As they were increased [multiplied in population, and in wealth], so did they SIN against me [their sins also increased, and multiplied!]: therefore will I change their glory *into SHAME*" (Hos.4:6-7).

God also speaks to us through the prophet Malachi. He declares, "And now, O ye priests [i.e., MINISTERS of God, particularly those of His Church!], this commandment is for you. If ye will not hear, and if ye will not *lay it to heart . . . I will even send a CURSE upon you, and I will CURSE YOUR BLESSINGS:* yea, I have *cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart.* Behold, I will corrupt your seed [the ministers' own children and offspring!], and *spread DUNG [doo doo, manure, excrement, fecal matter, or "crap"] UPON YOUR FACES, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away [remove you] with it*" (Mal.2:1-3). In other words, God is so upset with His ministers during these end-times that He is going to bring them down to utter shame, and even spread foul excrement all over their faces, and then have them hauled off and thrown out with the excrement itself!

This is certainly very strong language. We should not minimize it by sugar-coating it, or ameliorating it, or using piffle words and "euphemisms" -- clever circumlocutions -- to get around what it really says. God wants us to *get the point!*

God goes on, discussing what a minister of His is to be like, using the patriarch Levi, the son of Jacob, for an example, saying: "My covenant was with him of life and peace: and I gave them to him *for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name.* The *LAW OF TRUTH was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips;* he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. *For the priest's [minister's] lips should keep KNOWLEDGE, and they [the people] should seek the LAW at his mouth: for he is the MESSENGER of the LORD of hosts*" (Mal.2:5-7).

But, God thunders, His end-time ministers (and priests of the Jews, as well, for that

matter), have turned their backs on His truth. He says, "But ye are *departed out of the way; ye have caused MANY TO STUMBLE AT THE LAW*; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts. Therefore have I also made *you contemptible and base before ALL the people, according as ye have NOT kept MY WAYS, but have been PARTIAL IN THE LAW*" (Mal.2:8-9).

How have God's end-time ministers "corrupted" His covenant? How have they been "partial" in teaching the "Law" of God? Where have they gone wrong?

Notice! Continuing this chapter in context, we discover that God indicts His people, and His ministers in particular, because, as Malachi says, "we deal every man treacherously against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our father" (v.10). God goes on saying that modern Judah has "dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem" (v.11). He says Judah has "married the daughter of a STRANGE GOD" (same verse). What is this talking about? Who is this "strange god"? The predominant "strange god" of the western world today is the world's "Christianity" which has its leading representative in Rome, the Papal See, the so-called "Vicar of Christ," the POPE! In other words, God's end-time people are involved in religious teachings that COME STRAIGHT OUT OF ROMAN CATHOLICISM -- the modern end-time "DAUGHTER OF BABYLON," the "DAUGHTER OF THE CHALDEANS" (see Isaiah 47:1).

God's church during the end-time, in other words, has taken on some of the major doctrines and teachings of the Babylonian religion -- the Roman Catholic Church! And God thunders, in response to this serious matter, "The LORD will *cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the SCHOLAR, out of the tabernacles of Jacob . . .*" (v.12). They will be "CUT OFF" from God! He will cast them out!

But when God really pinpoints the major fault that He finds with His priests and ministers, which has been brought about by the corrupting influence of the doctrines of this "strange god," the end-time Babylonian Whore religion (Rev.17:4-5), apostate "Christianity," what does He bring up? Notice what God says! The major fault and "sin" He discusses involves the building block of society, the foundation of a nation -- the HOME! He says, ". . . the LORD hath been witness between thee and the *wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the WIFE OF THY COVENANT*. And did not he make *one*? [That is, did not God make the two of them ONE FLESH, in marriage?] . . . and wherefore *one*? That he might seek a *godly seed [that is, godly children from the marriage, godly offspring!]*. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the *wife of his youth*" (Mal.2:14-15).

Now, what is the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church concerning "divorce and remarriage"? Whatever it is, God is saying in this passage that He condemns it because of the evil fruits that come from its enactment -- the evil consequences it has upon the home and the family!

Let's continue the chapter. In verse 16, God picks up this theme and states categorically, "For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that *he hateth putting away . . .*" (Mal.2:16). What is

this? The Moffatt Translation has this passage: ". . . the Eternal was a witness at your marriage in youth to the wife with whom you have now broken faith -- though she is your own mate and lawful wife. Not one of you has any trace of moral sense. . . Take heed to yourselves, and let none prove unfaithful to the wife of his youth, *FOR I DETEST DIVORCE and cruelty to a wife*, the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, declares."

"*I HATE DIVORCE*, says the LORD God of Israel," the New International Version has it. Says the *Good News Bible*, "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel. 'I hate it when one of you does such a cruel thing to his wife. Make sure that you do not break your promise to be faithful to your wife.'"

The *New Revised Standard Version* has this passage: "And what does the one God desire? Godly offspring. So look to yourselves, and do not let anyone be faithless to the wife of his youth. *For I hate divorce*, says the LORD, the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So take heed to yourselves, and do not be faithless."

How is a man "faithless" to his wife? Of course, if he commits adultery with another woman, that is an act of callous faithlessness. But even more, for a man to DIVORCE HIS WIFE is an act of ongoing callous indifference, cruelty, and utter faithlessness -- a repudiation of his marital vows and covenant! This is faithlessness *in the extreme!*

Obviously, then, for any minister of God to condone adultery, by a married person, is a gross sin and miscarriage of justice. And for any minister to countenance DIVORCE, *UNLESS IT IS FOR SCRIPTURALLY APPROVED REASONS*, is an abomination in the sight of GOD!

### ***Back to the Book of Genesis***

Now, let us go into the Scriptures and see what they teach concerning this matter of divorce and remarriage. It should be obvious, first of all, that marriage is very important in God's sight, and not to be treated with a cavalier attitude, or careless contempt. We must approach this study *in the fear of God*. Self-will and personal ideas notwithstanding, we must be open-minded to the truth of God.

It is always best, in studying a matter, to always go back *to the beginning*. Let us begin by establishing the original purpose of God for ordaining marriage, and let us get the "overview."

In Genesis, chapter 2, we read God's original words and commandment concerning this subject. Notice! God Himself says, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an HELP meet [fitting] for him" (Gen.2:18). God intended a wife, then, to be a man's help-mate -- and the implication is that this was intended FOR LIFE! Continuing:

"And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. *Therefore shall a man leave father and mother, and shall CLEAVE UNTO HIS WIFE:*

and they *TWAIN* shall be *ONE FLESH*" (Gen.2:22-24).

This clear implication here is that God intends for one man to have one wife, and that union is meant to endure FOR LIFE! A marital union, then, should be based on TRUE LOVE, true ROMANCE -- two becoming one, in flesh, mind, and spirit, through serving God together, and growing and grace, truth and knowledge together, helping each other, sharing thoughts and sharing the ultimate goal in life -- to become the perfect children of God in the resurrection!

This passage shows that marriage was intended for LIFE. But because we are human beings, and some decide not to obey God, and begin to VIOLATE His divine Laws, and begin to go astray -- such as Cain, who slew his brother Abel -- the question must arise, how does SIN affect the human marriage relationship? In particular, what about capital sins, or major sins, like idolatry (worshipping false gods), murder, adultery, and so forth? Does a marriage of necessity have to remain BOUND FOR LIFE EVEN IF A MATE BECOMES A MURDER, IDOLATER, WHORE-MONGER, ADULTERER, and the like?

The answer of some is, you are bound till death *regardless of what crime your mate may commit, or continue committing!* Is such reasoning of God? Does it come from His Word?

***The teachings of the Roman Catholic Church say that you are bound FOR LIFE REGARDLESS OF WHAT YOUR MATE DOES!*** In the eyes of Roman Catholicism, no marriage "once bound" can ever be "unbound" except by a dispensation of the Pope! Only those marriages where "fraud" is established -- or deception, where one person committed sexual fornication *before marriage* -- can divorce be permitted -- and even then, it is not called "divorce" technically, but "annulment." Sometimes the Roman Catholic Church may grant an "annulment" in the case of adultery, but such cases must go to the highest echelons of the Church for such a revocation of a marriage. Is this what God intended?

But what does the Word of God say on this issue?

### ***Deuteronomy 22 -- Marriage for LIFE!***

This theme is covered in the Old Testament, during the time of Moses. What was to occur if a man thought or claimed his wife was guilty of fraud, and accused her of having committed sexual intercourse with another man before their marriage?

Notice what God said during the time of Moses:

"If any man take a wife, and go in unto her [sexual intercourse], and hate her, and give occasions of speech against her, and bring up an evil name upon her, and say, I took this woman, and when I came to her, I found her not a maid [virgin]: Then shall the father of the damsel, and her mother, take and bring forth the tokens of the damsel's virginity unto the elders of the city in the gate: And the damsel's father shall say unto the elders, I gave my daughter unto this man to wife, and he hateth her; and, lo, he hath given occasion of speech against her, saying, I found not thy daughter a maid; and yet these are the tokens of my daughter's virginity [proof she was indeed a virgin]. And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city. And the elders of the city shall take that man and chastise him [whip him]; and they shall amerce him

in an hundred shekels of silver, and give them unto the father of the damsel, because he hath brought up an evil name upon a virgin of Israel: *and she shall be his wife, and he may not put her away [divorce her] all his days*" (Deut.22:13-19).

Notice! Even in ancient Israel, marriage was for life! The husband in this case could not "divorce" his wife just for "any cause." He had to accept her as his wife for the remainder of his life -- no divorce permitted! Of course, an exception to this would have been if she then went on to commit adultery. In that case, another law came into play, the law against adultery. What is that law? Simply put, the Law of God states:

"And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbor's wife, **THE ADULTERER AND ADULTERESS shall surely be put to death**" (Lev.20:10).

Obviously, therefore, if this man's wife later was found committing adultery with another man, the law stated that the marriage was no longer binding. She was to be put to death. Once she was dead, he was free to remarry. But what if, for some reason, that society itself was not obeying God's Laws? What if she was found committing adultery, but the laws of the land -- such as in the United States and modern world, today -- said that this was not a "sin unto death" and not even punishable in the eyes of the law? In that case, would the man still be "bound" to her?

Think about it! God's Law says she was as good as DEAD. The penalty for adultery was very clear -- DEATH. No exceptions. We are not talking about "rape" here. Of course, she could come to him, begging forgiveness, and he could forgive her. That would be the best solution to the problem, *if she sincerely repented*. Or, on the other hand, let's say the MAN commits adultery. In that case, the Law of God states that he should be put to death. That would free up his wife to remarry. But what if, in the society, death was not the penalty, and adulterers were permitted to keep on living, as in America, today? Would she still be BOUND to him?

This question is the real heart of the issue. In other words, are there ever legitimate grounds for DIVORCE in the Bible?

Before discussing that issue, however, let's look at another case of "divorce," given in Deuteronomy, chapter 24. This is the chapter usually quoted when people wish to refer to the "bill of divorcement" which was permitted during the time of Moses. Let us notice this example, and see what it really says.

#### ***Deuteronomy 24 -- The "Bill of Divorcement"***

"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 into her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, SHE MAY GO AND BECOME 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; for that is ABOMINATION before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee . . .*" (Deut.24:1-4).

Notice, in this case a man gets married, and then discovers some "uncleanness" or "impurity" in his wife after they marry. Whatever this item is, it is enough to allow him to sever the marriage and divorce her. We will discuss these possible "causes" later. Once he divorces her, she is permitted to marry another man. *But because the first man put her away, and divorced her, HE MAY NOT TAKE HER BACK LATER, after a second husband should divorce her, or die.* In other words, the first husband made his choice, decided to divorce her, and so he cannot marry her again. That would be an abomination in God's sight!

This clearly shows that if a man ever thinks he can divorce his wife, for whatever "uncleanness" is involved, yes, he may do so -- but if he does, he himself is BOUND BY THE CONSEQUENCES, and he may not change his mind later and take her back to himself!

Now, this was the LAW OF GOD. It is a GOOD law. It prohibits men being careless, or capricious, in "divorcing" their wives. In other words, they had better have a good reason, because they also are going to be BOUND by the consequences, and cannot later change their minds! *This law, like all God's laws, is still in effect today* (Rom.3:31; 7:12, 14; Matt.5:17-19).

### ***God Married Israel***

Now we come to the greatest example of marriage and divorce in the entire Bible. Let us see how God Himself handled this matter of divorce!

We read in the Scriptures that the God of Israel, the God of the Old Testament, made a "covenant" with Israel when He brought them out of Egypt, and gave them His Laws at Mount Sinai. That covenant, or "agreement," was twofold -- a MUTUAL covenant. They agreed to take Him as their Lord and God, their "Husband," and to OBEY Him, and keep His commandments and Laws, and HE agreed to be their God, to protect and prosper them, and keep them from all evil. They promised to love Him, and He promised to love and provide for them. This was a MARRIAGE COVENANT!

God says that He brought Israel out of Egypt, and rescued them, and declared, "Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swear unto thee, and ENTERED INTO A COVENANT with thee, saith the LORD God, *and thou becamest mine*" (Ezek.16:1-8). God "washed" Israel, and beautified her. He says, "I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thy head. Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver; and thy raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and brodered work" (v.11-13).

But did His wife Israel remain faithful to Him? He goes on, "But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and *playedst the harlot because of thy renown, and Pouredst out thy FORNICATIONS on every one that passed by; his it was*" (v.15). She became a harlot, a prostitute, and committed "whoredoms" (v.16-17, 20).

Now notice! Israel WAS HIS WIFE! They were MARRIED! God Himself says, "thou becamest [past tense] MINE" (v.8). Yet, after she became "married" to God Himself, she went

astray, and played the harlot, and committed -- what? what was it called, in the Word of God? -- "FORNICATIONS"! (verse 15).

This is very important to take note of, as we will see later.

But then what happened?

The story is told in more detail by Jeremiah the prophet in chapter 3 of his book. Let us read it carefully. Notice again! God says of Israel: "Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. . . And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel *COMMITTED ADULTERY I had put her away, and given her a bill of DIVORCE . . .* Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful . . . Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; *FOR I AM MARRIED UNTO YOU . . .*" (Jeremiah 3:6-14).

Now notice! In Ezekiel, God says what Israel did was "fornications" against Him, although they were married! Thus *fornication, by Bible definition, can be committed by a MARRIED PERSON!* Notice also, that in Jeremiah God calls what Israel did "whoredom" and "ADULTERY," over and over again. It should be crystal clear that "fornication," according to the Bible, and "adultery," are overlapping words, and "fornication" IS and INCLUDES "adultery"! It also means "whoredom," "harlotry," and obviously means sexual congress with strangers and others besides one's mate -- in other words, all kinds of immoral sexual activity on the part of a married person -- which is ALSO called "ADULTERY"! It can include all kinds of sexual perversions, group sex, wife swapping, homosexual behavior, sex with animals ("bestiality"), and participation in "sexual orgies." All of these things, done by a married person, would constitute ADULTERY! Thus "fornications" is in many cases a clear and obvious synonym for "adultery"! What could be clearer than that?

Why did God "put away" or "divorce" His wife, Israel? Because of "FORNICATIONS" committed AFTER marriage, or sexual unfaithfulness -- that is, ADULTERY! Israel had become a promiscuous prostitute, a lavish adulteress, giving her favours and charms to every one who passed by. So grief-stricken, as any loving husband would be, God "divorced" her! He could have put her to death. The penalty for "adultery" was clearly death. But He did not choose to put her to death. He chose to plead with her to repent, and change her ways. If she will not do so, eventually those who refuse to repent will be put to death -- in the lake of fire, called "Gehenna." Those who do repent of their backsliding and adultery, He promises to forgive, and to have mercy upon them. They will be accepted back as His wife, with the past forgiven and covered by the blood of Christ, the Messiah and Saviour!

But what does all this Old Testament history have to do with the New Testament teaching on Divorce and Remarriage?

The answer? *Everything!* Let us now notice the words of Christ, and of the apostle Paul, in the New Testament!

### *New Testament Teaching on Marriage and Divorce*

What did Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of David, have to say about divorce and remarriage? What was His "position" concerning the LAWS of God? What did He teach about marriage itself, and the marital union? Are there ever grounds for "divorce" and "remarriage" according to Christ Himself?

We turn now to the first book of the New Testament, the gospel of Matthew. In the foundational, pivotal, basic underlying text of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus laid down the essential truths which we are to always keep in mind. Notice what He said.

First of all, Jesus declared concerning God's Law: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matt.5:17). Notice! He says He did not come to destroy, or do away with, or abolish, GOD'S LAW! Or the words of the prophets! Therefore, everything written in the Law, including the laws of marriage given in Genesis 2, and Deuteronomy 22 and 24, and the words of the prophets concerning marriage given in Malachi, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, *are all still in effect and in force today!*

Clarifying this statement, so that no one would have any excuse for misunderstanding Him, Jesus Christ went on: "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till ALL be fulfilled" (v.18). Obviously, heaven and earth are still in existence! Therefore, ALL the law of God -- every "jot" and every "tittle" -- is also still standing, and in force and operation, today! Every dotting of an "i" and crossing of a "t" -- every stroke of every Hebrew letter found in the Torah -- the Word of God!

Now, does Jesus Christ discuss the subject of marriage and divorce in this pivotal, foundational chapter, the Sermon on the Mount? Yes, He does! Notice!

"It hath been said, Whoever 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.5:32).

Now what did Jesus mean here? What is this "cause of fornication" that He mentions? This word has caused NO END of controversy among those who have different opinions concerning "divorce" and "remarriage"! But does our own HUMAN opinion count for anything?

God says of human beings, and human opinions, on this and other subjects, that they don't amount to the dust in the balance! "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing . . . All nations before him are *AS NOTHING*; and they are counted to him *less than nothing, and vanity*" (Isaiah 40:15-17).

Only God's opinion, and His judgment, count, in the final analysis. Therefore, what does He say about this word "fornication," as we see it translated in the English language?

Let's go on to the words of Christ in Matthew, chapter 19. Here we find the Pharisees came up to Him, inquiring about the laws of marriage and divorce. They asked Him, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" (Matt.19:3). This is a question millions would like to have answered, today! *Is it lawful to divorce for any and every reason? Is ANY cause or complaint sufficient grounds for divorce?*

What was Jesus' answer? Notice!

"Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them MALE AND FEMALE, and said, For this cause [marriage] 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).

When they marry, two people -- a man and a woman -- become "one flesh." They become "one" entity in God's sight. God Himself *joins them* in this marriage state. That is why it is called "*holy* matrimony." It is a God-ordained, God-sanctified, UNION. Therefore, Jesus said, men should not break apart that which GOD has joined together. MAN should not attempt to render null and void that which GOD has created as a new UNION -- a new "oneness."

This verse does not say that man "cannot" put asunder what God has joined. It says, literally, that man SHOULD NOT attempt to do so -- for doing so will bear tragic consequences in the home, in the family, in society, and in the nation! The consequences of divorce are very far reaching, indeed! Divorce destroys lives, ruins the lives of children, creates hatreds, animosities, mental, psychological, and even physical illnesses. It is a **HORRIBLE THING** in God's sight! It is an "ABOMINATION," as He so clearly says in the book of Malachi!

But -- is that it? Is that ALL Jesus had to say on the subject? What about God divorcing Israel in the Old Testament? What about if a man finds some "uncleanness" in a woman, as we saw in the book of Deuteronomy? What is this speaking of?

Thankfully, Jesus did not stop here. He went on to add to His foundational words, and to clarify the **WHOLE ANSWER** to the question the Pharisees had raised. At this point, He merely gave them the "OVERVIEW," as it were -- the general, over-riding **PRINCIPLE** involved.

Let us continue the passage:

"They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?" (v.7).

Now we are getting to the nitty-gritty of the question. What about divorce, then, they asked him? Is it ever permissible, or all right, to **DIVORCE** a women, when you are married to her? Notice! This question which the Pharisees are asking has *nothing to do with FRAUD*, which can annul a marriage for obvious reasons! All societies and nations recognize the fact that

any union or contract entered into illegally, or by means of FRAUD, is by its very nature fraudulent and illegal! If one party deceives the other party from the "get-go," from the very beginning of the relationship, and perpetuates that deception, IT IS FRAUD -- AND NO CONTRACT OR COVENANT, BASED ON FRAUD, IS BINDING ON THE INNOCENT, DEFRAUDED AND DECEIVED PARTY!

This question they posed for Him was not even about "fraud." It was about DIVORCE, once a couple are BOUND in marriage! Their original question was, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife -- divorce her -- "for every cause"? They were talking about a man and woman who were indeed "husband and wife." Is there ANY cause whereby a man can divorce his wife, they wanted to know -- and what causes? What if she smiled "crooked"? What if she had a blemish on her small toe? What if she proved to be a witless and foolish person? What if she was too caustic in her language, made snide, contemptuous remarks, and railed at him? On and on we could go. In other words, what are the legitimate grounds for divorce -- if there are any? That's what they wanted Him to tell them!

What did Jesus answer? Notice! He did not avoid their question. He gave them a very explicit and detailed answer! He said:

"Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but *from the beginning IT WAS NOT SO. And I tell you, WHOSOEVER SHALL PUT AWAY HIS WIFE, EXCEPT IT BE FOR FORNICATION*, and shall marry another, *committeth adultery*: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" (Matt.19:8-9).

Obviously, Jesus very clearly did give ONE REASON -- ONE "CAUSE" -- whereby a man could legitimately DIVORCE, or "put away," his wife! And, by implication, the exact reverse would be true, as well. That is, a woman could put away her husband for the very same reason -- the "cause" being "FORNICATION"!

What, then, is "fornication"?

That is the question of the hour -- of the century -- of the millennium! That is the "million-dollar" question!

It is beyond dispute that Jesus, in His foundational comments on this question, plainly and clearly said that there is *one cause which can JUSTIFY DIVORCE!* And that "cause," He said, is "FORNICATION"!

### ***Just What IS This Thing Called "FORNICATION"?***

Of course, like everything else regarding divorce and remarriage, this is a hotly disputed topic. Just what is "fornication," anyway? What does the Bible say? Does what men say make any difference? Should we base our decision merely by quoting some "English dictionary"? If so, which one?

First, let's see what English dictionaries say about this word, "fornication." The hard-line

"conservatives" on the divorce and remarriage issue are those who adamantly tell us it means "sex committed by unmarried persons" and "sex committed prior to marriage," period, end-of-question, end-of-discussion. But is that the case? Let's search the English dictionaries ourselves, and see what this word really means, *even in the English language!* Notice the definition according to the prestigious and authoritative *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*:

"FORNICATION. 1: *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 -- used in some translations (as AV, DV) of the Bible (as in Mat.5:32) for unchastity (as in RSV) or immorality (as in NCE) to COVER ALL SEXUAL INTERCOURSE EXCEPT BETWEEN A HUSBAND AND WIFE or concubine.* 2: sexual intercourse on the part of an unmarried person accomplished with consent and not deemed adultery."

To try to claim that this word "fornication" only means "pre-marital sex" or "sex between unmarried persons," is itself a fraudulent, deceptive, deceitful and wicked perversion of the simple truth of the definition of this word in an English dictionary! Such people are limiting and unfairly discriminating against all the definitions of this word, including its NUMBER ONE AND MAJOR DEFINITION, by attempting to pick and choose and limit to a "lesser" and more "limiting" meaning. This procedure is utterly DISHONEST and does violence to the Dictionary meaning of the word itself! It is nothing less than word-murder!

The Webster's Dictionary itself shows that the PRIMARY MEANING of this word is to describe "human sexual intercourse other than between a man and his wife" -- that is adultery and all related sexual acts of infidelity, including but not limited to sexual intercourse between unmarried persons!

But apart from the clear English definition of the word, what is the BIBLE definition? How is this word used in the Scriptures, to help us to understand its real and full and complete meaning? How are we to understand Christ's usage of this word? Let us not "pre-judge." Let's be honest, and face this issue squarely, boldly, without preconceived opinions!

### ***The Bible Words for "Fornication"***

In the book of Ezekiel, we read that ancient Israel was guilty of "fornication." What was this? Notice what God says of her, His wife!

"But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown, and pouredst out thy FORNICATIONS on every one that passed by; his it was" (Ezek.16:15).

"Thou hast played the whore also with the Assyrians, because thou wast unsatiable; yea, thou hast played the HARLOT with them, and yet couldest not be satisfied. Thou hast moreover MULTIPLIED THY FORNICATION in the land of Canaan unto Chaldea; and yet thou wast not satisfied herewith. How weak is thine heart, saith the Lord GOD, seeing thou doest all these things, the work of an imperious whorish woman; in that thou . . . hast not been as an harlot, in that thou scornest hire; but *as a wife that committeth ADULTERY, which taketh strangers instead of her husband*" (Ezekiel 16:28-32).

The Hebrew word for "fornications" in Ezekiel 16:15 and "fornication" in verse 29 is the word #8457 in *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, and is *taznuth*, which means, literally, "harlotry, i.e., fig.) idolatry: -- fornication, whoredom."

Says *Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon to the Old Testament*, this word means "whoredom." Whoredom is a wife playing the prostitute. On the part of a man, it would be a promiscuous and unfaithful husband, pouring out his affections and lusts on other women instead of loving his wife -- a "philanderer" or "whoremonger." We have such men around today, even in the ministry, who besmirch the name of Christ with their blasphemous philandering and insatiable womanizing!

In the New Testament, the word translated "fornication" is the Greek word *porneia*. It is #4202 in *Strong's Concordance*, and literally means, "harlotry (*including adultery and incest*); fig. idolatry: -- fornication."

*Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon to the New Testament* defines this word as meaning:

"a. prop. of illicit sexual intercourse in general . . . Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25, (that this meaning must be adopted in these passages will surprise no one who has learned from I Cor.6:12sq. how leniently converts from among the heathen regarded this vice and how lightly they indulged in it . . . *used of adultery* [(cf. Hos.2:2 (4), etc.)], Matt.5:32, 19:9 . . ."

This should be crystal clear to anyone with an open mind. The scholars who wrote these Biblical helps, Charles Thayer, and James Strong, were devout men who sought only the truth about the usage of words and language in these matters. They had no "ax" to grind, as I fear certain modern "ministers" do, who wish to have their status upheld in the eyes of the people, and their authority feared and respected. They do themselves and their followers a terrible disservice by being so recalcitrant, oblivious, and stubborn-willed on these matters.

*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* also gives us deep insight into the meaning of this word. On the word "FORNICATION," it says:

"1. *porneia* is used (a) of 'illicit sexual intercourse,' in John 8:41; Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; I Cor.5:1; 6:13, 18; 2 Cor.12:21; Gal.5:19; Eph.5:3; Col.3:5; I Thess.4:3; Rev. 2:21; 9:21; in the plural in 2 Cor.7:2; in Matt.5:32 and 19:9 it stands for, or includes, ADULTERY . . ."

Now let us notice how this word is used in the New Testament. Let's see if it makes any sense to use the word as meaning only "pre-marital" sex.

First, in John 8:41 the Pharisees sneered at Jesus, claiming, "We be not born of fornication." This was a snide reference to the birth of Christ, whom they considered as being "illegitimate," or a "bastard" because Joseph was not His real father. They assumed that Mary had had intercourse with some other man. Now was this word used because they were saying Mary had "pre-marital" sex? Not at all! Mary was already MARRIED TO JOSEPH! In ancient Judea, to be "betrothed" was tantamount to being married. If Mary had had sex with another man while betrothed, she would have been guilty of ADULTERY -- not "pre-marital" sex!

Notice!

We read in the book of Matthew, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was *espoused [betrothed] to Joseph, before they came together*, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph *her husband [they were married, you see -- he was already her "husband"!]*, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily [secretly, privately]. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, 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.1:18-20).

Therefore, in John 8:41 the Pharisees used the word *porneia* to describe a supposed act of ADULTERY! Mary and Joseph were already "married" in God's sight, and in the sight of the Jews. Therefore, the Pharisees thought she was guilty of "fooling around" while she was engaged, or betrothed -- which would have been an act of adultery!

Now notice Acts 15:20. Here we find the early headquarters church had met together to decide on certain issues confronting the church, particularly if new Gentile converts needed to be "circumcised" in order to be saved (vs.1-19). The church decided circumcision of the flesh was not necessary to become a Christian. They determined to send out a letter from headquarters to all the churches scattered abroad with this news, and with the timely admonition that the Gentiles should remember to "abstain from pollutions of idols, and from *fornication*, and from things strangled, and from blood" (v.20). It is clear from the context that the "fornication" mentioned here referred to all sexual vices, immorality in general, and sexual intercourse between any two people who were not married to each other. This clearly included adultery, which was a very common sin among the Gentiles of that period, as it is an exceedingly common sin among people today! Consider the adulteries of the Hollywood movie makers, who are famous for their illicit liaisons. Consider the many adulteries of the President of the United States, William J. Clinton, who is so famous in this regard that Jay Leno on the "Tonight Show" and Dave Letterman on the "Late Show" both regularly spoof and make fun of the President's sexual escapades, and infidelities, making a "joke" out of what is not at all a laughing matter in the sight of Almighty GOD! In our modern world society also treats "porneia" or adultery and such vices as trivial, insignificant, unimportant "peccadillos" and not as major capital SINS, as God does!

When the early church leaders wrote to the Gentiles to keep themselves from "fornication," if that word only referred to "pre-marital sex," then the apostles were STUPID and blundering idiots, because the REAL TEMPTATION that surrounded the Gentile converts was the WORLD'S WIDESPREAD INDULGENCE IN AND ACCEPTANCE OF ADULTERY! In fact, this problem even reared its ugly head in the Church! Paul had to write to the Corinthian church and rebuke them for the "fornication" -- *porneia* -- that was reported among them! Paul wrote, "It is reported commonly that there is *fornication [porneia] among you* and such *fornication [porneia]* as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, *that one should have his FATHER'S WIFE*" (I Cor.5:1).

Notice! This wasn't just "pre-marital" sex -- this was sex between a man's son and that

man's own WIFE -- evidently the son's step-mother!

In chapter 6 of the book of I Corinthians, Paul addresses this subject further. Now remember, he is writing to the WHOLE CHURCH. His words are not directed to the unmarried, but to both the married AND the unmarried church members. And to ALL of them, he writes, "Now the body is not for *fornication [porneia]*, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body" (v.13, latter part). He goes on, then, talking about the horrible SIN of a church member, married or unmarried, having sexual intercourse with a harlot, or whore, saying, "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (I Cor.6:13-17).

After writing these things to ALL the Corinthian church members, including the married men and women, Paul goes on saying to them all -- not just the "unmarried" -- "FLEE FORNICATION [*porneia*]. Every sin that a MAN doeth is without the body; but he that committeth *fornication [porneia]* sinneth against his own body" (v.18).

Do you see? Sexual intercourse with any one other than one's own mate is DANGEROUS -- such a person sins "against his own body"! The danger of contracting an incurable sexually-transmitted disease is very real! Herpes, venereal disease, gonorrhea, syphilis, and of course AIDS, are only a few of the sexually-transmitted diseases that are directly due to SEXUAL IMMORALITY, and widespread sexual indulgence! God seeks to protect all of us from such diseases. When Paul says to "FLEE fornication," therefore, he is saying to flee ALL sexually immoral sins! His focus most definitely is not just a warning to the "unmarried" persons in Corinth, but for ALL to avoid sexual sins.

"Fornication" therefore is a general term and applies to ALL sexual sins, including harlotry, whoredom, adultery, perversion, and the like!

Moffatt translates this verse, "Shun immorality! Any other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his body" (I Cor.6:18). The *New International Version* has it, "FLEE FROM SEXUAL IMMORALITY. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body" (v.18).

Says the *Goodspeed* translation of this verse, "Avoid sexual looseness like the plague! Every other sin that a man does is done outside his own body, but this is an offense against his own body."

The *Amplified Bible*: "Shun immorality and all sexual looseness -- flee from impurity [in thought, word or deed]. Any other sin which a man commits is one outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body."

This would be true, of course, for married men and women, just as much as for unmarried men and women! The term "fornication" therefore and the prohibition against it REFERS TO

BOTH CATEGORIES! It is a general term and refers to all sexual looseness, promiscuity, and all sexual intercourse *outside of MARRIAGE!*

Finally, this same word *porneia* is used to describe the wicked pollutions and perversions of "that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication [*porneia*], and to eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication [*porneia*]; and she repented not" (Rev.2:20-21). God thunders, "Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit ADULTERY with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds" (v.22).

Here the words "fornication" and "adultery" are used interchangeably! They often mean the same thing, obviously. And remember -- that ancient woman Jezebel was a MARRIED WOMAN -- not a single woman! Yet she committed *fornication or porneia* -- as a married woman -- and taught others to *follow her example*, and to do so, as well!

And in Revelation 9:21 we find that God condemns the "rest of the men" who "repented not of the works of their hands . . . Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their FORNICATION [*porneia*], nor of their thefts." Notice that "fornication" is here itemized right along with other sins which break the Ten Commandments -- murder, theft, sorcery (idolatry) -- and is obviously here the equivalent of adultery, and sexual looseness!

God would not leave out adultery, and harlotry, and such widespread common sins, which are terrible in their consequences, and only mention the relatively small scale problem of "pre-marital" sex, along with such things as murder and the like! Let's be reasonable!

### ***"Porneia" in the Old and New Testament***

The real "key" to understanding what "exceptions" there are to God's law regarding marriage and divorce is to understand the real meaning of the word *porneia*, translated "fornication," in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. Clearly, Jesus said this is the acceptable "cause" for ending, dissolving a marriage through "divorce." Either we are willing to believe Him, our Saviour, or we might as well pack up and go home, and forget the Bible and salvation, altogether!

Those who refuse to accept the definition of this word, as it has been carefully defined by Bible translators, scholars, and the editors of Greek-English Bible lexicons, maintain that despite all these people and their evidence "porneia" just means "sex before marriage," or "pre-marital sexual intercourse."

However, the Bible itself puts the "lie" to their claims! The key to understanding the meaning of the word "porneia" as Christ used it is actually found in the Bible itself -- the Old Testament itself -- the Septuagint Version of the Scriptures, which were translated into the Greek language by the Jewish priests and scribes, about 280 years *before* the time of Christ!

As we have seen, God married ancient Israel, and Israel became His wife (Jer.3:14). He was "married" to Israel. Yet, Israel, He said, went a whoring, and committed adultery with all the surrounding nations (Jer.3:1-14). The prophet Ezekiel also discusses how God's "wife" Israel "playedst the harlot" (Ezek.16:15), and poured out her "*fornications* on every one that passed by"

(same verse). The Hebrew word for "fornications" here is #8457 in *Strong's*, that is, *taznuth*, which means "harlotry, fornication, whoredom." It is derived from #2181, *zanah*, which means "to commit adultery, (usually of the female, and less often of simple fornication)," and is translated variously as "play the harlot," "play the whore," "whoredom," "go a whoring," "whorish," etc.

Israel, God's "wife," was guilty of "whoredoms" [Heb., *taznuth*] (v.20), and multiplied her "whoredoms" [Heb., *taznuth*] (v.25), and committed "fornication." The word for "fornication," here, is the Hebrew word #2181 in *Strong's*, or *zanah*, which is related to #8457, *taznuth*. As I pointed out, although the translators here translated it as "fornication," it is correctly defined as "to commit adultery, (usually of the female, and less often of simple fornication)," and is translated variously as "play the harlot," "play the whore," "whoredom," etc.. She committed this sexual act with the Egyptians, her neighbors, a mighty nation (v.26), and also "played the whore" [Heb., *zanah*] with the Assyrians (v.28). God thunders, "Thou hast moreover multiplied thy *fornication* [Heb. word #8457, *taznuth*] in the land of Canaan unto Chaldea" (v.29).

Obviously, the Hebrew words here, *zanah*, and *taznuth*, refer to adultery and harlotry on the part of a married woman, in this case, "Israel." These acts were clearly committed when Israel was MARRIED to God. This is NOT speaking of "pre-marital" sex. This is speaking of acts Israel committed while married, after the covenant was agreed upon at Mount Sinai. These acts were committed while Israel was *in the promised land*. These are the very words translated "whore," "whoring," harlot," throughout the Old Testament. That is their definition.

The question is, then, are these acts, which were committed by a married woman, Israel, in Ezekiel 16, the same type of thing Jesus Christ referred to when He spoke of "fornication" in the New Testament," and the same thing the apostles referred to when they used the same word? In other words, does the Greek word they used -- *porneia* -- refer to the same thing as the Hebrew words *zanah* and *taznuth*?

The answer is revealed, clearly and simply, in the pages of the official Greek version of the Old Testament Scriptures, the Septuagint, translated 280 years before Christ, and which was the version most often used by Jesus Christ and the apostles when they quoted the Old Testament! How important is the Septuagint to our study of God's Word? We read in *The New Bible Dictionary*:

"V. SIGNIFICANCE. Valuable as a monument of Hellenistic Greek, the LXX occasionally preserves meanings of Hebrew words that were current when the LXX translation was made, but which were subsequently lost. It acts also as a linguistic and theological bridge-head between the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New; for it served as 'Bible' to generations of Greek-speaking Jews in many countries,

and it is OFTEN

*QUOTED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.* (Luke and the writer to the Hebrews use it most. Matthew least. The New Testament quotations which do not agree with the LXX can be attributed to inexact quotation from memory, the writer's own translation, translation of Aramaic sources, translation of Hebrew texts different from the MT, perhaps to other Greek translations, perhaps also to deliberate adaptation of the Hebrew under the Holy Spirit's guidance.)" (p.1261).

The Septuagint Text was the standard text used by Jews in the synagogues in the Gentile world, and also became the standard text used by early Christians. For hundreds of years it served its purpose well, without any controversy. Even among the Jews in Judea, Greek was a language spoken by the majority of the people, and there were many Greek-speaking synagogues, even in Palestine. The Septuagint was considered the "official" Greek version of the Scriptures, ever since its original translation.

Says *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*:

"The LXX REPRESENTS A PRE-MASORETIC HEBREW TEXT and accordingly is important for textual and exegetical studies . . . .

"The LXX became the O.T. of the Christians, who used it in their controversies with the Jews, even though it differed in various words or passages from the Hebrew text then in vogue. The QUOTATIONS FROM THE O.T. IN THE N.T. ARE USUALLY CITATIONS FROM THE LXX, *either verbatim or with unimportant verbal changes*; in other cases, the N.T. writers apparently themselves translated from the original Hebrew. The Ethiopian eunuch whom Philip met was reading the LXX (Acts 8:30-33)" (p.972).

The Septuagint text actually represents a PRE-MASORETIC HEBREW TEXT, which appears to have been lost over the centuries. It is THIS PRE-MASORETIC TEXT, the basis of the LXX, that Jesus and the apostles and the New Testament writers quoted from! What, then, does the Septuagint tell us is the GREEK WORD EQUIVALENT for *zanah* and *taznuth*?

Since the Septuagint was written in the GREEK language, just like the New Testament, the question arises, did it use the same word Jesus and the apostles used -- *porneia* -- and HOW does the Septuagint use that word? Let us look up these Scriptures in the Septuagint (LXX), and see! Notice:

"Thou didst trust in thy beauty, and didst *go a-whoring* because of thy renown, and didst pour out thy *fornication* on every passer by" (Ezek.16:15).

"And it came to pass after all thy wickedness, saith the Lord, that thou didst build thyself a house of *fornication*, and didst make thyself a public place in every street; and on the head of every way thou didst set up thy *fornications*, and didst defile thy beauty, and didst open thy feet to every passer by, and didst multiply thy *fornication*. And thou didst *go a-whoring* after the children of Egypt thy neighbors, great of flesh; and didst *go a-whoring* often to provoke me to anger" (Ezek.16:23-26).

"And thou didst *go a-whoring* to the daughters of Asshur, and not even thus wast thou satisfied; yea, thou didst *go a-whoring*, and wast not satisfied. And thou didst multiply thy covenants with the land of the Chaldeans; and not even with these wast thou satisfied" (Ezek.16:28-29).

***In every case, in these verses in Ezekiel 16, where we read the word "fornication," or "fornications," "a-whoring," and "whoredom," -- see all the italicized words -- the Greek word in the Septuagint is PORNEIA or a derivative from it! Throughout the Greek Old Testament, in fact, the Greek words used for "harlot," "whore," "whoring," and "whoredom" are ALMOST ALWAYS the word PORNEIA, or a closely related word such as PORNEUO, and PORNE -- from which we get our English words, "porn," "pornography," etc. - words that describe "the writings of harlots," and the illicit sexual industry.***

It is absolutely clear, then, that the word *PORNEIA*, which Jesus Christ said was the ONLY real grounds for DIVORCE, does refer to ALL ACTS OF ADULTERY, HARLOTRY, AND SEXUAL INTERCOURSE WITH STRANGERS, whether performed by a MARRIED PERSON, OR UNMARRIED! This wanton act of sexual wickedness, as described by Ezekiel, clearly includes wanton sexual unfaithfulness on the part of a mate. The Greek word used to translate the Hebrew, is *PORNEIA* and its variants! Thus the Hebrew words *zanah* and *taznuth* -- "harlotry, whoredom, adultery," etc. -- are correctly translated into the Greek language by the word used by Jesus Christ -- *porneia*. When Jesus Christ used this word in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, therefore, **He was describing sexual unfaithfulness, adultery, and harlotry -- whoredom and the like! He was NOT limiting His meaning to a "pre-marital" sex act which occurred BEFORE marriage!**

The word itself means ALL acts of harlotry, whoredom, adultery, and the like -- whether committed by a married or unmarried person! The related word *porne* (#4204 in *Strong's*) is translated "whore" in Revelation 17:1, 15, 16, and 19:2, and "harlot" in I Corinthians 6:15, 16, and in Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25, describing Rahab the *harlot*. It is translated "harlots" (plural) in Matthew 21:31-32, Luke 15:30, and Revelation 17:5, "Mother of *harlots*."

Therefore, when Jesus Christ said that marriage is BINDING, except for *porneia*, He meant the very thing we call harlotry, whoredom, prostitution, being an unfaithful slut, or whoring around -- being a "whore" or a "whore-monger." He was not referring to a single act of "fornication," before marriage, or "adultery," after marriage. The Hebrew word used for "adultery" in the Old Testament is #5003 in *Strong's Concordance*, the word *na'aph*, meaning "to commit adultery, woman that breaks wedlock." The Greek word for "adultery" is #3430 in *Strong's Concordance*, the word *moicheia*, meaning "adultery," and #3431, *moicheuo*, meaning "to commit adultery."

These facts then absolutely destroy the arguments of those who insist that "*porneia*" refers to *PRE-MARITAL SEX ALONE* when used by Christ to explain the only conditions whereby a marriage may be dissolved, and "divorce" may be permitted. When Jesus used the word *porneia*, He was describing "whoredom," "harlotry," gross sexual unfaithfulness -- not just an act of "pre-marital sexual intercourse"! Nor was He describing a one-time, single act of "adultery." He was speaking of living and acting like a slut, a whore, on the part of a woman, or living like a whore-monger, and womanizer, on the part of a man -- that is, a mate guilty of committing rampant adultery, sleeping around, continual unfaithfulness, having one or more extra-marital "lovers," and therefore being guilty of "whoredom."

Therefore, those who insist Jesus only meant "fraud" -- undisclosed "pre-marital sexual intercourse" -- are in complete error. They simply don't have a leg to stand on! Their arguments are vapid -- vain -- empty -- useless -- worthless -- and of utterly no avail!

Will those who have become so twisted up in their own arguments, and faulty logic, be willing to admit the truth? Will they accept correction from the Word of God? Will they be willing to DEMOLISH their false doctrines and devil-inspired teachings, which have destroyed families, uprooted homes, ruined relationships, and severely cauterized and traumatized innocent

children? Will such ministers, and teachers, be willing to admit egregious error, and to REPENT?

### *The Consequences of Sexual Immorality*

It is very interesting that to some people the worst sin imaginable seems to be "pre-marital sex." And yet in the Bible, pre-marital sex is not nearly the equivalent sin as continual ADULTERY or rampant whoredom on the part of a mate!

Imagine for a moment. When one commits rampant adultery, he or she sins against their own MATE, to whom they have covenanted to be faithful for LIFE. Such adultery and whoredom breaks a clear covenant and marital contract. It is gross unfaithfulness. It destroys union and robs a marriage of unity and love. It breaks the heart of the mate, and sets a terrible example for children. It erodes trust and creates distrust, enmity, hatred, and ill will, on the part of family, relatives, children, and neighbors. It is an egregious sin.

But those who deny people the right to divorce an unfaithful spouse, and to break off such a wretched marriage, give license for the wicked to continue on in their wicked behavior, their adultery, perversion, whoredom, and harlotry. *And the innocent party has no recourse! They are condemned to live with that person for the rest of their life, or to remain CELIBATE!* Yet God's Word says such a person is worthy of the DEATH penalty. They are as good as DEAD in God's sight, unless or until they REPENT! But in many cases there is no intention of repenting. The wicked individual intends to go on, sinning and committing perversion and whoredom.

*That is why Jesus said that in the case of PORNEIA -- flagrant and rampant sexual intercourse with one or more people other than one's mate -- whoredom or harlotry -- acting like a slut or prostitute -- is grounds for DIVORCE! In such a case, the mate sinned against DOES have the right to DIVORCE, and to REMARRY SOMEONE ELSE!*

Consider once again. Would God give someone the right to divorce, on the grounds of a relatively minor sin like pre-marital sex, but compel and "bind" someone who had really been victimized in their marriage by a grossly unfaithful spouse, to remain married and "BOUND" to that wicked person for the rest of their life, no matter how terrible that person behaved? That is utter nonsense! *GOD FORBID!*

Such a theory puts much more importance on the sin of pre-marital sex than on the sin of gross and rampant, flagrant ADULTERY, which involves not only sex itself, but gross unfaithfulness, and which has many more horrendous side-effects, nasty repercussions for the children and family, and causes widespread harm and injury to many persons involved -- including the whole of society.

### *What about Romans 7:2?*

Despite the clear evidence we have seen up to this point, those who deny that there is ANY grounds to break up a marriage which God has bound, often will point to a statement made

by the apostle Paul to the church in Rome. In the book of Romans, we read:

"Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband IS BOUND BY THE LAW TO HER HUSBAND so long as he liveth; but IF THE HUSBAND BE DEAD, she is loosed from the law of her husband."

"So then if, while her husband liveth, she be MARRIED TO ANOTHER MAN, she shall be called AN ADULTERESS: *BUT IF HER HUSBAND BE DEAD, SHE IS FREE FROM THAT LAW; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man*" (Romans 7:2-3).

What does Paul mean in these verses? Is he contradicting the plain words of Christ, who said that in case of PORNEIA -- sexual immorality, harlotry, and adultery -- that a man may divorce his wife, and marry another?

Of course not!

Paul taught the very same gospel Jesus Himself taught. They taught the SAME THING. Paul is here giving the basic understanding of the Law. That is, if a woman marries another man while her HUSBAND STILL LIVES, then she is committing adultery! In this case, obviously, her husband has not "divorced" her or given her a bill of divorcement, such as Jesus described, for having committed "porneia."

Paul wrote, "For the woman which *hath a husband* is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth." But a woman who has been "loosed" from her husband, because of adultery, or "porneia," *no longer has a husband*. Therefore, she is free to marry another, just as he would be free to marry another (see Deut.24:1-4). But once she marries another, if that doesn't work out, she is not free to remarry her first husband! (same Scripture). Once a man divorces a woman, for porneia, it is final -- finished. That marriage is "kaput." He may not change his mind, and take her to him again, *if she has married another man since being married to him*.

In no way does the apostle Paul contradict Christ in this passage in Romans. He is merely discussing the basic principle of the law, and not the "exceptions" to the general law. That should be perfectly plain.

Similarly, in Mark's gospel, the same incident Matthew discusses in chapter 19 is discussed more briefly in chapter 10. But Mark only gives the overall comments made by Christ. He quotes Jesus as saying, "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" (Mark 10:11-12). Mark leaves out the "exception clause" which Matthew recorded in both Matthew 5:32

and 9:19. Mark does make one point which Matthew does not make, however, in that he speaks of a wife who "puts away her husband." This shows that either husband or wife might "put away" or "divorce" the other, depending on the "cause."

Luke makes an even briefer comment, quoting Christ as saying: "Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is

put away from her husband committeth adultery" (Luke 16:18). If all we had was the comments quoted by Mark and Luke, we might have reason to assume and believe that there are no grounds for divorce whatsoever. However, Matthew explains the subject in much greater detail, and explains it TWICE, so that we are left with *no excuse* for not understanding the truth of the matter.

### *Marriage and the True Gospel*

Those who stress the importance of marriage in God's sight are correct, in that it is very important, and is not something we should take for granted. Marriage is indeed a TYPE of the relationship between Christ and the Church. The Church of God will MARRY Christ at His return (Rev.19:7-9). Today, the Church is the espoused or betrothed BRIDE of Christ, being prepared for the upcoming nuptials (Eph.5:23-27). If any church member forsakes Christ, is not faithful, and begins to commit spiritual "adultery," by worshipping false gods or some form of "idolatry," that member would disqualify for being part of the Bride of Christ which is to marry Him at His coming. If the member repented, however, and put away his or her sin, and returned to Christ in faithful obedience and worship, they would be forgiven and accepted (I John 1:9).

The marriage of Christ and the Church, of course, will be for ALL ETERNITY! It will last "forever." The wife will be composed of spirit born members of the Family of God -- and as such will never sin -- she will be incapable of sin -- and will never commit "adultery." The Son of God, Christ Himself, also will never commit adultery. They will be faithful to each other for eternity. That marriage will last forever!

However, does this fact prove that *human* marriages between flesh-and-blood human beings, are also ordained *forever* and that nothing can break them up? Not at all! Remember, Christ and the born-again Church, born of Spirit at the resurrection, will both be PERFECT! However, flesh-and-blood human beings are most certainly NOT perfect! Therefore, human marriages are not automatically "eternal," till death. They are "conditional." Their existence and continuity depends on the FAITHFULNESS of the two partners involved. If one were to commit adultery, that one would be worthy of death, and by God's law could receive -- and ultimately will receive -- the DEATH penalty, unless he (or she) comes to full repentance!

As a type of God's "Kingdom," however, marriage is very important in God's sight. It must not be treated lightly. Any who pervert God's teachings about "marriage" are indeed guilty of "perverting the gospel"! By analogy, any who teach that Christ would be eternally BOUND to His "wife," the Church, *even if the Church committed idolatry, fornication, adultery, and harlotry, by following Satan the devil, would be guilty of teaching "another GOSPEL"* (Galatians 1:6-10; II Cor.11:1-3).

*Christ is not bound to 'live forever' with a rebellious Bride or a harlotrous Wife!*

To try to compare a perfect Christ and Bride with an imperfect human marriage, however, is like comparing apples and oranges. You cannot do it. The contrasts are greater than the similarities.

### *Absurdities and Nonsense*

The ministerial writers of the research paper for the Worldwide Church of God -- who claim the 1973 marriage and divorce booklet of Herbert Armstrong is correct in its teachings -- go on to make the statement:

"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. . . But once bound, there is no putting away -- no divorce -- for *any* reason" (page 3).

Do you see the absurdity in that statement? By trying to compare human marriage between fallible, weak, human beings, with the perfect marriage between PERFECT HUSBAND AND WIFE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD -- two spirit beings, Christ and "The Church" -- the writers totally overstate their case and miss the real point. By their reasoning, IF for some reason the Church decided NOT to be faithful to Christ, in the Kingdom, *He would have no recourse but to stay bound to an idolatrous, harlotrous, whoring Wife -- FOR ALL ETERNITY!*

Do you think that either Christ or God the Father would stand for such a situation, *for all eternity? NONSENSE!* The penalty or wages of "sin" is DEATH (Romans 6:23). IF such a situation came to exist, even AFTER the Church married Christ in the Kingdom, then God would deal with it even as He has dealt and will deal with Satan the devil, that spirit being who SINNED "from the beginning" (John 8:44). He would "terminate" the existence of such a "Bride" (see Heb.2:14; Matt.25:40; Ezek.28:16-19; Isa.14:12-16).

It is absurd to think that Christ could not, if He chose, put away a sinning, rebellious wife, and then would be free to marry another!

The writers of the research paper go so far as to declare:

"Romans 7:1-3 negates any chance of finding a 'loophole' . . . . 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!" (p.3).

Again, this reasoning is absurd and ludicrous. As we have seen, Romans 7:1-3 does not "negate" the very words of Christ. The fact that "fornication" or adultery and similar sins of "unfaithfulness" actually nullify and can negate a marriage was made crystal clear by Christ. This is not a "loophole." This "exception" to the overall rule that marriage is INTENDED to be for life, but *it doesn't have to be if one or more of the members of the marriage BREAK THE MARITAL COVENANT, is not a "loophole" but an example of the WISDOM and MERCY of a loving God, who never intended two people to be bound to each other if one hates the other, or if the two of them hate each other's guts, and if one or both of them willfully commit adultery and every other heinous abomination because of their hatred of their spouse!*

MARRIAGE IS A CONDITIONAL COVENANT, as are all covenants. God Himself showed this to be true when He *DIVORCED ISRAEL because of her harlotry and whoredom -- her "adulteries"!* Even so, a man or woman has the right to divorce their mate, if he or she

becomes guilty of gross adultery, harlotry, and whoredom!

Contrary to the writers of the absurd statements above, to permit divorce and remarriage in case of adultery, and similar acts of *porneia* -- gross sexual immorality and unfaithfulness -- does not at all deny the need of faithfulness to Christ. Rather, it illustrates perfectly the need to be faithful to Him -- *or else He will "put us away" -- divorce us!* He is not "bound" to accept us, and remain faithful to us, *no matter what we do*, or how we behave! This teaching smacks of the "NO LAW" teaching of the apostates who say we are saved NOW, eternally, no matter how much we sin or turn to do evil!

These ministerial writers also declare:

"But what about *porneia* after marriage? Does God allow divorce from a *bound* marriage for this?

"**EMPHATICALLY NO!**" (page 22).

Do you see that? Christ Himself said the **ONLY** grounds for divorce is *porneia*, in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, yet these yokels, these misbegotten madmen, have the audacity to **DISAGREE WITH CHRIST HIMSELF!** He said *porneia IS grounds for divorce -- PERIOD!* But they say, "**EMPHATICALLY NO!**"

Whom will you believe? Christ? or these swaggering ministerial miscreants who profess to be "men of God"?

The teaching of permitting divorce and remarriage under the *Biblically approved and sanctioned "exceptions"* is upheld by the Word of God, the example of the God of the Old Testament Himself, who was the Pre-existent Christ, and is in complete accordance with the very words of Christ Himself.

To deny this is to set oneself as *more righteous than God, as "holier" than God*, and as one who sets standards *even God Himself* never set or expects us to achieve!

To claim there are absolutely **NO GROUNDS** for divorce, whatsoever, no matter what, is to "**PUT A YOKE upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear**" (Acts 15:10). *It is to put a YOKE OF BONDAGE AND SLAVERY on the necks of all the disciples and all true Christians! As Peter declared, "Now therefore WHY DO YE TEMPT GOD, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?"* (Acts 15:10).

Why, *indeed!*

The writers of the research paper, all ministers and theologians of the Worldwide Church of God, declared in their study paper the following words:

"What God has joined in *holy* matrimony -- 'let no man put asunder.' Man is **NOT ALLOWED** to break apart the indissoluble bond of marriage that God has bound.

There are NO EXCEPTIONS!" (page 8).

And elsewhere they write:

"God's law of marriage is plain. Once bound by cleaving together in a one-flesh relationship, there is *NO WAY OUT* except by the death of one of the marital partners. *That* law has NO EXCEPTIONS!" (page 9, my emphasis on "no way out," their emphasis on the rest!).

Do you see how they have read into the text what simply is not there? Jesus did NOT say men are "not allowed" to break apart the bond of marriage. He simply said, "Let no man put [it] asunder." That is, men should not do it. But where do they get this "There are NO EXCEPTIONS!""??? Later on, in this same passage, verse 9, Jesus Himself plainly GIVES AN EXCEPTION -- He sets forth a circumstance which would NULLIFY the covenant which God has bound! He Himself said, "*EXCEPT it be for fornication [porneia]*" (v.9)!

How DARE men, supposedly ministers of God, make such iron-clad, rigid, blasphemous statements, when Jesus Christ Himself in the very next verses goes on to PROVIDE THE BIBLICAL GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE!

### ***"Heavy Burdens"***

Yet these self-acknowledged "scholars" and "ministers," set impossible standards which nobody can keep! They create rules and regulations which NO MAN can live up to! Some, trying to follow their teachings on divorce and remarriage, forced to separate from their beloved mate because the church called the union "adulterous, went on to COMMIT SUICIDE! They simply could not stand the psychological pressure and despair which came upon them from having to separate from their beloved mate, and live alone, for the rest of their natural lives.

*Suicide!* Yes, I said some have, as a result of these callous, cruel teachings, even in their despair and agony gone out and committed *SUICIDE!*

Those are the "FRUITS" of this diabolical, devilish, Satanic teaching that there are NO grounds for divorce -- none whatsoever!

Such inhuman and unrealistic teachings and requirements are worse than the "circumcision" requirements imposed on the early church by certain Judaizers (Acts 15:1-7). I feel toward those hypocrites and self-righteous ministers who demand one live for the rest of his life with an unfaithful spouse, or remain single, just as the apostle Paul did toward those in his day who insisted that Gentile Christians "must" be circumcised in the flesh in order to be saved. He said, "I wish those who unsettle you would *castrate themselves!*" (Galatians 5:12).

That's right! Paul actually wrote that he wished those "legalists" would go and CASTRATE THEMSELVES! Pretty plain language, isn't it!

Or, as the Jewish New Testament has it, "I wish the people who are bothering you would *go all the way and castrate themselves*" -- not just "circumcise" the foreskin of their own penis, but cut the whole thing off! -- emasculate themselves!

Moffatt says, "O that those who are upsetting you would get themselves *castrated!*"

Do I make my point? These modern self-righteous Pharisees, who impose upon men burdens which they themselves do not have to bear, are no better than the Pharisees of Christ's time -- legalists -- who add their own laws to the Scriptures, making them a burdensome yoke of horrendous bondage and weight, which no man can carry or sustain!

Jesus Christ said of such men, "For they bind *heavy burdens and grievous to be borne*, and lay them upon men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers" (Matthew 23:4). He said of them, "Ye blind guides, which *strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel*. Woe unto you . . . hypocrites!" (Matt.23:24-25). "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (v.33).

Those who would be "more holy than God," who set up religious requirements far in excess of what the Word of God establishes, will be the cause of their own destruction and damnation. Such pride, such arrogance, such stern and strict legalism, is the very thing that Jesus Christ condemned the scribes and Pharisees of His day for binding upon the people, in regards to the Sabbath day, and other commandments! They took them to excess. They turned the simple and wonderful laws of God into hideous monsters of frightful mien and awesome exactitude. They turned simple commandments into *IMPOSSIBLE DEMANDS!*

Christ will surely have a lot to say to them when He returns. Notice what He Himself declared would happen when He once again sets foot on the earth, and ministers come up to Him, claiming to have been serving Him and teaching His Word: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied [preached] *in thy name?* and in thy name have cast out demons? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, *I never knew you: DEPART FROM ME [into everlasting Gehenna Fire!], ye that work iniquity [teach error and bind grievous burdens -- works of "SIN"]*" (Matt.7:22-23).

### ***Getting the Balance -- Marriage Laws for ALL MANKIND***

The "conservative" ministers have at least one thing right. They teach that the laws of God regarding marriage apply to ALL mankind. This truth would seem to be self-evident, since God inaugurated "marriage" in the very beginning, with Adam and Eve.

The truth is, all God's laws are intended for ALL mankind. God makes no distinction between Jew and Gentile. As Paul wrote in the book of Romans, "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the *DOERS* of the law shall be justified" (Rom.2:13). He went on, "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing them witness . . . Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will . . . And art confident that thou thyself are a guide of the blind, a light to them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? . . .

Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, JUDGE THEE, who by the letter and circumcision doth *transgress* the law?" (Rom.2:14-27).

The laws of marriage and divorce apply to ALL mankind. Marriages performed in the world, in society, when a man and a woman take each other as husband and wife, ARE BINDING IN GOD'S SIGHT! God in heaven sees what ALL His children do, upon this earth. He is involved very much in every wedding and marriage, if the conditions are right and the two individuals are old enough and free to marry each other. Indeed, as the Scriptures say, "There is *no respect of persons with God*" (Rom.2:11).

It is God who joins a man and woman together in marriage, just as Jesus Christ said (Matt.19:5-6). One married, they should stay bound in marriage for life. They should be faithful to each other. When problems come up, they should strive to work them out, by discussion, debate, yielding to each other, submitting to one another, in love and kindness and mutual concern (Eph.5:21-22). Wives should understand that God has set the husband to be the "head" of the home, and of the wife, and should honor his authority and submit to it cheerfully and with loving honor and respect, reverencing their husband (Eph.5:22-24, 33).

Husbands, on the other hand, should love their wives, and seek their utmost welfare and good (Eph.5:25), even as Christ Himself loved the Church, and gave His own life for His bride-to-be (v.25). As Paul said, "He that loveth his wife loveth himself" (v.28). So husbands should "nourish" and "cherish" their wives (v.29-33). This mutual relationship of mutual love and adoration should grow and increase all through the marriage, until death -- growing fuller, more comprehensive, more abundant, more glorious and fulfilling, *as each and every year passes!*

Yes, the marriage state is ordained of God. It is holy. That is why, if one person "wrecks" it, by committing adultery, whoredom, and harlotry, this is a serious offense in the sight of God and worthy of DEATH FOR ETERNITY! The sin can be repented of, and we know that all marriage unions in the world are not full of mutual love and fulfilling God's purpose -- we know, therefore, that "temptation" can occur, for either a man or a woman. But temptations were meant to be mastered and overcome! There is NO EXCUSE for sin -- adultery -- or unfaithfulness! However, this being said, if one mate does begin to "stray," and becomes a whoremonger and womanizer, *the wife is not required to stay bound* to such an individual and to put up with his hanky-panky and sexual forays! *She is permitted to DIVORCE HIM!* And vice versa, if a wife begins to stray, and commit harlotry, and adultery, the husband is permitted to *DIVORCE HER, just as God divorced Israel* in the Old Testament!

God Himself set us the example of what is permitted, and what is legal, and what is permissible, according to His divine Law! *And DIVORCE is permitted on grounds of ADULTERY, PROSTITUTION, WHOREDOM, and related sexual sins!*

***So says the inviolable, eternal, immutable WORD OF THE LIVING GOD!***

### ***To "BIND" and "UNbind"***

But some will argue, if GOD has "bound" the union, even Christ said "Let not man put it asunder." What does that mean?

First of all, notice carefully what Jesus Christ did NOT say. He did not say, If God has *bound* them, they are bound for life, *and there is no way out of it -- "no loopholes."* Rather, He simply said that IF God has bound a man and woman in marriage, then "let not" man put it asunder -- that is, man SHOULD NOT put it asunder. He did *not* say man was *incapable* of putting it asunder, or dissolving it. Obviously, then, man CAN do that -- but the point is, *he should not do it*, lest he incur the judgment and wrath of God upon his head!

Another way to look at this verse is as follows: Although man is not to "put asunder" that which God has joined, *this does not mean that GOD HIMSELF cannot "put it asunder," and dissolve such a union!* In fact, as we have already seen, in the case of PORNEIA, Christ said a man MAY "put away" or DIVORCE his wife! He is not to do such a thing, "except it be for PORNEIA," He declared (Matt.19:9). And that means for adultery and related sexual sins with someone other than her husband -- such as philandering, playing the whore at a local "bar," going out with other men, and acting like a "trollop" or harlot.

In such a case he has every right to divorce her and to be done with her, and get on with his life, and marry another woman, if he finds a true "soul-mate." He is not under such a circumstance required to live the life of a Herculean hermit or cerulean celibate for the rest of his life. Not at all! He may marry some one else, if he so chooses, if he should "fall in love" again! But having been put through "hell," once, he should be very careful the second time around not to make the same mistake he made the first time! These lessons and principles also apply to women, of course, if their husbands should be guilty of such immoral conduct and philandering and womanizing.

In such a case, if a man or a woman takes such action against their mate, and DIVORCES them on grounds of infidelity, and adultery, then GOD HIMSELF SEVERES THAT UNION. God bound it in the first place, and He is the One who severs it. Just as the man and woman took each other as husband and wife, and GOD BACKED THEM UP, and "bound" their union, so, if they separate and DIVORCE, on the proper Biblical grounds, then once again, God Himself BACKS UP THEIR DECISION, and makes it authoritative and final -- and HE "unbinds" them, just as He originally "bound" them!

Isn't that perfectly simple, and easy to understand? What's so difficult about it? Why do men want to make impossibly difficult that which God makes so simple and understandable?

### ***Spiritual PORNEIA***

Clearly, Jesus showed us, there are grounds for divorce and remarriage, according to the Word of God -- the Word which we are to live by "every word" (Matt.4:4). Those grounds, He explained, are what constitutes "PORNEIA," which is properly translated "sexual looseness," "sexual immorality," "adultery," "harlotry," "whoring around," and related sexual sins and crimes

which constitute "unfaithfulness" to the marriage contract or covenant. Those are the basic biblical grounds for divorce, if a man or woman -- a husband or a wife -- chooses to act upon them, to sever a marriage one and for all.

Are there any OTHER grounds which would also constitute the equivalent of "porneia" -- such as spiritual "porneia" -- that is, *turning away* from the true God and His true worship, and following after idols and other gods -- turning, for example, to PAGAN practices in religious activity and worship?

The answer is, the Bible uses the Hebrew words *zanah* and *taznuth* to refer to forsaking the truth of God, to "a-whoring" after other gods. The Septuagint, of course, in place of these Hebrew words uses *porneia*, as we have seen. In the New Testament, the same truth holds firm. An excellent write-up and discussion of this truth is found in *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. We read under the phrase, "To go a Whoring, be a Harlot," the following commentary:

"*zanah* (#2181), 'to go a whoring, commit fornication, to be a harlot, serve other gods.'

This is the regular term denoting prostitution throughout the history of Hebrew, with special nuances coming out of the religious experience of ancient Israel. The word occurs approximately 90 times in the Hebrew Old Testament . . .

". . . this term is used most frequently to describe '*SPIRITUAL PROSTITUTION*' in which Israel turned from God to strange gods. Deut.31:16 illustrates this meaning: 'And the Lord said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land . . . and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them.'

"*Zanah* became, then, the common term for spiritual backsliding. The act of harloting after strange gods was more than changing gods, however. This was especially true when Israel went after the Canaanite gods, for the worship of these pagan deities involved actual prostitution with cult prostitutes connected with the Canaanite shrines . . .

"The Book of Hosea, in which Hosea's wife Gomer became unfaithful and most likely was involved in such cult prostitution, again illustrates not only Hosea's heartbreak but also God's own heartbreak because of the unfaithfulness of His wife, Israel. Israel's unfaithfulness appears in Hos.9:1: 'Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy; for thou hast gone a whoring from thy God, thou hast loved a reward upon every cornfloor' (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, p.286-287).

Again, the New Testament equivalent of this Old Testament word *zanah* is the word *porneia*, and it, too, refers to both physical *and spiritual* whoring after idols, and other gods. Says *Vine's Expository Dictionary*, this word applies "(b) metaphorically, of 'the association of *pagan idolatry with doctrines of, and professed adherence to, the Christian faith,*' Rev.14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3; 19:2" (page 252). This reference tool also points out that the related word *porneuo*, "to commit fornication," is also used both literally and metaphorically. Another related word, *ekporneuo*, is a strengthened form of *porneia*, (*ek* is used intensively) and literally means "to give one's self up to fornication," implying excessive indulgence -- i.e., what we today might call *sexual addiction*.

Without a doubt, there is a spiritual "porneia" just as there is a physical "adultery" and

"porneia." In fact, the Scriptures often use the term *porneia* to describe SPIRITUAL ADULTERY AND UNFAITHFULNESS! We read in the book of Revelation, for example, we read of "that woman Jezebel" who calls herself a prophetess -- a false church system or organization -- that "seduces my servants to commit fornication" (Rev.2:10). This Scripture is speaking primarily about *spiritual adultery or fornication*, as the context shows. As people of God, following His way, we should separate ourselves from those who are committing "spiritual porneia" or "prostitution" -- spiritual adultery -- by following the teachings of this paganized Christianity of this world, instead of the laws and commandments of the God of Israel!

In Revelation 17, also, God speaks of "fornication" -- *porneia*, or "whoredom and harlotry" -- in both senses of the term, both the physical and spiritual. Notice:

"And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great *whore* [Greek,  *pornos*, "harlot"] that sits upon many waters: With whom the kings of the earth have committed *fornication* [*porneia*, "whoredom"], and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her *fornication* [*porneia*]" (Rev.17:1-2).

The peoples of the earth are made "drunk" with her false teachings, her blending of pagan doctrines and concepts with Christian and Biblical doctrines, thus perverting the truth and blinding the people, making them foolish and absurd. This is speaking, of course, of *spiritual fornication*, or whoredom -- spiritual *porneia*. In Revelation 18:3 we read, further, "For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her *fornication* [*porneia*], and the kings of the earth have committed *fornication* [*porneia*] with her . . ." Spiritual "porneia" denotes *apostasy*, turning away from the truth, and embracing pagan religious teachings and principles, which cause one to depart from Almighty God and His Word, His truth.

The same principle applies here as it does to physical porneia. Spiritual porneia, of course, applies to a person's relationship with God and Christ, and the Word of God. It is spiritual apostasy, and chasing after "foreign gods," strange "idols," and demonic-inspired religion -- doctrines of demons!

As Paul wrote, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall *depart from the faith*, giving heed to seducing *spirits* and *doctrines of demons*" (I Tim.4:1). If a mate completely apostatizes, and goes off after "strange gods," and leaves the truth of God, utterly and totally, then is a Christian "bound" to continue married to such a mate? If that were true, it could lead to terrible and horrible circumstances. If a woman, for example, becomes demon-possessed, and rages against the truth of God and threatens her husband's very life, is he "bound" to her so long as they both shall live? I know of a case just like that.

Some ministers will tell you they are permanently "bound." But the Word of God says differently! Again, remember the principle: Christ said plainly two people are bound together, *unless one of them is guilty of PORNEIA* -- and *porneia* is defined as 1) harlotry and whoredom, illicit sexual congress and adultery, and 2) spiritually forsaking the truth of God for idols, idol worship, and departing from the true faith. *Either one or both of these conditions can qualify to sever and destroy a marriage, leading to the option of DIVORCE!*

Paul writes, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship

hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial [Satan the devil]? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore COME OUT from among the, and be ye *separate*, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you; And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (II Cor.6:14-18).

If a mate plunges into paganized "Christianity," or devil worship, or witchcraft, or some similar condition of spiritual *porneia*, then a Christian would not be "bound" to continue married to such a person -- even though they were once married in the sight of God. The condition of *spiritual porneia* takes precedence over the original marriage contract, which by its very nature stated that the two would be faithful to each other, and which implied by its very nature that the two would also be faithful to the God of Israel and His Laws! If one should "depart from the faith," and become an "infidel," that is, an "unbeliever," then the marriage could be dissolved on those grounds -- grounds of clear and obvious *spiritual porneia*!

The great false church of this world God calls "Babylon the Great" (Rev.17:5). God says of this "woman" who impersonates the "bride of Christ," but who is really the "bride of Satan" the devil:

"And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her *FORNICATION [PORNEIA]*: And upon her head a name written, *MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS [FALSE, CHRISTIAN-IMPERSONATING CHURCHES] AND ABOMINATIONS of the earth.* And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (Rev.17:4-6).

Clearly, there is a "spiritual fornication" or *porneia*, which is described here, as the teachings and doctrines of that great "Mother Church" of Christendom, "Mother Rome," here called "Babylon the Great," because most of her holidays, holidays, practices, and doctrines stem from and originate in ancient Babylon, the seat of the Babylonian mysteries, the headquarters of the original apostate this side of the Flood, Nimrod and his consort adulteress/wife, Semiramis.

The point should be clear -- adultery is grounds for divorce, both physical adultery, and spiritual adultery! The innocent Christian, or the innocent party, need not to remain "bound" to a mate who is guilty of continuing in such unrighteous and ungodly conduct and behavior! If they do not repent, within a decent interim of time, during which the innocent party exercises patience and forbearance, even as God did for His wife "Israel," then the time comes when the true innocent party, and true Christian, may exercise the final option left to them, by the Word of God -- and DIVORCE the offending and unrepentant party, severing the marriage for the rest of their lives!

What could be plainer than that?

This implies that if a Christian's mate, who is in the church of God, but then becomes an apostate, and flings away the truth of God, and begins to practice spiritual "porneia," or harlotry

and adultery, by consorting with demons, witchcraft, paganized religions, Buddhism, Taoism, tarot cards, crystal-ball gazing, astrology, or paganized Christianity, Roman Catholicism, or any of her "offshoots" or "daughter" churches, then that marriage may be dissolved, that mate may be "put away" and DIVORCED! God does not compel His people to live with or to be "married" to practitioners of the "dark" practices of this world, whether it be witchcraft, or mainstream "Christian" religion which worships "another Jesus" (II Cor.11:1-4). In extreme cases, divorce may be the only solution to the problem.

### *A Closer Look at I Corinthians, Chapter 7*

In I Corinthians, chapter 7, the apostle Paul has a number of interesting things to say about the marriage relationship. Let us notice some of the principles he states in this chapter.

"And unto the married, I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband [strive to stick together, in other words]: But and IF she depart [the situation is such that she simply cannot take the "pressure," abuse, negativism, or whatever it is that drives her to distraction], *let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband:* and let not the husband put away his wife" (I Cor.7: 10-11).

Sometimes stresses and strains in a marriage can reach the "breaking point." She feels he isn't providing for the family, there is not enough food, and maybe she feels he is "selfish" to boot, and inconsiderate of her feelings. Maybe she feels she works too hard, that her husband is a "slave driver," and all she ever does is "work, work, work," with no relief in sight!

At times the pressure can reach the "boiling point," and something has to give, or "explode"! Sometimes a few (or many, as the case may be) well chosen and well placed words can ameliorate the situation. Maybe the husband was simply *unaware* of how his wife felt, or completely *baffled* by her attitude. Maybe they have a difficult time "communicating." Lack of or inability to communicate is at the basis of MANY marriage problems. Some problems sort themselves out, with a little talk back and forth -- *careful and considerate communication*. My wife and I often take walks together in the morning, about 4-5 miles or so, and talk back and forth -- and sometimes get into some heated, heart-felt "discussions," and sometimes have to "back off" and let things "cool down." Sometimes differences of opinions on things leads to verbal "fisticuffs," and we must seek ways to make "peace," and be willing to each listen carefully to the other, and not "put down," or "judge" one another.

But when troubles come, God says the answer to them is NOT DIVORCE! Divorce is only a remedy for the most *serious problems -- such as ADULTERY, HARLOTRY, WOMANIZING, and REFUSAL TO CHANGE AND REPENT!*

On the other hand, what if a husband has the "macho" attitude some men cultivate, from childhood, and "beats" and physically "abuses" his wife? What should she do, in such a situation as this? Well, here the words of the apostle Paul clearly apply. She may "leave" him, if it is necessary, to preserve her sanity, peace of mind, and physically protect herself from harm and injury. In such a case, a separation would not be wrong. *In EXTREME CASES of physical abuse, and continuing non-repentance, with accompanying womanizing, and drunkenness, which often all go together, she would be within her rights to DIVORCE the man and TERMINATE the*

marriage.

As Paul goes on to explain:

"But to the rest speak I, not the Lord [this is Paul's own inspired opinion, but not a clear-cut, "Thus saith the Lord," in other words]: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and *she be pleased to dwell with him, let him NOT put her away.* And the woman that hath an husband that believeth not, *if he be pleased to dwell with her, LET HER NOT LEAVE HIM [obviously, if he is "pleased" to live with her as husband and wife, he will not mistreat her, or abuse her!].*

"For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband [that is the unbelieving mates are "set apart" in God's sight, He looks upon them in a special way, even though they are not yet "converted"]: else were your children unclean; but now are they *holy [God looks upon the children as "set apart," sanctified, and "holy" because of the presence of the converted and godly parent].*

"But IF THE UNBELIEVING DEPART, *LET HIM DEPART.* A brother or a sister is *NOT UNDER BONDAGE* in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.

"For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife? But as God has distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk" (II Cor.7:12-17).

Clearly, the marriage state should be preserved, if at all possible. The believer should not leave or desert the unbelieving mate. The marriage is a special union in God's sight, and the unbelieving mate is "sanctified" or "set apart" by the converted mate. So long as they can live together in peace, harmony, and are "pleased" -- happy, content -- to dwell or live with each other, then that is the way it should be. *But if the unbelieving becomes UNpleased, and begins to make very difficult demands, including breaking God's laws, such as the Sabbath, Holy Days, or other laws of God, then the believing mate should PUT GOD FIRST, even if it comes to having to DEPART from the persecution and pressure of the unbelieving mate!*

Peter stated this principle very plainly when he told the Pharisees, "We must OBEY GOD rather than man" (Acts 5:29).

In such a case, however, unless the unbelieving mate commits the sin of physical or spiritual *porneia*, the Christian mate should remain unmarried, and divorce is not an option. Divorce is only permitted on the Biblical grounds of adultery, fornication, harlotry, womanizing, homosexuality, promiscuity, and similar sins -- *porneia*. In principle, that includes spiritual *idolatry and chasing after pagan false gods, demon gods, and any aspect of devil worship, whether it be out-and-out witchcraft or involvement in one of the devil's false churches.*

In some cases, therefore, a Christian woman may be forced to flee for her life from an abusive, destructive, and sadistic mate, who hates the truth of God. In such cases, she may need to remain single for the rest of her life, or till Christ comes, depending on the circumstances.

But there is one more situation which we need to understand. What if one mate forsakes the other, runs out on the marriage, and deserts his or her mate totally -- runs off to another state,

another life, another "relationship," perhaps, and completely leaves his or her own "family" to their own resources. What about the act of "desertion"?

### ***What about DESERTION?***

A real brouhaha and barn-burning controversy has erupted over the question of "desertion." Those who feel there is absolutely NO grounds for divorce, of course, also believe that if a mate deserts the other mate, that is definitely not grounds for divorce and remarriage. But what does the Word of God say?

Notice again the words of the apostle Paul in I Corinthians, chapter 7:

"But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A BROTHER OR A SISTER IS *NOT UNDER BONDAGE* in such cases" (I Cor.7:15).

"Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed? Are thou LOOSED from a wife? seek not a wife" (I Cor.7:27).

"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 about this matter of "desertion"? In the military, if a soldier or a sailor "deserts," and goes AWOL, during time of war or national emergency, the penalty is DEATH -- usually by a firing squad. Desertion is a very serious crime. A true believer and Christian should NEVER desert a mate, or fail to do their part to make a marriage work. The only case where a woman should leave a man is if he is so brutal, abusive, and unbearable, that she cannot stand it and her life itself may be in danger. If there are violent tendencies, and the threat of violence, whether the mate is sober or drunk, then the Christian mate would have grounds to leave, and separate from the offending mate.

However, in most cases desertion would be a serious sin. As Paul told Timothy, "For if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, *he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an INFIDEL*" (I Tim.5:8). Men who "desert" their wives and children, with no legitimate reason for doing so, are an abomination in the sight of God. They have abdicated their God-given responsibility, and "run off" and like the cowards they are, they will be held accountable.

Of course, God knows all circumstances. If a man's wife is the virago, the shrew, the termagant spoken of by Solomon in the book of Proverbs, a veritable fisher's wife, a scolding, loud-mouthed, screaming "bitch," then we would have to consider the circumstances. In such a case, maybe the man was justified to leave -- to protect his own health, safety, sanity, and well-being. Some wives can be vicious, violent, and threatening, also! Solomon wrote:

"Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith" (Proverbs 15:17).

"Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices and strife" (Prov.17:1).

"It is better to dwell in the wilderness [Hebrew, "in the land of the desert"], than with a contentious and an angry woman" (Prov.21:19).

"A foolish son is the calamity of his father: and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping" (Prov.19:13).

"It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman and in a wide house" (Proverbs 25:24).

If a man's situation is such that his wife is contentious, and a brawler, and he is simply unable to live with her, then I suppose he might, in some situations, be justified to separate from her -- but he would not be justified to DIVORCE her, or to marry another woman! For a woman to be contentious, angry, or a brawling and scolding type of person is NOT grounds for divorce - it is NOT "porneia"!

Clearly, as I Corinthians 7:39 says, a wife is "BOUND" by the law to her husband so long as he lives -- and so long as he truly is her "husband." And a man is "BOUND" to his wife so long as she lives -- and so long as she is truly his "wife."

But what about I Corinthians 7:15 -- "But if the unbelieving *depart*, let them depart. A brother or a sister is *not under BONDAGE* in such cases"?

What does this actually mean? `

Although it is God alone who "binds" a marriage, in principle, He does use human instruments to "tie the knot." Ministers perform weddings and marriages, pointing out the rules and agreements that are involved in the marriage covenant. Similarly, although it is God alone who "unbinds" marriages, He can and does do that very thing when the proper conditions have been met, when one party to the marriage contract has defrauded and broken the contract, thereby rendering it null and void in God's sight.

God also inspires His ministers, if they call upon Him and look to Him in judgment, and gives them discernment to determine if and when a marriage has "crossed the brink" and gone beyond the point of salvaging -- i.e., when either *porneia*, *desertion*, and *spiritual porneia*, are clearly involved, and there is no repentance forthcoming, when time has been given for the sinning party to repent and change his (or her) ways.

### *A Time for Mercy and Forgiveness*

Judging by the clear evidence of the Old Testament, and the example of God Himself, as well as the example of His prophet Hosea, who was married to a prostitute, it is not God's will for a mate to issue a summary "judgment" on their spouse after only "one" offense of adultery. Rather, God's example and way bespeak the necessity of forgiveness, if there is genuine, heart-felt repentance!

We read in Ezekiel 16, how God was very patient and pleaded for Israel to repent, and come to her senses, even though He was divorced from her. He did not remarry someone else, although He could have. Rather, he waited patiently, and faithfully, holding out His hands in a

very loving and merciful attitude. God's attitude toward His wife was to implore her to repent -- an to wait patiently, and give her plenty of opportunity to do so. He did not just "cut her off" at the first infraction of HIS LAW!

Similarly, we find that Hosea was told to marry a prostitute. Now, normally this would seem like a ridiculous commandment! What kind of life could Hosea have with such a wanton and wild woman? But God was teaching a lesson. He told His prophet, "Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD" (Hosea 1:2). "So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son" (verse 3). The whole lesson of the book of Hosea is that Israel became a harlot, and Ephraim joined himself to idols, and forsook the LORD, their true "Husband." Yet time and time again, God pleaded for Israel to return to Him, and He would forgive them, and bless and prosper them as if they had never departed or sinned in the first place!

Eventually, the book of Hosea shows, Israel WILL repent, and turn to God, and then will be incredibly blessed (Hosea 14:1-2). God says of Israel, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon" (Hos.14:4-5). How wonderful such a reconciliation is!

And so Paul tells us, "And so ALL ISRAEL shall be saved" (Rom.11:26). Yes, the Bible shows that Israel as a whole WILL repent, and then God will accept them back, and HE WILL RENEW HIS MARRIAGE VOWS WITH ISRAEL!

This truth is not generally understood. Most "Christians" seem to think that God has rejected Israel, finally, since "Israel" rejected Him and His truth. Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God, and many of its off-shoots, teach that the marriage of Christ/The Logos to Old Testament Israel was terminated *by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross!* Now, they teach, He is free to marry a different "wife" -- the Church!

But is this true? Just what is the Church, anyway? Paul calls the Church by the term "the Israel of God" (Gal.6:16).

### ***Coming Soon: A NEW "Marriage Covenant"!***

Paul also wrote, "I say then, hath God cast away his people? God forbid. . . . God hath *not cast away his people* which he foreknew" (Rom.11:1-2). Paul explains, "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that *blindness in part has happened to Israel*, until the fullness of the Gentiles come in. And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Sion a Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is *my covenant* [a marriage covenant, remember] unto them, when I shall take away their sins" (Rom.11:25-27).

In other words, GOD IS YET GOING TO RE-MARRY "ISRAEL"! This time, however, He is going to make sure that she has the right "Spirit"! He is going to give her His Holy Spirit!

Notice! God says, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make A NEW [MARRIAGE] COVENANT *with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah*: Not according to the old covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; *because they continued not in my covenant* [they broke it, rejecting Him, and committing spiritual prostitution!], and I regarded them not, saith the Lord [He divorced them!].

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel *after those days*, saith the Lord; *I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts*: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Heb.8:8-10).

Notice! God did not permanently divorce Israel. In the future, He is going to change their nature, their hearts, by His Holy Spirit dwelling within them, giving them the spirit of repentance. And at that time, He will marry Israel once again -- this time for GOOD! This time Israel will remain faithful! We in the Church of God are "forerunners," "firstfruits," of this divine marriage! But as Paul wrote, the time is coming when "ALL ISRAEL shall be saved" (Rom.11:26). The entire earth will be covered with the knowledge of God (Isaiah 11:9). All mankind will come to repentance, and enter into this NEW COVENANT -- this NEW "marriage contract" between God and His people! (see Jer.31:31-34; 32:40; 33:14-26; Ezek.37:21-27).

What a wonderful truth this is! Israel is going to repent, and God is going to forgive her all her sins, and He is once again going to MARRY ISRAEL! We, who are called of God today, are the "FIRSTFRUITS" of that wonderful marriage union (see Jas.1:18; Rom.8:23; Rev.14:4).

### ***How Should This Affect OUR Marriages?***

What does this mean for us, if our mate goes astray, then?

As Peter wrote in his second epistle, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is *longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that ALL should come to repentance*" (II Pet.3:9).

Even as God has been long-suffering and patient, waiting for Israel to repent and to come to her senses, so we should be patient, and long-suffering, seeking reconciliation with our mates, if there is adultery, and strive to bring about a reconciliation. Of course, this is not always possible. When there is no chance of reconciliation, and the "fruits" prove it beyond doubt, then one is free to divorce and remarry. However, God never intended men or women to "jump at the first chance" they get, in order to break up a marriage! That would be a carnal, wicked, ungodly attitude. God waited patiently for His wife to repent. She did not, and He finally divorced her. But when she finally does repent, He will marry her again -- with a NEW "contract" or "covenant" of marriage!

God's way, obviously, is to show mercy and forgiveness. It is not always easy. But it is the best way, if the sinning partner is willing to repent and to change. Divorce, in most all cases, is a very miserable, unhappy, and the least desirable option. It should be viewed as a "court of last resort." When all else fails, and all other recourses fail, and nothing else works -- and

reconciliation is impossible -- then . . . and only then . . . should one take that irrevocable step, and go the route of "divorce."

As Solomon wrote, in the book of Ecclesiastes, by implication, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (Eccl.3:1). There is a time for marriage -- a very happy, joyous time. But there is also a "time for divorce" -- a most unhappy, traumatic, and said time.

One may, at times, hope for reconciliation, and saving a marriage. But there is a time when "time runs out." There is a time when it becomes "too late" for repentance. The fruits show that it is hopeless. The evidence shows that reconciliation is impossible. Maybe the mate goes and marries someone else. And starts a new family. Maybe they lose complete and total interest. Whenever the "time of no return" or "point of no return" is reached, then the individual must decide what they are going to do with the rest of their physical life here on this earth. That time must be ultimately determined by the offended party, by the mate who has been sinned against. How long will they wait for their mate to repent of harlotry, whoring, adultery, desertion, spiritual harlotry, or the equivalent sins? How long will they endure the situation? What are the hopes or chances of an eventual reconciliation? They themselves must address those questions, and make their own decision before God and Christ.

In some cases, depending on the extent of the *porneia*, and the attitude of the mate, divorce might be decided upon relatively soon. In other cases, the offended mate may decide to wait for a long, long time, before "giving up" on his or her partner. Some may choose to wait till the coming of Christ, and simply choose to never remarry, though they could do so.

Some, based on their mate's unfaithfulness and remarriage to another, showing that there is virtually zero hope of any reconciliation, might then consider remarriage themselves.

### ***When a Marriage Ends, Then What?***

If there is clearly no desire on their part to repent, and save the marriage, then -- as God says -- "a brother or a sister IS *NOT UNDER BONDAGE* in such cases" (I Cor.7:15). That is, they would be free to divorce, and then to remarry somebody else!

The word for "bondage" in this verse is #1402 in *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, and is the word *donioo*, meaning "to enslave," "bring into or under bondage," "become (or make) a servant" or "slave." It is derived from the word *doulos*, which means "a slave," "frequently therefore in a qualified sense of subjection or subservience." Says *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*, the word *donioo* literally means, "to make a SLAVE of, reduce to BONDAGE."

What, then, is the meaning of a Christian mate "not under bondage" if their mate leaves or forsakes them -- deserts them? The answer should be clear: It means they are NO LONGER CONSIDERED BOUND TO THEM IN MARRIAGE!

By deserting and running out of a mate, the one who deserted is guilty of BREAKING THE MARRIAGE COVENANT in a flagrant, unmollified, egregious manner. What they have

done is equivalent to PORNEIA -- gross unfaithfulness, desertion, and dereliction of all familial and matrimonial duties. In such a case, a brother or a sister would not be considered bound in marriage any longer to such a person, and would be free to seek and to obtain a divorce, and to marry another individual, if they so choose, "only in the Lord," as Paul qualifies (I Cor.7:39).

### *Who Has AUTHORITY to Make Decisions?*

Obviously, there would be many times when people, seeking to obey God, would want the counsel of a true minister of God, *who understands the Scriptures*, to give them counsel and advice concerning their marital problems. These problems are not easy, nor are the answers to each situation necessarily 'self-evident.' How should such matters be resolved? How should personal situations be handled?

Jesus Christ told His disciples, the leaders of His Church:

"And I will give unto thee the KEYS TO 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" (Matt. 16:19).

Jesus gave His ministry the power and authority to make binding decisions regarding matters of doctrine, and interpretation of the laws of God, as they apply to the Church, and members of the Church of God. This authority He delegated to them, as His representatives here on earth. Of course, He made it clear that *all their decisions must be based on the WORD OF GOD*. Every decision must be in accordance with God's law, His purpose, and His truth. Any decision made by any man to the contrary would automatically be "null and void."

As Isaiah the prophet declared: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to THIS WORD, it is because there is *no light in them*" (Isaiah 8:20).

The Williams Translation gives us more insight into the real meaning of Matthew 16:19 and the matter of "binding and loosing." Notice:

"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."

Clearly, any decision made by a minister of God, or a group of ministers of God, **MUST** comply with the Heavenly Edict -- the Word of GOD -- and conform to His eternal Law! That is why God's TRUE ministers *must understand this subject of divorce and remarriage, and not PERVERT THE WORD OF GOD!* By doing so, they could literally ruin -- and many have already ruined -- the lives of innocent, naive, sincere children of God, who are seeking their advice as if it were from God Himself! Woe be to that minister who perverts, and twists, and distorts, the plain truth of God's Word!

This God-given authority which He gives the ministry, is only given conditionally, that is, so that they will teach the word and law of God properly, with love and understanding. As Paul wrote, "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are OVER you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their

work's sake" (I Thess.5:12-13).

Paul also explains, "For the bishop [minister] must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre [money-grubbing greedy individual]; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate [has self-control]; *holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught*, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince [convict] the gainsayers" (Titus 1:7-9).

Again, Paul shows it is the ministry who alone are qualified to rule in such matters. He writes, "Remember them which have the RULE over you, who have *spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conduct: Jesus Christ, the same, yesterday, today, and forever*" (Heb.13:7-8).

Paul adds, "OBEY them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that *must give account*, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Heb.13:17).

Any decisions reached by the ministry, in any case, must be in accordance with the LAW and the WORD of God! And if it is, then it is most surely BINDING upon the individual! That decision, in a marriage and divorce case, may be that a particular marriage is binding, or that a particular marriage is NOT binding. A decision may be made to "LOOSE" a person from a particular marriage situation -- or not to "loose" someone. All the factors involved must be carefully sorted out and weighed. All the evidence must be carefully sifted through, and considered deeply and solemnly, without failure. No piece may be ignored, or dismissed. The lives of people can surely be effected, and therefore loving consideration and due diligence must be made to get all the pertinent facts, before rendering a decision. But when that decision is made, in accordance with prayer and the Word of God, it does become binding.

God told ancient Israel -- and the same principle applies to the Church, which is the "Israel of God" (Gal.6:16):

"If a false matter rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong; then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days [the ministry of God]; and the judges shall make *diligent inquisition [to get ALL the facts]*: and behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from you. And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you. And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Deut.19:16-21).

Notice also God's instructions for His priests, which would include the ministers of His true Church:

"If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the LORD thy God shall choose; and thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites [or, today, the ministry of God's church!], and unto the judge that shall be in those

days, and inquire; and they shall shew thee the *sentence of judgment*: and thou shalt OBSERVE TO DO according to ALL that they inform thee; according to the *sentence of the LAW* which they shall TEACH thee, and according to the *JUDGMENT* which they shall tell thee, thou SHALT DO: thou shalt not DECLINE from the *sentence* which they shall shew thee, to the right hand nor to the left.

*"And the man that will do presumptuously, and will NOT HEARKEN unto the priest [or minister] that standeth to minister there before the LORD thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall DIE: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously" (Deuteronomy 17:8-13).*

These are certainly serious considerations, and not to be taken lightly. But Jesus Christ plainly gave authority to His servants, His ministry, to make decisions for people based on the laws of God -- just as He did in ancient Israel, for the priests, Levites, and judges to make such decisions that affected the population of Israel, and matters of controversy.

God put His ministry into effect so that they could be used by Him to build up and strengthen, to teach and promote unity and spiritual growth, in the body of Christ. As Paul wrote, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers: for the *perfecting* of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the EDIFYING of the body of Christ: *Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect [fully mature] man*, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be *no more children, tossed to and fro*, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but *speaking the truth in love*, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh *increase of the body* unto the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:11-16).

### ***What Should You Do?***

Needless to say, marriage is a vitally important matter in God's sight. It is very important that we seek wise counsel when considering getting married. Solomon wrote, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance. . ." (Eccl.3:1-4). He might have added, "a time to marry, and a time to refrain from marriage; a time to divorce, and a time to refrain from divorcing."

It is not easy to live together in marriage. There are always trials, tests, and "problems" that arise, sooner or later, in any marriage. God intended men and women to marry, and to produce "holy seed" or godly children. He commanded Adam and Eve, and through them all the rest of us, as a whole, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Gen.1:28).

Solomon also wrote, "A prudent wife is from the LORD" (Prov.19:14). He added, "Whoso findeth a wife, findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the LORD" (Prov.18:22).

True as these things are, Solomon also wrote, 'Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands' (Prov.14:1). And he also warned, "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones" (Prov.12:4).

How can one find a truly good wife, or husband? Solomon also wrote, "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety" (Prov.11:14). He said, somewhat along the same lines, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed" (Prov.13:20).

Seeking a wise, godly, and good mate is like searching for hidden treasure. You must be diligent, spend your time wisely, and don't look in foolish or stupid places (like "bars," B-joints, night-clubs, etc.). Evaluate people you meet wisely and prudently, don't be naive or believe every word you hear.

As Solomon also warned, "The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man [or woman] looketh well to his going" (Prov.14:15).

In the final analysis, a good, prudent, righteous mate is "from the Lord." Such a mate is a precious "gift" from God! We must appreciate such gifts, and thank God for them profusely, and often, and show our appreciation by the love that we show our mate. As Solomon also wrote, perhaps with a tinge of despair, as he considered his own life's quest for a good mate, "Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her . . . She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life" (Prov.31:10-12).

Solomon concluded, of such a woman, "She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates" (Prov.31:26-31).

### *The Blessing of Marriage*

There can be no doubt that a godly, righteous marriage, between two individuals who truly love one another, is one of the GREATEST BLESSINGS of this present human life!

A good, solid, stable marriage, between two "love birds," is the foundation for a happy, joyous, and prosperous family, with radiant and healthy children, and wonderful companionship and family fellowship.

David the king and prophet of God, wrote under divine inspiration,

"Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it. Unless the LORD keep the city, the watchmen waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he [God] giveth his beloved sleep.

"Lo, children are an HERITAGE OF THE LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate" (Psalm 127:1-5).

Continuing this same wonderful theme of the godly home, David explains the secret of a truly happy home in the next Psalm, Psalm 128. Notice the following deep and insightful words of wisdom and meditation:

"Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labor of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128:1-6).

God's Laws were ordained for our good, for our welfare. They were created to sustain our family and society, in righteousness and abundance. But when they are broken, they exact a frightful and awful toll of misery, wretchedness, ruin, destruction, and death.

God's Laws of Marriage, and Divorce, were also both enacted by the Wise Legislator of the Universe, for our benefit and for the well being of our homes and marriages. God never intended for marriages to be ruinous battlegrounds of war and hatred spilling over and swamping all the potential blessings of life. God never intended for ministers, who claim to represent Him, to challenge and besmirch and pervert His glorious marriage laws, and divorce laws, by their insidious and evil misinterpretations, and gross errors. But we do not live in a perfect world. There is a lot of foolish teaching, unbalanced and prejudicial ranting and raving, and wicked and self-righteous nonsense, being put forth as if it were the pristine and golden "truth of God."

As the old saying goes, "Let the buyer beware." And let the man and woman of God also "beware."

In the Christian world, today, there are two extremes -- one on the right hand, the "right-wingers," and one on the left hand, the "left-wingers." The "left-wingers" are the ones who say that virtually everything goes, you may divorce whenever you please, however you please, for whatever grounds or reasons you please. They are the "no-fault" divorce ministers, who don't really care if you divorce or not, so long as you support them with your tithes and offerings!

On the right-wing side of the fence, however, we have the crusty old reactionaries who are so rigid that they make ice look soft and malleable! They are like iron, in that they refuse to change, or admit error. They would rather cling to things they way they were taught 40 or 50 years ago, and refuse to believe that they could have been WRONG!

The interesting thing is, of course, that both sides quote the Word of God to support their beliefs. Both extremist camps ridicule the other side, and hurl barbed javelins at each other, accusing each other of self-condemnation. Both sides are insidiously and assiduously in grave

and impervious error. Both sides are BLIND to the truth of God -- and fail to see its real glory, truth, and beauty. Jesus Christ warned, "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matt.15:14).

The apostle Paul told Timothy about such ministers and people, when he warned him, "But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing them that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive of him at his will" (II Timothy 2:23-26).

God's way, on the other hand, is the way of "moderation" in all things (Phil.4:5). His is the way of true BALANCE, fairness, equity, and judgment. His is not the way of stentorian cruelty which inflicts horrible punishments upon the innocent. Nor is it the way of permissiveness and promiscuity, ending in disease and death.

As the people of God, we need to avoid BOTH EXTREMES! As Solomon so wisely wrote: "My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the *midst of thine heart*. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look *straight before thee*. Ponder the paths of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. ***Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left***; remove thy foot from evil" (Proverbs 4:20-27). God will surely bless those people who carefully and rightly "divide" His word, and obey His Law, and avoid every extreme position which constitutes "sin."