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STUDY PAPER
MARRIAGE & DIVORCE

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INTRODUCTION

GREETINGS!

This study paper is preliminary! And it is just that -- both preliminary and a study paper. It is not the last word in every technical point. We prepared it for your information, future sermons, Bible Studies, personal counseling, etc. It represents only a fraction of research material available. But I thought it best to place it in your hands now, before you return home to your congregations -- so that you may be "well-armed." A second and expanded edition of this material, more complete, will be forthcoming soon. In fact, I encourage all who are interested to submit their questions, additions, comments, etc. (to Dr. Dorothy) for consideration in the preparation of the second edition of this doctrinal discussion of divorce and remarriage. Comment on this study paper, on what you've heard at the Conference, on what you feel. (Also to follow will be a fully-revised booklet for the general membership and public.)

The subject of divorce and remarriage is of seemingly endless ramifications and individual judgmental problems. Much work has already been done on these many individual "cases" which arise (most of which were brought out in the doctrinal workshops), and this material will be sent to you via the Bulletin, personal communications, etc. By the way, I am setting up an informal committee, consisting of C. Wayne Cole, Herman L. Hoeh, and Charles V. Dorothy (along with others in CAD), to help you with counsel and guidance in "borderline cases." But -- and I stress this -- you do not have to report to, or check with, these men. They are here to advise. The decision in "borderline" cases must be the sole responsibility of the individuals involved.

Thanks for a great Conference!



P.S. Please remember to exhort our former "D&R's" to exercise extreme caution and care, allowing for much prayer and counsel, before entering into a new marriage. The sanctity and permanency of marriage cannot be stressed enough!

THE EXTENT OF DIVORCE IN THE WORLD
OF THE FIRST CENTURY

To what extent was divorce and remarriage practiced in the time of Christ? This question needs to be answered if we are to properly evaluate the New Testament teachings on the subject.

As we might expect, there are no extant public surveys or exact statistics on marriage and divorce available from the 1st century Roman world. But we do have a number of indications which allow us to compare their situation with today's. The ancient writings leave us in little doubt as to the overall picture of morality and matrimony.

The Hellenistic World

The loose morals of the Greeks are proverbial. Such a book as Hans Licht's Sexual Life in Ancient Greece gives enough of the gory details to satisfy any doubter. Public masturbation was apparently common and is even clearly depicted on vases from the time. Frequentation of the brothels by young men was taken as a matter of course.

The Hellenistic world was dominated by Rome and epitomized by Roman society. The early Roman Republic was so strict, Dionysius made the incredible statement there were no divorces for the first 500 years. But contemporary writers of the later Republic and early Empire make it obvious the good old days lay in the dim past. Even before the first Caesar (Julius, died 44 B.C.) divorce and remarriage was very common. *Sanctimonious reputation*

The senator, orator, and writer Cicero (106-43 B.C.) divorced his wife of thirty years over money, according to his account. Very shortly afterward, already in his 60's, he married a girl younger than his daughter. He was married to her only a short while before divorcing her as well. (See G. Boissier, Cicero and His Friends, pp. 89ff.) Cicero's first wife twice remarried after being divorced by him.

Cicero was quite typical of the upper classes of his age. A little later the satirist Martial (c. 40-100 A.D.) write, "'tis the thirtieth day--perhaps less, at least no more--and Telessilla is now marrying her tenth husband. . . .she is adulteress by form of law" (Epigrams VI, vii). Juvenal paints a similar caricature of the Roman lady: ". . .she flits from one house to another, wearing out her bridal veil. . . . Thus does the tale of her husbands grow; there will be eight of them in the course of five autumns--a fact worthy of commemoration on her tomb!" (Satire VI, 224-30).

Naturally, one must allow for a certain hyperbole--just as one does with jokes about the modern Hollywood romances ("Daddy, please sign my guestbook"). But the overall truth is nonetheless there: "Of course the satire is overweighted. . . . Yet because

Did not
belong to
A. D. 100 A.D.

of the long degeneration of Roman morals it was probably close to the truth in its own time" (G. Highet, Juvenal the Satirist).

The historian Ludwig Friedländer agrees the general picture is quite apparent: "Thus great frivolity, due to the arbitrary divorces, was shown in making and abandoning marriages. . . .these exaggerations must have a foundation in truth. Quintus Lucretius Vespillo (consul 19 B.C.) erects this stone to his wife Turia (who died 8-2 B.C.): 'Seldom do marriages last until death undivorced: but ours continued happily for forty-one years'" (Roman Life and Manners Under the Early Empire, pp. 242-3).

Friedländer goes on to relate some of the personal statistics of famous figures known even to the most casual reader of history. Ovid and Pliny the Younger went through three wives. Julius Caesar and Mark Antony had four each. Sulla and Pompey found five were quite enough. Others required even more: "A tombstone recently unearthed mentions a seventh wife; there is no exaggeration in Martial's epigram: 'Phileros, you are burying your seventh wife on your estate. No estate has ever been more profitable.' Women remarried as often. Cicero's daughter Tullia married three times, and Nero was the third husband of Poppaea, and the fifth of Statilia Messalina" (ibid., p. 243).

A historian on the period of the early church writes: "Perhaps the best evidence as to the frequency of divorce, however, is the legislation of Augustus. His concern was not with divorce per se, but the effect divorce had on the declining birth rate. Legislation is hardly enacted unless needed" (P. Harrell, Divorce and Remarriage in the Early Church, pp. 32-3). One of the clearest statements comes from a contemporary of the Apostle Paul, the Roman writer Seneca (with whom more than one historian has compared Paul). Seneca writes with disgust, "Is there any woman that blushes at divorce now that certain illustrious and noble ladies reckon their years, not by the number of consuls, but by the number of their husbands, and leave home in order to marry, and marry in order to be divorced?. . .now, since every gazette has a divorce case, they have learned to do what they used to hear so much about. Is there any shame at all for adultery now that matters have come to such a pass that no woman has any use for a husband except to inflame her paramour. . . . She is simple and behind the times who is not aware that living with one paramour is called 'marriage'!" (On Benefits III, xvi, 2-3).

The acme (nadir?) of sexual license was the city of Corinth, the very city to which Paul wrote I Corinthians 5, 6 and 7 dealing with sex and marriage. Its very name was verbalized; "to Corinthianize" meant "to practice fornication or traffic with prostitutes." A "Corinthiator" was a "whoremonger." The geographer Strabo (between 50 B.C. and 50 A.D.) describes the city this way: "And the temple of Aphrodite was so rich that it owned more than a thousand temple slaves, courtesans. . . . And therefore it was also on account of these women that the city was crowded with people and grew rich" (VIII, vi. 20). Even New York and London

could hardly hold a candle to ancient Corinth! And Paul would feel right at home today!

Jewish Palestine

The New Testament itself is a major source in giving us a picture of morals of the Palestinian Jews. Undoubtedly, there was not quite the licentiousness and open debauchery found in some parts of the Hellenistic world. In the New Testament Jesus several times referred to his own time as an "adulterous generation" (Matt. 12:39; 16:4; Mark 8:38). In the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8), Christ suggested those without sin should cast the first stone. We do not know what their particular sins were. But in the context, one gets the impression the accusers were as guilty of sex sins as the woman. *Good point to help understand*

We do not need to go into detail about the two schools of thought among the Pharisees (Hillel and Shammai) since this is well known. The point is that divorce and remarriage was a current and accepted thing. The question was not over whether divorce could take place but only over the circumstances. The school of Hillel was, of course, extremely lax, allowing divorce and remarriage for the most trifling things. Both Philo and Josephus adopt this free approach to divorce. Notice what Josephus says: "He that desires to be divorced from his wife for any cause whatsoever (and many such causes happen among men,) let him in writing give assurance that he will never use her as his wife any more" (Antiquities IV, viii, 23 Whiston's translation).

Among the documents from the first and early second century found in the Judaeen desert at Muraba'at were five pertaining to marriage. Three were contracts of marriage, one was a divorce certificate, and the other a contract of remarriage of a couple earlier divorced from one another. Perhaps one could argue this is pure chance. But the evidence certainly suggests divorce was not infrequent. (See Discoveries in the Judaeen Desert, vol. II.)

The Mishnah is a codification of Jewish religious laws on various subjects. It did not reach final form until about A.D. 200. Much of it stems from the period following the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, but it is generally recognized that it can give us some idea of the situation before A.D. 70. One of its tractates is on divorce and the laws concerning the certificate of divorce. The minute regulations of writing and delivering the divorce certificate would make one think that we are dealing with a practical situation rather than a theoretical one. The general approach to divorce is that of Hillel--divorce was evidently free and easy. Neusner, in analyzing the situation of a slightly later time (4th century) among the Jews of Babylon, quotes sources to "show that divorces were relatively common and lightly given" (A History of the Jews in Babylon, vol. IV, p. 210).

We have already shown the loose moral standards and easy changing of marital partners in the Hellenistic world. Recent

researches have shown just how Hellenized Palestine and Palestinian Judaism had become. Hellenistic culture and approach had permeated the society from top to bottom. (See Morton Smith's article in Israel: Its Role in Civilization.) Evidence of this can be found in the writings of Josephus, himself very much a Hellenized individual. He shows how a number of the members of the Herodian family divorced. Josephus himself twice divorced and remarried (see his Vita 75-6).

Divorce was not difficult to obtain among the Jews. If divorce was easy, we can hardly conclude no one took advantage of the license to change mates. Human nature being what it is, and men being what they are, the inference is that the Jews had a high rate of divorce at the time. The evidence--the Muraba'at documents, the New Testament, the writings of Josephus--definitely confirm the truth of this inference.

Comparison With Today

We are all quite aware of the generally high divorce rate in our modern world. Statistical studies done from census reports since 1890 in the United States show the divorce rate tripled between then and 1960 (see Carter and Glick, Marriage and Divorce: A Social and Economic Study, pp. 55ff). But we need to be careful lest we draw the conclusion our age is unique. On the contrary, 1890 represented the "Victorian age" when divorce was highly frowned upon. There were perhaps just as many unhappy marriages, but people resorted to other courses than divorce. Most of the rates of increase in divorce came in the thirty years between 1890 and 1920.

Statistics are often misleading because they are not always designed to answer the questions we are asking (not to mention the deliberate twisting so prevalent). But here are some which seem to give a reasonable description of today's situation. According to the U.S. News (Oct. 30, 1972, p. 39), "Of the 41 million couples in the U.S. in June, 1971, about 33 million--or 81 per cent--had been married only once." The context of the quote indicates that remarriages after death of a mate are included statistically with divorces. If so, the number of marriages which do not end in divorce would be even higher than 81 per cent, though probably only a few percent higher.

Paul Glick (one of the co-authors of the book cited a few paragraphs back) did a study of 50,000 marriages to see how many actually ended in divorce over a lifetime. This study yielded a figure slightly different from the U.S. News one but close enough for our purposes. He found that 71-75 percent of married women are likely to stay married for life. (Reader's Digest, February 1973, p. 113.)

We certainly can't kid ourselves the situation is good. But if 75-80 percent of the marriages contracted in American today stay put, this would seem to compare quite favorably to the marriage

situation in the first century A.D.

The last two thousand years have been dominated by the Christian religion, especially Catholicism. This has meant the actual number of technical divorces has always been rather small. But here is where statistics can be misleading. Men generally have been just as unfaithful to their wives as they are now. We are all familiar with the sexual licentiousness of various ages. Slaves, servants, and sluts have always been available to the man unable to divorce his wife legally. Even then Henry VIII divorced two of his six wives--and he had other alternatives than divorce to rid himself of an unwanted wench!

If we compare today's world with the Victorian age we certainly come up short. But we have nothing on the Hellenistic world of the time of Christ and the early Church. The two are really quite comparable in the amount of divorce and remarriage going on. Thus, the situation then is even more important for judging that of today than might otherwise be the case.

Conclusions

The New Testament is crystal clear on such subjects as circumcision and eating meat offered to idols. We have reams of information. Strangely, these just aren't burning issues anymore. But on the doctrine of marriage and divorce--certainly one of the major ones of the Church--where are the traumatic decisions?

Why do we have not one record of a D & R decision before baptism in the ministry of the apostles--or even a record that the question ever came up? A strange and almost uncanny silence exists--especially when we know such details as that Timothy had an ulcer and that the woman raised by Peter was known as Dorcas. Why doesn't Paul tell us about deciding people's D & R cases prior to baptism in that licentious city of Corinth--instead of waxing eloquent about meat offered to idols or "boasting" of his personal afflictions?

We must face the facts. Is it possible that God did not give clear, unambiguous instructions on D & R prior to baptism because he never intended that it be a major issue in baptismal counseling? Is it possible that any previous D & R is one of those things forgiven and forgotten at the time of repentance?

Why is the silence of the New Testament so deafening?

ADDRESSING A NEW QUESTION ON MARRIAGE

Over the years the Church of God has come to understand the transcendent purposes of marriage. The Church has also understood clearly the divine laws governing marriage which God set in motion from the beginning.

The problem under examination involves individuals who were married and divorced, and are now apparently happily remarried at the time of their conversion, as well as those who were married and divorced, and remain unmarried. How are these situations to be viewed from a Biblical standpoint, especially in cases where children are involved?

Up to the present we have applied Jesus' statement in Matthew 19:6, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder."

The new question is not whether man has the authority to loose on earth what God in heaven has joined. The question is rather, did God ever directly involve himself in these marriages? Put another way: since the first marriage in the Garden of Eden, has God continued to bind all marriages down through history?

Does the New Testament give an indication of the solution to this question which was equally prominent in Roman times as it is today?

The Old Testament and the New Testament provide the following summary information: God created the marriage relationship when he made man. God was present at the first marriage. He presented the first woman to the first man. Adam understood the meaning of marriage (Genesis 2:21-25). Not long after that first marriage, sin entered the world. Man cut himself off from God spiritually. The Eternal God drove the first man and woman from his presence (Genesis 3).

Man has, from the time of Adam, rebelled against the government and customs of God. At the building of the tower at Babel, recorded in Genesis 11, men thought to establish human government to regulate their society. God permitted this act of defiance, but divided humanity linguistically. To avoid anarchy and to provide some kind of order among diverse human societies cut off from God by sin and rebellion, the Creator ordained that individuals should be subject to the human governments they desired (Romans 13:1-7). Ever since, human governments have exercised the prerogative to legislate, to establish judicial systems, to regulate society, to wage war, etc. Universally, human governments and tribal societies have also exercised prerogatives in the area of marriage, separation, child custody, divorce, re-marriage.

Our question is, again, has God involved himself in all these

marriages -- marriages which have been regulated by human laws and customs?

In the days of Moses God chose a people to become a very special nation. To this people Israel he gave the Ten Commandments (the seventh of which expressly forbade adultery), statutes and judgments incomparably superior to those of other nations. But the nation Israel was not promised the Holy Spirit and conversion at that time. Israel had an administration of death (II Corinthians 3). Moses, because of the hardness of their hearts and lack of faith, permitted them to wage war (instead of trusting God to do battle); to have more than one wife at a time (Exodus 21:10-11); to put property rights above marital rights, so that a man was allowed to put away a wife he could not redeem from servitude (Exodus 21:1-6). He also, because of their human nature, permitted them to remarry after they had put away their wives (Matthew 19:8 and Deuteronomy 24:1-5). All these permissions were in some way contrary to the spirit of God's law as revealed by Jesus.

God did not spiritually call the broad majority of the nation. Only in the rare cases of certain judges, prophets and kings did God deal directly in their lives. The rest of the nation had the letter of the law -- and various permissions because of their hardheartedness. They lived commonly in bigamy, polygamy, concubinage, put away wives by bills of divorcement and, by New Testament times, had allowed themselves great "liberties" in granting divorce. Did God involve himself in binding in heaven these various marriages that were legally permitted? And what of the Greek and Roman world that dwelt in sin and spiritual darkness? Paul addresses himself to this question in I Corinthians 7. Remember, Paul was writing to the Corinthian Church: baptized, converted members of God's Church.

In addressing himself to those who are properly married in the church, Paul writes with force: "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife" (verses 10-11). (See also verse 39.)

Here are converted church members who know the Biblical teaching, meaning and purpose of marriage as it was instituted at the beginning. God is in their marriage. Theirs is holy matrimony.

But what of those who come to the knowledge of the Bible and have been through the divorce mill or have unconverted mates? They, too, are in Corinth and pose their problems to Paul.

"But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away" (verse 12). In the Old Testament, marriages were not to be contracted with unbelieving

individuals from the surrounding nations. Ezra and Nehemiah specifically had such forbidden marriages dissolved for the good of the community (Ezra 9,10: Nehemiah 13). But Paul, knowing that one member of the marriage is already of a converted mind and the other willing to live at peace, speaks affirmatively not to separate.

Verses 13 and 14 continue the theme: "And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy." We have never focused on these verses sufficiently before to see what light they shed on the new question before the church today. Was God in these marriages prior to the conversion of one of the mates?

Verse 14, the last clause, answers our question. It is very much clearer in the Greek than in the English of the King James Version. Otherwise your children are in fact unclean, but now are they holy.

In other words, the marriage prior to conversion is legal in the eyes of the state. The children therefore are legitimate, not like the tragic cases of those born out of legal wedlock. When both parents (the believer and the unbeliever) are pleased to dwell at peace with one another despite religious differences, God sanctifies their legal marriage and they know they are bound for life. Their children even if unconverted, are holy because their parents' marriage is hallowed, not by some added ceremony here on earth -- the ceremony had long been performed -- but by God becoming part of their marriage. However, if the unbelieving partner in a marriage legally contracted does not want to live with the converted person, he can leave. The children who leave with that partner are -- not "were" -- spiritually unclean, not part of a union sanctified by holy matrimony.

"But if the unbelieving depart," Paul continues, "let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: for God has called us to peace" (Verse 15). Not understanding the application of verses 13 and 14, we have usually tried to drink a meaning out of verse 15 that is not there. Unlike verse 12 where a person is commanded to remain unmarried, there is no such command even hinted at here. Instead, in cases where only a legal marriage without God's presence had occurred and has broken up, the converted person is under no obligation (bondage) to continue the contract with the unconverted person who has refused to dwell at peace and has departed. This is the sense of the verse in Greek and in most translations. This decision is in agreement with the Old Testament principle regulating marriages with those of another religious belief. That is why Paul understood it so easily. It was never clear to us before because we did not see fully that God has not involved himself in this world's marriages except in those specific

cases where he was intervening and calling them and providing a wife or husband -- as in Isaac's case for example -- "...let her be the one thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac" (Genesis 24:12-14, RSV).

"God has called us to peace" (verse 15, last clause). To make that peace possible, he has concluded the whole world in sin and unbelief that he might have mercy upon all. He has not intervened in the governmental and legal structures and religious customs of this world to bind marriages. That has been left to men. But God has given his Church authority to bind and loose in matters such as marriage in which men have stumbled and erred and been in confusion and in which God has not been a party. The Church therefore recognizes the legality of divorces of those who are not members of the Church of God.

That is how God has made peace in the home possible for those who are coming to conversion.

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Clarifying the New Understanding

"What therefore God has bound together, let not man put asunder" -- as Jesus taught -- is the doctrine and policy of the Worldwide Church of God.

Just as Jesus did, the Church teaches the absolute sanctity and permanence of marriage.

Obviously, God intended -- from the beginning -- that marriages be lasting and permanent.

Marriage is a natural union, yet a divine institution ordained of God. The marriage covenant is defined in Genesis 1:27-28; 2:23-24 as the forming of a new family unit ("leave father and mother"), for procreation ("be fruitful"), for psychological and personality development ("cleave unto his wife"-- cleave is not a sexual term), and for sexual fulfillment ("become one flesh").

Beyond these four basic physical attributes, there are the supremely important spiritual ones: the symbol of a God-plane relationship, the understanding of a God-family relationship, the relationship of Christ to the Church.

This skeletal definition can be improved upon, expanded, researched and preached in many different ways; but our brethren should always be kept mindful of the transcendental purpose of matrimony, the biblical definition of marriage and the tremendously high stakes involved in this lifetime man-woman-child relationship.

We must stress these foundational concepts. (See also the New Morality, Why Marriage? and Your Marriage Can Be Happy.) While it is true that further research and application of the new understanding will produce some refinements and/or modifications, it is now possible to state some clarifications -- thanks to the fine input of our ministers around the world.

Let's first understand what we are not saying.

What It Does NOT Mean

1. We do NOT say "God has not recognized your marriage"!
We do not say God has NOT recognized marriages which took place outside of the Church of God.

Within two days of the original announcement a few irate people called Headquarters either asking for apologies or demanding retractions or accusing us of saying God had not recognized their marriages or that their children were "bastards" -- not realizing we emphatically teach that their marriages are totally legal and acceptable in God's sight. These accusa-

tions are attacking a non-issue because we do not say they are "not bound" or are "bastards." The point is we can become over-zealous and misapply the new understanding if we give the erroneous impression that everyone is "unbound" because they are not in God's Church. We must be careful how we announce and explain Church involvement in marriage and divorce. Marriages outside the Church are legal and acceptable to God (see #1 below under the subtitle "What It Does Mean").

2. The new understanding of itself does not "unbind" or loose anybody in or out of the Church. Marriages are legally binding until legally, jurisdictionally, and judicially dissolved.

3. We do not condemn marriages outside of God's Church. We do not deny marriages contracted either on desert islands or in formal High-Church ceremonies. Such marriages are just as valid legally by our new understanding as they were by our old! It is God's intent for people to stay together for life. If it is also the people's intent to stay wed for life and they achieve this goal, they are fulfilling the original ideal of God.

4. We do not disallow or annul marriages just because people are called into the Church. Rather, we fully recognize all legal marriages. Malachi says of God, "He hateth putting away." We also hate putting away and do not require separation of legitimately contracted unions.

4. Outside marriages are not illegal or illegitimate since they are legally bound by the courts of the land to whom God has given authority. Men who do not have God's higher law are still responsible for obeying man's lesser law. The children of marriages performed outside of the Church are not illegitimate. Mr. Herbert Armstrong spoke very strongly on this point years ago when he stressed that people bound in the eyes of the state when married for the second time did not produce "bastards." He emphasized that children of such marriages "are not bastards in God's eyes."

5. We are not encouraging divorces. We must encourage people to stay together in accordance with God's ideal.

6. The fact that God allowed the laws of the land and the courts of this world to bind and loose marriages does not mean there is no such thing as the spirit or the letter of adultery!

If a legally bound mate has sexual intercourse with some other person, that mate has committed adultery! Further, if a person lusts after a woman or man in his or her heart, Christ said they were committing adultery in their heart.

The seventh Commandment is intended to preserve marriage. If someone breaks the "one flesh" unit and joins sexually with

another he is certainly a physical adulterer. In the Old Testament a man could have several wives, so long as none was already someone else's wife, and if they became officially bound according to civil law. He was not legally guilty of a civil crime, though he spiritually was in violation of the intent of God's law.

What It DOES Mean

1. WE MUST TEACH THE SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE MORE FORCEFULLY, MORE ELOQUENTLY AND MORE FERVENTLY than ever before. We must teach that marriage is a God-plane relationship. Paul says that marriage is a mystery (Greek: musterion) which in Bible language means a revealed truth (often formerly secret). "This [the relationship of man and woman] is a great mystery, and I am speaking about Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:32). Truly this relationship is great and precious and the responsibility we have as Christ's chosen ambassadors is to further, to strengthen, to exalt this marvelous truth.

2. The Worldwide Church of God teaches that MARRIAGES ARE BOUND BY THE STATE AND HENCE ARE RECOGNIZED BY GOD. A civil marriage is bound in man's eyes, in society's eyes, in the law's eyes, and in a sense in God's eyes. Notice we did not say "God bound." We said "bound in God's eyes" -- bound by another agent, recognized by God. The marriages of this world are not made in heaven but they are recognized in heaven. They are not recognized because God intervenes in them; they are recognized because God allows civil authorities to legislate all matters of man's society (Gen. 3:22-24; 9:1-6; Rom. 13). These scriptures teach us that ever since Eden where man cut himself off from God, chose the way of sin and continues living therein (Isa. 59:2), God has, for man's ultimate good, relinquished the administration of human affairs to man himself. Man is now held responsible for customs, social mores, laws, wars, marriages, criminal executions, systems of governments, science, industry, knowledge, etc. etc. God is not working in this world by forcing His will upon men. God is working in this world by intervening in human history, to call out first a faithful man Abraham, and (as it turned out) a faithless nation, Israel. He then sent Jesus Christ to be His faithful Son as a sacrifice for all mankind. Through the Son any man can have forgiveness of sin, can receive the Holy Spirit, can be begotten from above and eventually can be born into God's very family. While that divine mystery is being worked out here below in a select few, the world and society go their own way.

But even in going his own way, man has, despite himself, preserved a faint knowledge of God's way (Rom. 2:14). Anthropologists tell us that some form of marriage laws are found universally in primitive, even stone-age (!) societies. These marriage customs and laws -- as stated formally in recondite legal manuals or in ominous, grunted taboos of the witch doctors

-- ultimately derive from vestiges of God's revealed will and the Bible. So much for marriage laws in the world.

What of our teaching that marriages bound by the state are recognized by God? It means several things:

A. A married couple is already bound by the state if they have gone through the legal processes.

B. When called, this same pair does not need a new ceremony, a new solemnization by the Worldwide Church (HWA).

C. God does not perform a "second binding" once He calls a married couple and grants one or both His Holy Spirit. There is no scripture which tells us that God "intervenes" at some point and performs a second act of "binding."

D. Christ says "WHAT" (the Greek is neuter singular, not masculine plural), not THEY WHOM God has joined together, let not man put asunder. It is possible to take this as referring to the institution of marriage itself -- a warning to the Pharisees not to undermine the concept, the act, the institution of marriage in which God has permanently "yoked together" husband and wife.

If on the other hand, we insist "what" refers directly to two people in a specific marriage, fine. God then has 1) allowed the state to bind, in the case of unconverted people (and man should not break it up). Or, 2) God may have intervened in special cases where His purposes dictate (the type of Christ and the Church pictured in Isaac and Rebecca's case may indicate such intervention) and of course He does intervene in the case of marriages which originate in the Church of God.

E. So when, we are asked, does God bind a union between two people who were married in the world, but who now have God's knowledge and true conversion? Before baptism, during baptism or after baptism?

The answer is, God already allowed the state to bind them before. In allowing that, His "recognition" is also given. What happens when the couple becomes converted is not that God "rebinds," or renews His recognition, but rather is that the couple comprehends a profound, awesome, hallowed sense of responsibility: that God, at the beginning, ordained marriage for life, and that it is a one hundred percent giving of oneself to the other. The knowledge of the God-plane relationship, the transcendent importance of rearing children in the truth -- all this is added when the marriage is "in the Lord."

But to return to the main point. Marriages in this world are recognized by God to be bound . . . bound by man. Marriages are also "recognized" by God to be "unbound" when legally processed by state courts. This means that when people

are called and are converted, they become responsible to understand and live by God's originally revealed ideal and perfect way.

F. The Church of God is now saying that we recognize marriages as performed in this world. We add great weight and moment to understanding what marriage is, what marriage is for, and the great truths which marriage pictures. Incidentally, we also recognize the civil legality of the divorces granted in this world. (We must exercise care in our explanations lest we unintentionally appear to encourage divorce.) We do not make people go backward and pay (suffer) for those divorces. If spiritual laws are already in motion here, then those laws have already taken effect. Instead of being instruments of God's wrath, we can be helpers of their joy!

3. God's will is clear: His will concerning marriage is found in Genesis 1 and 2 and is again stated by Christ in Matthew 5, Matthew 19, Mark 10 and Luke 16:18. But hard-heartedness and sin is still here. Christ's pronouncement to the Pharisees did not change world nor human conditions.

Christ's pronouncement did do several things: 1) it transcended the Pharisees' argument by lifting the question to its true origin, to its true principles, and to its true intent; 2) it completely out-maneuvered the Pharisees who had set a trap for Him. Notice Christ did not directly answer their question. And though His answer tended more in the direction of the Shammai school, it did not side with either of the current Jewish theological positions.

Then why did Christ charge the carnal Pharisees with the sin of adultery? The key is to realize that the Old Testament did physically allow a divorce with no sin imputed. But Christ shows that 1) as teachers of God's Law, they knew they were stretching and/or breaking Moses' permission to divorce, as history plainly shows; 2) further, the Pharisees claimed to "see," that is, to understand. And because these teachers claimed to understand, Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains" (Jn. 9:40); 3) lastly, Mark 10:10 plainly says "in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. And he said to them" (the disciples). So Mark adds the fact that Jesus was privately with his disciples when he said divorce and remarriage constitutes adultery. Christ was beginning to introduce the Christian way to his followers -- a way that does not allow for divorce.

To the Pharisees, a physical infraction of the law would have been adultery. Anything above the letter of the law -- though God would have preferred a more spiritual obedience -- God did not yet require of anybody. To the disciples Christ was beginning to introduce a higher standard...the one which was established at the beginning. Of course that does not mean they were responsible at the instant of hearing it announced.

It does mean that Jesus Christ was beginning to reveal to them what God's will and intent originally was. "From the beginning it was not so."

Remember sin is still present in the world; the world lies in sin (I John 5:19). Mr. Herbert Armstrong went back beyond Genesis 9 to the Garden of Eden itself. It was there man's sin originated, but only after God performed the first marriage. One question suggested that if Adam and Eve were "unconverted" then God performing marriages for unconverted people would be "the norm." That would be true if the premise were correct. But it is not correct. Mr. Armstrong pointed out that Adam and Eve were sinless when God performed that first ceremony.

Adam and Eve were neither "converted" nor "unconverted." They were absolutely unique in their sinless state. Sin had not yet "entered into the world" (Romans 5:12), therefore that unique ceremony was a special case, and it could not become the norm for this sinful world.

4. The Church of God certainly encourages people to form life-long unions and certainly laments the disaster of divorce. Thus if the Church of God is compelled by the Bible to "recognize" a divorce which has already taken place in this wretched world, that recognition in no way denies the tragic nature of every marriage breakdown. Even at a purely human level such a breakdown implies the disappointment of hopes, the betrayal of faith, the defeat of love.

But look at the other side of the coin. God's Church is not responsible for the original breakdown of such a marriage, but we can be responsible for, or participate in, healing this tragic breach by 1) recognizing the second happy marriage, 2) teaching God's laws of home and family which lead to marital stability and success. Thus we salvage some marriages, help create some new, viable marriages, and protect all marriages in God's Church . . . we are truly "helpers of their joy."

To the extent that people in the world take one another to be their lawful wedded mates "until death do them part," they have learned lessons, received benefits, have faced and conquered trials, and have built in themselves something which no doubt will come up with them in the resurrection. But this truth does not change the plain fact that sin reigns in this world (I John 5:19; II Cor. 4:4; Romans 3:23). Where people have not been able to "stick it out" due to sin, lack of education, lack of help from the Holy Spirit, they did, do and will still split up.

This means that where people have not yet received His Spirit, a second marriage may at least be the lesser of two evils (not to mention that it may turn out to approach the ideal union). Surely we all also know of second or third marriages

which are far happier than the first unions those people abandoned. What a great truth to know. Our God is so merciful as to have foreseen the needs of His creatures, to have allowed for human nature, and to have provided a way for coping with it!

Now for some further explanation of the doctrine itself.

The Problem We Face

Mr. Armstrong's booklet Marriage and Divorce makes the importance, sanctity and permanence of marriage very clear from the Scriptures. The question is: HOW DOES THE BOOKLET APPLY TO UNCONVERTED PEOPLE?

God's ideal standard for marriage (stated above and explained in the booklet) certainly applies to those who are called of God. But what of those people who knew nothing of the ideal and who have already divorced -- broken up? Sin has entered the world and ignorance reigns in lives of millions of people.

AGAIN HOW ARE WE TO APPLY GOD'S IDEAL TO SPIRITUALLY IGNORANT PEOPLE?

WHERE IN THE BIBLE DOES GOD REQUIRE HIS CHURCH TO CREATE "SPIRITUAL WIDOWS" AND ORPHANS?

Does the Bible actually demand that we deprive a child of his own father or mother -- even sometimes expecting one mate to move a state away from his own flesh and blood?

Does God's ideal standard for marriage require us as a church to oblige apparently happy second marriages to break up?

The Unconverted State

Exactly what does God hold one accountable for in the unconverted state? Granted, sin always exacts a penalty -- whether the sinner is converted or not. We are dealing with invisible spiritual laws. But does God require the continued payment of that penalty after conversion?

Addressing the actual, less-than-ideal situation of his day, Jesus himself explained very simply:

"Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered [allowed or permitted] you to put away your wives . . ." (Matt. 19:8).

What could be simpler? An allowance was made for their hardness of heart. This phrase "hardness of heart" is basic

to the whole question. Hardness of heart is an expression for the unconverted state. The Old Testament Israelites were rebellious, stubborn and definitely (as a whole) unconverted. Speaking prophetically of the New Covenant and the conversion of our people, God says: "I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony [unconverted] heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them... (Ezek. 11: 19-20; Jer. 31:31).

This explains it. God never intended marriage to be broken up -- ideally, that is. "From the beginning it was not so" But God also recognized the impossibility of human beings achieving the ideal UNLESS THEY WERE CONVERTED by His Holy Spirit. So He made allowance for their unconverted state (hardness of heart).

Since they were going to divorce and remarry anyway (hardness of heart), and since God is allowing man to go his own way, God, through Moses, gave Israel guidelines and rules for divorce. God did not encourage divorce, but He allowed it.

The people God calls today are just as "hard of heart" -- just as unconverted -- as those called in Jesus' day. WHY NOT APPLY THE "HARD-OF-HEART" PRINCIPLE TO NON-BAPTIZED PEOPLE?

Another Principle

On another occasion Jesus was again speaking to the Pharisees; "Jesus said unto them, if ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see, therefore your sin remaineth" (John 9:41).

This indicates that a person who is ignorant of the law, whether through unconversion or otherwise, is not, in the same way, held accountable for an act committed in ignorance.

Not that the law did not exist. But a person is not held accountable in this life for what he did in ignorance even though he may pay an invisible, spiritual penalty. As Paul said, "For until the law [the codification at Sinai] sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed [credited or charged] when there is no law" (Romans 5:13).

Paul in Athens, observing the idolatry of the people -- a violation of the first three commandments -- recognized their ignorance of the higher laws of the true God. He said, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at [from huperorao = to overlook or disregard] but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

God "winks" at sins committed in ignorance, though not condoning them. Wouldn't this "winking" include a physical

divorce which occurred while a person was in an ignorant, unconverted state?

Administration of Unconverted Divorce Cases:
God vs. the State?

Who administers divorce and remarriage laws to the unconverted? Certainly not God's Church. The saints "judge" only in issues concerning the saints (I Cor. 6:1-4). We do not rule in matters outside the Body of Christ.

Following the flood, God said, ". . . at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed . . ." (Gen. 9:5-6). Mr. Armstrong has used these verses to show the transfer, because of human rebellion, of judicial authority regarding human affairs from God to man himself. God allowed man to exercise justice over man. Civil authorities were granted the power -- even of life and death -- over fellow human beings! In cases of divorce and remarriage and other civil matters, the civil authorities became "the ministers of God" since the days of Noah!

Romans 13 makes this plain:

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God."

"Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God....."

"For he is the minister of God to thee for good...for he is the minister of God...for they are God's ministers..." (Romans 13:1-6, excerpts). What lesson do we learn here?

God then, is not directly involved in each and every marriage and divorce in all nations throughout all time. God has left hands off since man wants it that way. He has placed the responsibility for administering these matters on the shoulders of man's civil and cultural leaders.

God's direct involvement begins when a person is called -- when the person comes to understand the real meaning of marriage and the family.

Therefore an unconverted person may be forgiven for the mistake of an earlier divorce and their present marriage recognized, but a converted person may not divorce another converted person. (This will be explained further later.)

I Corinthians 7
"Freedom From Bondage"

Why is there not one single case of divorce and remarriage in the New Testament?

The simple answer is that Paul's guidelines in I Cor. 7 solve marriage and divorce problems immediately, directly and easily. Paul's statement -- rightly understood -- does away with lengthy and embarrassing questioning of a person's forgotten (and hopefully forgiven) past. Therefore, we find no case of the Apostle Paul ever telling a prospective member, "I cannot baptize you into the Church until you separate from this second (third, fourth, etc.) wife"!

ON THE OTHER HAND, WE DO HAVE VERY CLEAR STATEMENTS THAT SUCH SITUATIONS DO NOT NEED TO BE QUESTIONED!

Let's examine the context of Paul's instructions in the seventh chapter of I Corinthians:

The Corinthians wrote Paul concerning marriage and sex. Paul's answer (I Cor. 7) consists of:

GENERAL PRINCIPLES -- to married in Church (verses 1-7)

TO THE UNMARRIED AND WIDOWS -- verses 8-11

BUT TO THE REST, say I and not the Lord -- verses 12-16

Social status (of slaves and married or divorced) not to change -- verses 17-24

Instructions to virgins and parents with marriageable girls -- verses 25-40

The entire chapter deals with MARRIAGE.

But who are "the rest" mentioned in verse 12? It is immediately obvious that Paul is still addressing himself to married people. But these were married people who were not long-time members of the Church. They were couples, one of whom was being converted. A "split-marriage" was their problem -- a problem which was yet unresolved. If the converted ones had been older members, the situation would already have come to a head one way or the other, for good or ill. Some of these people were what we would call "prospectives."

So Paul proceeds to give some governing principles for these brand-new members to use in their religiously-divided home.

In Moses' day the Israelites were commanded to not have any dealing with idolatrous people. In Paul's day some married families were "split": one was in the Church, the other was an idolator. Paul explains that if the unbeliever is pleased to dwell, they should "not divorce."

But why should they not separate if one is an idolator?

HUSBANDS

Paul answers "for the unbelieving man HAS BEEN SANCTIFIED [Greek perfect tense] by the wife, and the unbelieving wife HAS BEEN SANCTIFIED by the brother: otherwise your children are in fact unclean, but now they are holy." This is a careful rendering of the original Greek.

This interesting expression "has been sanctified," coupled with the fact that otherwise the children are unclean, shows that God HAS NOT ENTERED THE MARRIAGE UNTIL CONVERSION; "sanctification" takes place when the called ones or called one becomes Christian. Unconverted persons, outside the Church, are just exactly that -- outside, not sanctified, "unclean." Paul does not say their children are illegitimate (Greek could express that clearly), nor does he use the term "bastards" for them. Paul used the word akatharta -- "unclean."

Now a most powerful point: "A brother or a sister HAS NOT BEEN ENSLAVED in such cases"! The literal Greek here is a perfect passive tense just as the two "has been sanctified" verbs above.

A BROTHER HAS NOT BEEN ENSLAVED (AND WILL NOT BE) -- if the unbeliever departs! Twice in this chapter Paul uses the Greek word deō, "to bind." But in verse 15, Paul uses douloō, "to make a slave, to enslave." The word is used "literally to denote absolute subjection or the loss of autonomy." It refers to "a service which is not a matter of choice for the one who renders it, which he has to perform whether he likes or not, because he is subject as a slave to an alien will, to the will of his owner" (Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. II, pp. 261-280).

In I Cor. 7:15 douloō expresses total binding by another. When in a mixed marriage the unbelieving partner seeks divorce, the brother or the sister is not dedoulōtai (ibid), so the Greek expression in I Cor. 7:15 is in fact a more emphatic expression than the one in verses 27 and 39.

A.T. Robertson (1931) says of this expression: "15. Is not under bondage (οὐ δεδούλωται). Perfect passive indicative of (δουλόω), to enslave, has been enslaved; does not remain a slave. The believing husband or wife is not at liberty to separate, unless the disbeliever or pagan insists on it. Willful desertion of the unbeliever sets the other free, a case not contemplated in Christ's word in Matt. 5:32; 19:9... He does not desire enslavement in the marriage relation between the believer and the unbeliever" (Word Pictures in the New Testament, vol. IV, p. 128).

Moreover Paul adds, "For God has called you to [into] peace." How can a person have peace when he loses the love of his wife and children who are his flesh and blood, and the comforts and pleasures of marriage which God created us to have? That this "peace" includes freedom to remarry is clear!

In the next section of Paul's argument -- verses 17-24 -- Paul is still on the subject of marriage. As a matter of fact, the entire seventh chapter is about the subject of marriage.

Now let's notice verse 17 (R.S.V.) -- keeping in mind that Paul is writing about MARRIAGE. "Only, let every one lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him. THIS IS MY RULE IN ALL THE CHURCHES."

Paul has stated a basic principle of judgment concerning marriage. Then he gives an illustration: were you circumcised when God called you? If so, STAY THAT WAY! And the reader, applying the same, can logically supply the following: are you living with a second wife? Stay that way! More about that in a moment.

Paul then REstates the principle in the broadest possible terms. Verse 20: "Every one should remain in the state in which he was called."

But perhaps Paul anticipated that some of the Corinthians, like many of us in the centuries since, just wouldn't quite "get it" the first time. So he gives another illustration: were you a slave when you were called? It's all right to stay a slave -- unless a chance offers itself for you to become free. Were you free? Stay free.

And then he repeats the principle again in verse 24: "So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God." And "with God" means in the same state in which God has once and for all accepted him.

Why didn't Paul mention that this thrice-repeated, thrice-emphasized principle applies to the marital state? Because it was obvious that the marital state was the situation he was illustrating. But in verse 27 he does apply it; have you been bound to a wife? Stay bound. Have you been loosed (divorced)? Stay loosed -- THAT IS, insofar as changing or not changing your marital situation just to please God. DON'T seek to CHANGE it for that reason.

Now notice Paul's shocking follow-through: "Do not seek a wife, but and if you marry YOU HAVE NOT SINNED." So a "loosed" person, a divorced person CAN MARRY WITHOUT SIN.

How can that be so?

Simply because God had not sanctified those former marriages outside the Church (verses 12-16).

But what about that word "bound" (Greek: dedotai) in verse 27: This verse rather clearly states that this being "bound" is a marriage relation which you could become "free" of. Notice that. And does "free" mean eligible to marry? The same word, in the same verse, implies so.

Another point. Does II Cor. 5:17, coupled with baptism, perhaps mean more than we thought? This view means that something really occurs to unconverted people when they become converted. On conversion, a spouse becomes "a new creation" (Greek: ktisis, II Cor. 5:17). In at least a figurative sense his or her marriage ended with his old life; it is dissolved in baptism and "old things are passed away." The marriage can be reconstituted; Paul advises the Corinthians to take this course; for the pagan partner may be expected in many cases to later be converted by the example of the other. But the unbelieving partner can refuse (if he or she so chooses) to reconstitute the marriage. The Christian is then free.

The Christian has not been "bondaged" in such cases. The words "not under bondage" (ou dedoulōtai) are perfect tense -- past action with a present and continuing effect. Marriage had not made the Christian an enslaved person (doulos), nor was he or she made one now. The separation, in fact, did just the opposite. Paul is not saying anything about whether it had been a "bound marriage," as we might speak. The comparison he introduced into the discussion (to illustrate a marriage point, of course) concerns the kind of bondage that binds and holds a slave.

To recapitulate: It is significant that verse 15 does not repeat the earlier requirement, applicable where both spouses were converted, to "remain unmarried or be reconciled." And it is significant that verses 10-11 contain no concept of bondage. The two cases are wholly distinct. If verse 15 meant only to repeat the rule of verse 11, it would not only be redundant but completely confusing.

If a Jewish husband was going away on a journey and the wife feared he was deserting, she could require of him a bill of divorce, for her own protection so that she might remarry (B. Keth. 110b). The gospel was now extending beyond the Jewish world and needing clarification; Paul simply applied the basic spiritual principle to this new case. It was not the Church's responsibility to judge the outsider (I Cor. 5:12).

In any covenant, when one partner completely breaks the terms, the other is no longer obligated to perform them.

What About Romans 7:2?

Romans 7:1-2 has been misunderstood in the past, as if it were the overall marriage principle which not only stood alone, but also overruled all others. The fact is, however, as the Bible commentaries point out as if with one voice, the reference to marriage in this chapter is only "an illustration," an "example," a "for instance," a "general principle," an "analogy." And analogies don't prove anything!

The context tells us not to expect to find here the whole of God's revealed truth about marriage. Paul is not expounding on marriage. He is explaining law and grace.

Notice it. The point Paul is trying to get across is not that marriage cannot be ended. It is that a sinner's bondage to the penalty of his sins can be ended. He refers to the marriage law only for the sake of the broader argument, not for the sake of marriage.

The International Critical Commentary, page 170 in the volume on Romans, makes the whole argument clear by this paraphrase:

The Marriage Law only binds a woman while her husband lives. So with the Christian. He was wedded, as it were, to his old sinful state; and all that time he was subject to the law applicable to that state. But this old life of his was killed through his identification with the death of Christ; so as to set him free to contract a new marriage -- with Christ, no longer dead but risen: and the fruit of that marriage should be a new life quickened by the Spirit. (emphasis ours)

Paul's analogy has to be of a marriage broken by death. It would not have suited his purpose to use the law of a marriage which was broken by divorce because he had to bring in the death of Christ and the sinner's symbolic death with him in baptism (which he had expounded in the previous chapter). He did not have to explain that there were other ways of breaking legal marriages, because he was writing to people who "knew the law" or who "know law (in general)." (See Romans 7:1 in the New English Bible, the New American Bible, G. Williams.) Either Paul means the Old Testament books from Genesis to Deuteronomy which the Jews call the Torah or "Law," which Law spells out, not just that a wife is bound to a living husband, but all kinds of contingency judgments and regulations including those regarding divorce, polygamy, slave girls, concubines, etc. Or he is also referring to Roman Law (law in general) in which case the woman is also bound to her mate "till death," but with the right and provision to divorce for several legal reasons. In either case, we cannot build a theology of marriage administration on this single passage.

Can we in fact claim that Romans 7 is a complete, exhaustive proof text, showing marriage has no escape except death? If so, we run into inescapable difficulties. Paul speaks of the historic problem of being "wedded to sin" for thousands of years until Christ came. Logically then, if there is no other escape from marriage except death, then God could not have called Moses or Elijah out of sin until they died,

Or would you say, until Christ came? Remember, the premise (false) is that there is no exception -- marriage is unbreakable until death. If that is so, then a sinner by analogy is uncallable in the Old Testament. Obviously, there were exceptions to the general Old Testament rule that sin reigned supreme until Christ came. All right, then there can be exceptions to the marriage contract also.

Now what if Paul's analogy applies only to the individual? If the analogy is pressed in its absolute sense, it leads to the absurd conclusion that God could not or would not call an individual until his death! Obviously, Paul speaks generally and does not press the details.

Then why not admit Paul doesn't mean that marriage absolutely cannot be broken except by death?

Once again, analogies are general comparisons, not proofs.

Conclusion

In all this we can see a reconfirmation of the sacredness and sanctity of the marriage relationship. Marriage is ideally, by God, intended to be a permanent relationship. From the beginning it was established so.

Yet God plainly does not require His Church to create spiritual widows or orphans or eunuchs! Whatever happened before baptism was done in a state of "hardness of heart" or unconversion. God allows the civil authorities to rule on the marital status of such couples. These legal decisions represent the "ordinance of God" (Romans 13).

Therefore, marriages following the civil divorces (of one or both partners) do not have to be dissolved as a condition for baptism.

This understanding further strengthens and protects the sanctity and permanence of the God-ordained marriage and family relationship, and strengthens the Church of God.

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