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WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

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HERBERT W. ARMSTRONG  
PRESIDENT and PASTOR

28 February, 1974

Dear Brethren in God's Church:

New light on marriage and divorce has been announced!

The CHURCH OF GOD GROWS in grace and the KNOWLEDGE of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Forty-seven years ago, I received the shock of my life. It must have compared to the shock experienced by Saul of Tarsus, when God blinded him and struck him down as he approached Damascus. He had believed the new Message announced by Jesus of Nazareth to be completely FALSE. To be shown, suddenly, that he had been persecuting the very Son of the Living God, believing the OPPOSITE of God's TRUTH, was the shock of his life.

Likewise, when God called me and opened my eyes to see in the Bible that "Christianity" was not teaching the TRUTH revealed in the WORD OF GOD, but in most basic areas precisely the opposite, I was simply dumbfounded!

If what I knew as CHRISTIANITY was virtually the antithesis of the teaching Jesus Christ gave to His Church, where was that true Church which Jesus said would never cease to exist? WHERE? He said the gates of the grave would never prevail against it. He said He would never leave nor forsake it.

But WHERE was the true Church Christ founded with and through the original Apostles? It had to exist. Jesus said the gates of the grave would never prevail against it. He said He would never leave nor forsake it!

I knew this: it had to be a church accepting and proclaiming BIBLICAL TRUTH. It had to be a church teaching repentance of SIN. And since sin is the transgression of God's spiritual Law, it had to be a Sabbath-keeping church. It had to be a church still kept in the name of God the Father. It had to be a church proclaiming to all the world the Gospel of the KINGDOM OF GOD.

One thing more especially impressed me. The individual Christian

must be constantly GROWING in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (II Pet. 3:18). The Church is merely the sum total of its individual members, collectively. Therefore, especially since we live in a world in which ALL NATIONS have been DECEIVED by Satan -- a world in which the churches of "Christianity" teach doctrines and follow customs diametrically OPPOSITE to the pure teaching of the WORD OF GOD, the true Church of God MUST be a Church which is constantly GROWING in truth and confessing and correcting ERROR.

But I could find no church which had been willing to do that. I do not know of a single church which in our time has ever confessed its teaching on major doctrines was in error and which has corrected that error; nor one which has accepted NEW (to it) truth. Yet that is one of the criteria of the one and only TRUE Church of God. And there is only ONE such Church (I Cor. 12:12-13,27; Rom. 12:5).

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

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

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

No other church, as far as I know, has this wonderful knowledge!

#### God's Law of Marriage

This Church also knows GOD's LAW of marriage, as mentioned in Romans 7:1-3: "Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,)...." Paul was speaking to them that "know the law." The great group of many churches called "Christianity" reject God's Law, and their people do not "know the law." Those of other religions the world over do not "know the law."

Continue in Romans 7: "...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 the 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."

WHY did God give to HUMANS this God-plane relationship given to NO OTHER creature? Because this life is the TRAINING GROUND for our life in God's Kingdom -- to prepare us for that ETERNAL life. We then shall enter a divine MARRIAGE to Christ. It shall be an ETERNAL marriage -- never broken through eternity. God's LAW of marriage was designed to impress us with the SACREDNESS and the PERMANENCY of marriage. Two of God's Ten Commandments protect the permanency of that sacred and holy union.

#### Divorce Question Plagued Church

But today we live in a deceived and sinning world. Satan is the god of this world. It does not KNOW the true God, nor His Laws, nor does it UNDERSTAND the meaning and PURPOSE of marriage.

It is a world plagued with broken marriages and broken families. This type of violation of God's Law produces much SUFFERING. More than one in every four marriages is now broken by divorce -- approaching one in three.

Of prospective Church members -- those applying for baptism -- somewhere near one in five, or one in four, have been divorced, and most of these remarried. In order to qualify to be baptized and accepted into God's Church MANY have been required by the Church, knowing this teaching, to separate from a second marriage -- in many cases a happy marriage with children.

This brought on a growing class of what came to be called "spiritual widows" -- women separated from such a second marriage, unable to support themselves (and often children) and therefore living on third tithe. Also many divorced from a former marriage were plagued with the desire to remarry -- forbidden by the Church.

Some began studying the Bible to find a way around this law and to justify remarriage after divorce from a first mate. A book was found, attempting to justify such remarriage without one being called an "adulteress" or an "adulterer." Several tried to justify a conclusion opposite to PLAIN SCRIPTURE by trying to prove that

the word "fornication" used by Jesus in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 -- translated from the Greek word porneia -- could mean the equivalent of "adultery." Efforts were made to read meanings into Deut. 24: 1-4, Jer. 3, and Hosea to allow for divorce and remarriage.

I appointed a team of scholars and researchers to research this question with a fine-tooth comb -- NOT to find a way to twist or distort or misapply God's Word, but to find the TRUTH. After this team had been studying the question and researching for some time all angles purported to justify remarriage after divorce, I promised, in December, 1972, to carefully study the papers prepared by the team and produce a new booklet on the subject as soon as possible.

This I did. I studied carefully the reports of the researches of the several members of the team. In addition, at the same time, there was my own further study of all these points of contention. The result was a new 96-page booklet titled Marriage and Divorce. I proved, adequately and conclusively, in it, that the maneuvering and twistings and human-reason arguments endeavoring to prove God's spiritual Law of marriage allowed divorce and remarriage were false, and that God's spiritual Law STANDS, immutable!

GOD'S CHURCH WILL NOT COMPROMISE WITH GOD'S LAW, or with the clear WORD OF GOD. Dissenters may go out of the Church, resorting to a striving about Greek or Hebrew words (forbidden by God -- II Tim. 2:14), but GOD'S CHURCH has been and WILL BE FAITHFUL with the WORD OF GOD (Rev. 3:8). Where proved TRUTH (new to us) appears, we shall ACCEPT IT. Where error is found, we shall CORRECT IT. But God's Church also will HOLD FAST that which is proved TRUE.

After the booklet was published, however, word reached me that some had not submitted their own contributions on the subject. I was overseas when this report reached me. Immediately I telexed Pasadena to withhold the new booklet from circulation until their contributions to the combined study could be considered and evaluated.

Meanwhile, this matter of the so-called "spiritual widows" was bringing more and more insistent protest from many of our ministers. The necessity, as we understood it, of telling an increasing number of applicants for baptism that they could not be baptized or received into the Church contrary to GOD'S LAW of marriage was fast becoming a heavy concern to us all. Many of these marriages involving a former marriage and divorce were marriages of some years, with children -- happy marriages. Yet God's Law seemed plain!

My son, Garner Ted Armstrong, came to me, heavily concerned -- as we all were -- with this: "In the first century, when the Apostle Paul wrote, Dad, divorce and remarriage problems were rampant

-- perhaps even worse than today, especially in Rome and the Greek world. That's an established FACT of history. Therefore, we know Paul was encountering these problems continually, just as we are today. WHY, then, do we not read of these problems and Paul's heartache in having to tell such happily-married people they have to break up their marriage? Yet we find no such experiences, either in the Book of Acts, or Romans, or his two letters to the Corinthians, or others. WHY?"

This triggered a NEW APPROACH in our research. In the urgency to FINALIZE this study for the definite answer before the worldwide Ministers' Conference convening May 6th at Pasadena, I appointed a special committee, including Drs. Herman Hoeh, Charles Dorothy, Robert Kuhn, and Mr. Raymond McNair, and asked them to make an intensified study of accounts of Paul's ministry in these areas of the Gentile world and his letters to those countries.

We were all reminded of how many times I have said that nearly always error results from an ASSUMED premise carelessly taken for granted because it seemed too self-evident to even question. WHAT could we have taken for granted? WHAT was the premise on which everything was based?

First, we all had to bear in mind that we COULD NOT accept mere arguments advanced by others outside the Church, resorting to unclear meanings of Greek or Hebrew words and using human reason to try to "prove" what they wanted to prove. Those arguments were found false.

Some of the team researched further into Paul's letters to the Romans and the Corinthians. Surely Paul had said something on this problem that plagues God's Church today. The Corinthians had written Paul about problems -- these he was answering.

The one chapter Paul wrote them on the subject of marriage is the seventh chapter of I Corinthians. Corinth was a hotbed of divorce and remarriage abuses. Verses 12 through 17 had never seemed completely clear to us. Verses 8 through 11 have been perfectly clear -- and in perfect harmony with Romans 7:1-3. In these verses Paul wrote: "To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband) -- and that the husband should not divorce his wife" (v. 10-11, RSV). This is addressed to "the MARRIED" and shows "the married" are bound to each other for LIFE. If a divorce occurs, each must remain single. A second marriage makes one an adulterer or adulteress, just as in Romans 7:1-3. But they MAY be reconciled. The husband MAY take his wife back again.

Next, verse 12 (RSV): "To the rest I say, not the Lord...." In verse 8, Paul addressed himself "to the unmarried and widows"; in verse 10, "to the married"; and in verse 12, "to the rest." WHO are "the rest" -- besides the UNmarried, widows and widowers, and besides "the MARRIED"? The expression, "I say, not the Lord," does not mean that this is not inspired. All scripture is inspired, and this is part of scripture. It simply means there has heretofore been no precedent. When Paul writes, "I give charge, not I but the Lord," he is quoting what the Lord has already said IN SCRIPTURE. But what he is going to say in verse 12 is something NEW, without precedent. Yet Paul, even though saying this for the first time in scripture, is inspired in writing it. I think all commentaries agree. He continues, "If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever...." Let us stop here and ask, "WHEN was such a brother married?" NOT since becoming a baptized believer, for believers are prohibited from being unequally yoked together with unbelievers. Therefore, this is speaking of a man converted, but already married while HE and his wife both were unbelievers. Continuing: "...and she consents to live with him." WHY should she NOT? She already had "consented" to live with him when they were married. She still was living with him when he was converted and baptized. The reason she might NOT consent to live with him now is his conversion, which she might not agree with and turn hostile because of it. How many such experiences have we had today like that?

So here is a NEW type of case. A newly converted person married to an unbelieving wife. She may refuse to live any longer with him because of his conversion. Paul solves this by NOT QUESTIONING the validity of the pre-conversion marriage. He simply says to this NEW situation that if she consents to live with him, he should not leave her. If SHE is willing, he should CONTINUE (verses 17-20) in the same married state in which God called him.

Next (verse 13): "If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him."

Now we come to the part which was not fully clear to us before. "For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy" (verse 14).

The conversion of either partner in a marriage which was consummated before conversion sanctifies -- sets apart in God's favor -- the unconverted who is willing to live in peace with the converted mate. The conversion of one makes the children holy, where they had been "unclean" before (so far as Godly relation goes).

This can mean nothing else than that GOD has entered into the marriage and the FAMILY with the conversion of ONE, either husband or wife! This brings up a TREMENDOUS NEW POINT!

Marriage was ordained of God. The LAWS respecting marriage were set by GOD. And WHEN?

This is IMPORTANT!! God ordained the marriage institution PRIOR to man's rejection of God's Laws and God's institutions. And when man cut himself off from God, and from God's LAWS (including His marriage law, mentioned in Romans 7:1-3 and elsewhere), he no longer took God into such relationships as marriage, or business relationships, or government, or education. This world's institutions -- government, science, commerce, industry, society, religion, education -- all exclude God, except the god of this world.

#### WHEN God Ordained Marriage

God ordained the marriage and family relationship PRIOR to Satan's temptation and Adam's rejection of God and His knowledge and His Laws and ways.

God actually ordained marriage and family relationship at, and immediately upon, the creation of man. Notice: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, [His very first words to man] 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth...'" (Gen. 1:27-28).

Then, again, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

Then, in the third chapter comes the report of Satan's temptation and man's rejection of God and of God's part in his life.

#### Satan the GOD of This World

Even since Adam rejected God's rule over his life, man has gone his own way, swayed and deceived by Satan. This world became Satan's world. Satan is the god of this world -- of its religions, which are deceived by him.

As man rejected God's Laws and God's presence in his life -- as Israel even did, after God had intervened to give Israel His Laws and ways -- God "gave them also statutes that were not good, and

judgments whereby they should not live..." (Ezek. 20:25). It was like the expression in II Thess. 2:11: "And for this cause [rejecting God's Truth -- verse 10] God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." In other words, God GAVE THEM OVER to statutes, ordinances, governments, customs, development of knowledge devoid of God's revealed knowledge -- and WITHOUT GOD ENTERING INTO AND BECOMING PART OF THEIR LIVES. That has penetrated even into the religions of this world, under Satan's sway.

#### The ASSUMED Erroneous Premise

Thus, this greater IN-DEPTH study of I Corinthians 7 brought to light the PREMISE on which our whole conception of marriage and divorce was heretofore based: we assumed that GOD personally looked down from heaven and witnessed and Himself. BOUND every marriage of a heathen, a pagan, a couple who has no religion -- in short, ALL MARRIAGES of all the billions of human beings on earth.

God had revealed HIS LAW OF MARRIAGE -- His TRUTH about marriage -- God's PURPOSE in marriage, its sanctity, its PERMANENCY -- to His Church. And we applied that truth to ALL marriages, ASSUMING that God entered into every marriage, EVEN THOUGH GOD HAD NOT ENTERED INTO THE LIVES OF THOSE we SUPPOSED He had bound.

Let us REJOICE that God has revealed HIS TRUTH -- and that God's Church DID hold fast that which God had revealed as good; that we did not CHANGE until God revealed how HE HAD NOT HIMSELF BOUND all marriages.

Unconverted people have never let GOD enter their lives. They live APART from God -- CUT OFF from God -- because sin cuts one off from contact with God (see Isa. 59:2). When they have never let God come into their lives -- have been CUT OFF from contact with Him -- could He enter into their MARRIAGES and BIND them?

God allows the world to have its governments -- to legislate such things as war, peace; to regulate the commercial, industrial and social affairs; to make its own laws of marriage. The UNconverted are BOUND by the state, but NOT DIRECTLY BY GOD! Their marriages are LEGAL. Their children are LEGITIMATE -- in no sense bastards -- but the children of the unconverted are not HOLY. They do not have this special blessing from God.

These verses I am discussing in I Corinthians 7 were never clear to us in God's Church before.

But now back to I Corinthians 7.



Notice, now, verse 15: "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace." "IF the unbelieving depart" -- IF he or she so deeply resents the mate for letting GOD come into his or her life, with His Holy Spirit, and he or she refuses to live longer with the converted partner, let him depart. Pray, what else could one do? A brother or sister, in such a situation, having been married BEFORE conversion, IS NOT BOUND BY GOD!

And if GOD had not bound the marriage, then the newly converted one is FREE TO MARRY -- but ONLY a converted mate IN THE LORD! And THAT marriage, of course, would be BOUND by GOD.

God's teaching here is that, if possible -- if the unconverted mate is willing--the converted mate should CONTINUE LIVING WITH THE UNCONVERTED one. The unbelieving one is SANCTIFIED -- set apart for holy matrimony BY GOD -- through the converted one. In other words, GOD THEREUPON, for the first time, SANCTIFIES that marriage.

But if the unconverted refuses and leaves, and divorces, the converted one is NOT bound in marriage by God to the unconverted. This is NEW KNOWLEDGE to those of us in God's Church.

But what of the CHILDREN? I give you here, since God has not revealed this in this scripture, what I take the prerogative to say to God's Church -- and I think I have the mind of Christ in this. Since the marriage in question was a LEGAL, not a holy one, the human courts would have to decide the custody of the children. IF the children stay with the converted partner, they are sanctified through the converted one. If they go with the unconverted mate, they are NOT "holy" (or under God's special blessing or protection) -- though of course they are legitimate.

Another reason for continuing such a marriage, if the unconverted partner is willing: the chance that the unconverted may become converted through the converted one (verse 16). Let everyone (if possible) continue in the state in which God called him to conversion (verse 17). And all of this, PAUL ordained in all the churches.

THIS EXPLAINS why we find no record of Paul bringing up these cases that have plagued God's ministers today. This new (to us) teaching SOLVES all these knotty, troublesome cases and borderline cases at once! Let us be glad and rejoice!

Paul continues, in verses 18-24, to give illustrations of remaining in the state in which one is called (if possible).

Then this leads to, beginning in verse 27: "Art thou bound [by God] unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? [that is, divorced] seek not a wife." This refers to one who had been married and divorced prior to conversion. Continuing: "But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin [at the time of conversion] marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you."

A more technically-detailed booklet will be issued as soon as possible -- that is, a completely revised and FINAL booklet on marriage and divorce.

One of America's greatest tragedies -- one of her colossal sins and of the whole world today -- is the breaking up of families through the wringer of divorce. God's Church puts major emphasis on this national and international crime.

A strong and firm family structure is a basic building block of any happy and stable society.

But when we have encountered so many cases of a present happy family, where one party to the marriage has been divorced from a previous marriage, it has been a real heartbreaking experience to the ministry of God's Church to be required, according to our former understanding, to tell them this present marriage is adulterous -- that the present family must be broken up if they are to enter God's Kingdom. We assumed every first marriage, unless fraud was involved, was bound for life by the Living God. Not only did we assume that -- the present dissident ministers who went out of God's Church assumed it. So far as we knew, everybody who had any biblical knowledge at all assumed it.

One incident spurred me to immediate and decisive further extra-intensive effort to insist our research team enter upon a new crash program to see if God's Word anywhere allowed such a second marriage to continue.

One man on our staff here at Headquarters asked to see me a few days before the approaching worldwide Ministers' Conference. With him was the woman from whom he had separated a few years ago, in order to be baptized and to enter the Church of God. She was a "spiritual widow," subsisting on third tithe which was insufficient. They had children. She was living in Ohio; he in Pasadena.

He didn't want to live any longer. They were both in a state of virtual hopelessness and mental anguish. I felt helpless -- just as I have felt before when faced with similar tragedies; just

as our ministers from all over the world feel. I had to tell them I could do nothing -- unless God could show me where He authorized them to go back together -- and that seemed hopeless, because God does not authorize us to act contrary to His Law. What I did not know then was that God had not bound such cases. But I promised I would immediately order this crash re-study.

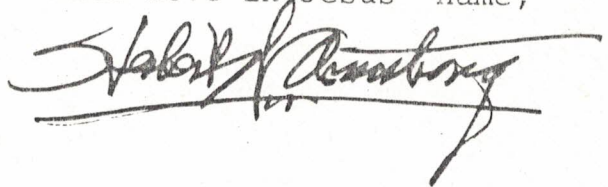
No matter how much anguish is caused -- and we ministers have suffered this anguish along with the victims -- God's Church cannot depart from God's Laws or His Truth.

Brethren, this very experience ought to teach all that loyalty to God and to His Church must always be placed first, over supposed or real wrongs or personal grievances. God has given those of us who are loyal to Him and His Word the relief we relied on Him to give us.

Also there were the many cases of individuals living single because they were divorced from one outside the Church.

I want all of you to know how happy we are for the answer given by God Himself, and how much I and all loyal ministers appreciate deeply from the heart the faithfulness of those of you who have endured this anguish in order to be obedient to our God. Loyalty and faithfulness always pays; God may test us for a while. But if we are faithful, I say again with Paul: "I reckon the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

With love in Jesus' name,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert A. Armstrong". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.