

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE MAY 1976

STATEMENT ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

The following statement of the Worldwide Church of God
supersedes all material heretofore published on this subject.

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A fundamental teaching of the Worldwide Church of God is that marriage is a Divine institution ordained by God. Marriage symbolizes both the God-plane relationship of the Family of God and the relationship between Christ and the Church. The sanctity and seriousness of marriage must continuously be stressed.

Changes made in the Church's administration of divorce and remarriage over the past two years should serve to prevent the breakup of all current marriages. The following points succinctly summarize the present Church teaching on divorce and remarriage.

- 1) The Church accepts new converts in whatever marital state they enter the Church--I Corinthians 7:20-24. Acts of adultery and other sins which may have dissolved a prior marriage are forgiven (along with all other past sins) at baptism--Acts 2:38; 3:19; Romans 3:25. A previously divorced person who has entered fellowship is free to remarry within the Church (I Cor. 7:27, 28, 39).
- 2) So far as the Church is concerned, there are only three scriptural reasons why Church members may divorce each other--with subsequent rights of remarriage.
 - a) Fraud: This amounts to an annulment, though divorce is usually required to terminate the marriage. The marriage covenant was made under false pretense. One party later finds that he or she has been defrauded and decides to take action. (Deut. 22:13-21--The spirit of this scripture may be applied to other acts of fraud besides the pretext of virginity.)
 - b) Porneia: This is the well-known "exception clause" stated by Christ. The term includes all illicit sexual activity (before or after marriage) including fornication, adultery, harlotry, homosexuality, etc. The offending party becomes "defiled" in the eyes of the offended party (Deut. 24:4; Matt. 5:31-32; 19:9, etc.)

- c) Desertion: If one member of a marriage is-- or becomes--an "unbeliever," and deserts his or her mate--not being "pleased to dwell with her/him"--the offended party is freed from obligation. He or she may formalize the separation and any subsequent divorce (I Cor. 7:15).
- 3) While the Church allows its members to divorce and remarry under the above biblical conditions, it does not generally recommend it. God says He hates divorce (Mal. 2:16). Rather than encouraging divorce the Church insists that every possible effort be made to reconcile the offended parties. Forgiveness is an intrinsic part of the Christian character (Matt. 6:14-15). The Church lends its counseling services to aid in achieving such reconciliations. If reconciliation is impossible, and separation follows, the Church suggests two possible courses of action:
- a) If no adequate scriptural grounds for divorce are present (see points of #2), the Church strongly recommends that the couple not divorce though they may choose to remain separate. Reconciliation should be achieved at the soonest possible time. If this is not possible, they should remain single.
- b) If adequate biblical grounds for divorce are present, the couple may divorce if they have first exhausted all other attempts to resolve their differences. Remarriage may take place, but only within the Church (I Cor. 7:10-11).
- 4) In the event that one party concocts "evidence" of fraud, or deliberately commits adultery (porneia), or becomes an "unbeliever" (i.e. reverts to the unconverted state) and deserts his or her mate in order to "qualify" for divorce or annulment--he or she automatically becomes disfellowshipped. Such a person will be readmitted to fellowship--free of guilt--upon genuine repentance. (If such a person deliberately orchestrates such a situation from start to finish, let the Eternal God be his or her Judge.)