

## Divorce And Remarriage

### Violence against the Marriage Contract

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Doctrinally, 1974 was a momentous year in the Worldwide Church of God because two major doctrines were changed. The one was Pentecost being revised from a Monday to a Sunday, and the second was a change in divorce and remarriage, in which something very interesting came to pass. Prior to this time, it was taught that the only reason for a lawful divorce that permitted remarriage was fraud. I am not going to go into the reasons why this was believed, because it was clearly wrong.

What we are going to do then, is to take a look at some scriptures that show that divorce, with the possibility of remarriage, is certainly a possibility. It is a liberty that is available under certain circumstances, but it is not to be abused.

As we begin, I want to give two disclaimers. The first is that I am not going into this subject because we are having any problem with this is the Church of the Great God. I am actually going into it because there is no problem, and because we have not gone into it for a long, long time.

Second, I cannot possibly cover every possible aspect of this. We can cover the major principles involved, and just from my own personal experience in this I think that this is one of the most emotionally charged subjects in the entirety of the book. As such, people have a way of looking at the scriptures, being inclined by their emotions, and coming up with conclusions that are different from what the scriptures clearly say. I think that it is emotionally-charged because marital relationships have, as a general rule, been very difficult.

**Romans 7:1-3** Do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), how the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.

I started here because people will argue vociferously that this verse shows that a marriage can only be ended by death. Now it may indeed say that, if this is the only set of scriptures that are used. I think that you understand a biblical principle regarding interpretation. Rarely does any one scripture contain all of the information, but rather a doctrine is built layer upon layer by taking scriptures from one area and combining them truthfully, honestly, and correctly with another scripture in another area, and so on and so forth until one gathers all of the scriptures on any given subject.

As I mentioned earlier, we are not going to be able to go into every aspect of this subject, but we are going to go into enough so that we have general guidance in regard to this emotionally-charged doctrine. People who would say that Romans 7:1-3 shows that there is no such thing as a divorce that will permit a remarriage are at variance with their Savior because He clearly says that there is a reason for divorce that will permit a remarriage. Paul, here, is only stating a legal generality regarding marriage. A lawful divorce is not being considered here. He is simply addressing a normal marital situation.

We are going to go from here to Matthew 19 because here Jesus speaks directly on divorce and remarriage, and these scriptures are central to understanding this doctrine because here is our Savior speaking on it.

**Matthew 19:1-12** Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings, that He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there. The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?" And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason shall a man leave father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce and to put her away?" He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." His disciples said to Him, "If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry." But He said to them, "All cannot accept this saying, but those to whom it has been given. For there are some eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are some eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it."

Now at the time of Christ, there were two schools of thought among the Jews. The followers of a rabbi named Hillel, advocated divorce and remarriage for anything. In other words, it was very liberal and it was wide open. The followers of a rabbi named Shami said, "No that's not correct, adultery only." Those who followed Shami were very strict regarding divorce and remarriage.

As one reads through this, and we see Jesus' statement on it, it appears that Jesus comes down on the side of the Shami group. This is shown by the disciples' reaction. They judged that since marriage was so difficult, and seemingly divorce was almost an impossibility, that it was better not to marry at all. This resulted then in Jesus' comment about the eunuchs, and not all men being able to bear what He just said. However, I think that we are going to see that Jesus only *appeared* to come down on the Shami group's side, because other information reveals that He was more liberal than it appears from just this one statement.

In other words, other scriptures have to be added to this, because remember the whole Bible is the Word of God. It is the Word of Christ, the whole Bible. He probably answered the way that He did because the Pharisees asked the question. And they tended to side with Hillel, divorce for any reason that would permit a remarriage.

The term 'fornication' is central to this issue of divorce and remarriage, because Jesus said that fornication is an exception. However, that term is also misleading to those who speak English, and therefore there is more there than meets the eye. I do not know whether you realize it, but English may be the most specific and descriptive language that there has ever been on earth. It is far more specific and descriptive than either Hebrew or Greek.

This is largely because of the cultural and commercial dominance of Britain and the United States over the past three hundred or so years. Virtually everywhere one goes in the world, one can hear English spoken by many people. Even people who are native born in their land. This is because they *must* speak it in order to do business and to make money. Even people who do not have one another's language in common, having maybe only their native language plus English, will use English to communicate with one another.

For example, maybe a French person wants to do business with a Russian person, the Russian person cannot speak French and the French person cannot speak Russian, but they both can speak to each other in English. So they use English in order to communicate and do their business, and this is because British and American cultural and commercial interests are so dominant that people all over the world have to defend themselves by learning to speak English; otherwise, they will have little or no prosperity because prosperity comes in dealing with the English and American people. So they learn it.

Just the other day, a Russian airliner collided with DHL cargo carrier above Germany. It said right in the article reporting that the command to both planes was given in English. Both apparently understood the English language; in fact, they *have* to because all commands to airliners are given internationally in English.

So, if there is any language on earth that is universal, it is English. If a Chinese plane is flying into Amsterdam, the landing instructions are given in English. If an Indian plane is flying into Paris, the instructions are given in English. All over the world English is the language of business. It used to be that French was the language of culture, but English has even displaced French, and the French are upset about it.

This has had a secondary affect and that is because of the dominance of the English and American people. English and American citizens are going all over the world to conduct business, (and I might add to this, make war, which is what is happening with America as a peacekeeper.)

Everywhere they go they pick up bits of the language of the people that they are doing business with. Whether it is in Vietnam, Japan, or China or wherever, those words—the Vietnamese words, the Indian words, the Indonesian words, etc—are added to the English language and become part of what we say. It may take a while, but eventually those things become part of our language.

Just to give you some sort of an idea of how huge the English language is—it plays very much on this, so please bear with me—in the Old Testament there are only 8,674 different Hebrew words. In the Greek New Testament there are only 5,624 Greek words. Now undoubtedly these languages had larger vocabularies than that, but those are the only ones that happen to appear in the Bible, and so *Strong's* recorded each and every one of them. Even if we say they had two or three times that many words, and I kind of doubt that, it still only means about 17,000 for the Hebrew and about 11,000 for the Greek. Shakespeare in the 1600s had a vocabulary of English words used in his books of 16,000 words.

Do you know how many the English language has now? Would you believe 400,000, plus 200,000 other technical terms, which they call professional terms. That is 600,000 words and this is why I say that English is probably the most specific language that there has ever been.

We have an almost endless variety of words that we can use to fit circumstances and give description of what it is that we are trying to get across, and those words may come from hundreds of different languages. We use these words every day, not stopping to think that this originally was not part of the English language. Now, this makes English very flexible, and I think that God had a hand in that because everywhere in the world there are people now that speak English.

So, mankind is without excuse for knowing a great deal about the sovereign God and His purpose. They may not be converted, but they have it available to them, and those who can read English can pass it on to others in their native language if need be.

Jesus used the term 'fornication.' In English, we designate fornication as illicit sexual relations before marriage, and we use adultery for those after.

**I Corinthians 5:1** It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife.

I think that you all understand when I ask you this question. What is the sin that is involved in I Corinthians 5:1? It is not illicit sexual relations before marriage. The sexual sin is incest.

**Revelation 2:20-22** "Nevertheless, I have a few things against you, because you allowed that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds."

There we have both fornication and adultery that are named. If you will look in a modern translation, the word 'fornication' does not appear, but rather 'sexual immorality' is the way that it is generally translated today. The word that is used and translated into the English 'fornication' in the *King James Version* is *porneia*. The word that is generally translated into 'adultery' is the Greek word *moicheuo*.

*Porneia*, in Greek, includes all sexual sins and especially those most frequently deemed to be more perverted and socially dangerous. *Moicheuo* is synonymous with the English 'adultery', but what about all of the other kinds of sexual sins that one can commit? How about incest, pederasty, pedophilia, homosexuality, lesbianism, or bestiality? A number of those are directly mentioned in the Bible. *The Greeks did not have a word for those sins*, but English does. So everywhere someone speaking Greek would be referring to a sexual sin *other than* adultery they were forced to use the word *porneia*, because that is as expressive as the Greek could be at that point. And the only way that we, an English reader, can tell what the sin is that is actually being described or named, is by the context.

Now, we have to feed this information back into what Jesus said. He specifically used the word 'fornication.' Is it possible when He made His exception, "except it be for fornication," that actually He was pronouncing a great deal more liberality than appears on the surface? In other words, it may be that He was saying that it is not just pre-marital sex that is hidden prior to a marriage and a fraud occurs, but also it may very well, and I am sure that it would, include such things as pederasty.

Ladies, would you want to marry a man who had a history of fooling around with little boys? Does this kind of person look like good material for a marriage? Pedophilia can be committed by either sex against a child. In fact I do not know whether you realize it, but Mohammed, the leader of Islam, married a girl when he was in his fifties and she was six, and he consummated the marriage when she was nine. That is pedophilia. This is the leader of that religion! Very interesting.

From what Jesus said, it is entirely possible that He specifically chose that word to open up the doors to something other than pre-marital sex, so that it is not limited to pre-marital sex, but all kinds of perverted sex, including adultery. Because in Revelation 2, it shows us very clear there that adultery is also included within *porneia*.

*Porneia* is a general term that encompasses every illicit sexual perversion. So the Greek's could not be specific like we can in English. The only one that they could specifically designate was adultery. The Bible consistently uses *porneia* far more than *moicheuo*.

Now we have to make a bit of deviation here, because we have to get some more background, but that is a good start for helping us to understand first of all that Jesus was more liberal than it appears on the surface, and we will find out why He was more liberal as we go along.

I want us to reflect on a couple of scriptures. Hebrews 13:8 says that Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, today, and forever." Malachi 3:6 reinforces that when it says, "I am the LORD, I change not." So, we understand that God's intention from the beginning regarding marriage, once we begin to apply this principle, has never changed.

However, we are going to see that God *does change* certain things, and we have to understand 'change' a little bit. In other words, is God like the law of the Medes and the Persians that changes not? Well, there are certain things that never change. His purpose never changes. His character never changes. He says that not one jot or tittle of His law will ever be changed.

But He does change His anger, does He not? He does change administrations, as II Corinthians 3 shows very clearly. He changed from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. Now here is something to think about: Jesus' own symbolic marital status when He divorced Israel.

What we are going to see as we develop this study, is that God shows a flexibility in His judgments as an act of mercy, so that we will not be bound or enslaved in a marital situation that is untenable, without peace, and destructive to God's purpose. That is very important. That combination has to be there.

**Malachi 2:16** "For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for [he is going to give a reason] it covers one's garment with violence," says the LORD of hosts. "Therefore [here comes the warning] take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."

Now for our purposes here, one of the key phrases is "one covers violence." The very fact that the word cover is used indicates something hidden, and it is hidden deceitfully. So one is hiding something, and God is *strongly* against this, and within the context it means He is strongly against it *because* of the marriage contract.

Think of the word 'violence.' Violence is abusive, but violence is not necessarily physical abuse. Many times it is, but not necessarily. Within the context, this is violence against what constitutes acceptable, good conduct, and approved by God within a marriage. It is violence against a marriage.

Let me give you a clear example. A person may commit adultery against the husband or wife. They do not punch the husband or wife out, they are not beating them up, but the adultery is nonetheless violence against the marriage contract, and it abuses it. Is adultery the only thing that is violence against the marriage contract? Not by a long shot. So a conclusion, from Malachi 2:16, is that violence constitutes somebody not holding up his end, his responsibilities to the marriage contract.

This is still not very clear and understandable regarding divorce and remarriage, but we do see evidence that God hates violence against the marriage covenant. But it is the violence that actually leads to the divorces that occur, and it can be committed by either spouse, or both of them against each other.

Let us go back to Genesis 2, and this always kind of amazes me because of whom the speaker is, it is the newly created Adam. How did he know to say this? He was just taken out of the ground. Eve was there before him and after saying, "Wow!" he said:

**Genesis 2:23-24** And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman [which essentially means, man without a womb], because she was taken out of Man." Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Okay, right off the bat, Adam says that there are three factors regarding marriage:

1. Each partner was to leave parents and establish a new unit.
2. They were to cleave, meaning stick together, unwaveringly to each other.
3. They were to bond sexually to the exclusion of all other possible partners.

Now back in thought to the word violence in Malachi 2:16. What we are gradually going to see is that even though God hates divorce, He recognizes that there are some who commit violence against the marriage contract, and that violence will be against one, two, or three of the three conditions that Adam stated. (1) The violence will be against the starting of a new unit because one or the other did not really leave Mom or Dad. That is a mental thing. (2) They do not stick unwaveringly to each other. (3) And they may go dilly-dallying around with somebody other than their spouse.

The implication is that all three of these were to be kept until death. This presents us then with the basis that Paul used in Romans 7:1-3. One of the reasons that we know that Paul was quoting the ideal is that Deuteronomy 24, with which he was very familiar, clearly allows a divorce that will permit a remarriage. Not only did Paul know it, the Pharisees knew it, and that is why they said, "Well then, why did Moses say. . . ." Paul in no way intended Romans 7:1-3 to be anything more than to be taken as an ideal. This is the way it *should* be, but the reality is unfortunately, in many cases, not this way. Because God will, even under the Old Covenant, permit a divorce with remarriage.

Following Adam's and Eve's sin, morality went into a free fall. It became so bad that God judged by means of the Flood, and it is interesting that in the beginning of chapter 6, just prior to the Flood, it says that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair and they took them wives of all which they chose. Marital problems were a major part of all of the sin that was involved before the Flood.

From this point on, for a while, my interest is God's reaction to the multiple marriages and the use of concubines of His servants. I am speaking specifically of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David, as being prime examples. What we have to ask here is what do we find in their lives, and what do we fail to find?

Now one who stands out is Isaac. He had one wife from beginning to end. In that regard he is a wonderful example, a type of Christ. However, he does not get off scot-free.

Both he and his father Abraham got involved with a man named Abimelech. They may have been different men with the same name, we do not know. But Abimelech is used, and I think that it is interesting to look at that example with Abraham in Genesis 20, because it is instructive.

**Genesis 20:1-2** And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar. Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.

These next few verses are really interesting because He not only puts a hedge around Abraham and Sarah, but He also put this hedge around this unconverted Gentile. This is very interesting as it unfolds. In other words, He kept them from sinning, which is very encouraging because if He did it for them, He will do it for you and me.

**Genesis 20:3-5** But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, "Indeed you are a dead man because the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife." But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, "Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also? Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she, even she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this."

Can you just imagine Abimelech's heart beating so fast as he stuttered these words out?

**Genesis 20:6-7** And God said to him in a dream, "Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. Now therefore, restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."

Gulp! Do you think that he felt like obeying? He did. Now what is so instructive is that even this pagan king knew that adultery was against God's law. He understood the wrongness of adultery. But everybody, except Isaac, seemed comfortable with polygamy. Abraham had both a wife and concubines—plural. And besides that there was Hagar, in which Sarah participated!

That is thinking out of the box for you and me, but they all seemed to think it was not so bad. This included one of the greatest men of faith in all of the history of mankind. Then there was Jacob. He

had two wives, two concubines, and constant fighting. "It's my turn, it's your turn, it is not!" But did it not seem like just the normal course of events?

Then there was Moses. Zipporah was a Midianite and they were cousins to the Israelites, there was a racial tie there. The other wife that was not named, she was an Ethiopian. (Incidentally, this is just an aside, just because she was an Ethiopian does not mean that she was black. She may have been, she may not have been, but by nationality she was an Ethiopian. This is very similar to Paul who was in reality, by race, a Benjamite, but by nationality he was a Jew.)

So this woman, who was apparently a prize of war, or so the history says, Moses took her as a wife. And you know that Miriam and Aaron got upset about that. They had problems with it, but you know what, God did not. God defended Moses, did He not? It is right in the Book. You see, we are examining God in this through the lives of these men who are considered heroes of faith.

Like I said earlier, everything in the Bible is not given in one place, and just because God does not call them into account does not mean that He was fully pleased with what they were doing. But, the generosity of His judgment was such that He permitted them to do this because it apparently was part of the culture. And, secondarily, as long as they were not committing adultery; that is, having sexual relations with a woman that had already been married to somebody else by which a contract was abused, a promise broken, He did not call them into account.

However, God did record, for your benefit and mine, what happened in their marriages, and I will tell you that for most of them they were a mess. Have you ever looked into Jacob's marriages and his concubines, and all of that constant competition and bickering that went on? And what did it produce? Twelve *brats*! Let us be honest. Even Joseph, for all of his gifts, was a smart-alecky, spoiled kid who later turned into one of the finest examples in all of the Bible of *anybody*, and I mean that. He was one of the *greatest* who has ever lived.

Look at the family trouble that Moses had. His children incidentally did not turn out to glorify him. I do not know whether you are aware of it, but some of that is recorded in the book of Judges. And David—a man after God's own heart—his family life was pitiful. It even says that David never called his children into account. He never said, "No, you can't do that." So what happened? Murder within the family. Rebellion: Absalom against his father, Adonijah against his father, Adonijah against Solomon.

So God was faithful, even though He never directly called them into account except for David. And when did He call David into account? When he committed adultery with a woman who had already promised her love to another man. He abused the marriage contract—violence against the marriage contract, which produced violence, and the death of Uriah.

So when we pull all of these cases together, and even though God is recording without censure, what they did shows us the fruit of what was produced and it makes it very clear that polygamy is *not* acceptable in God's eyes. And so, there is no law against it, but the implication of so many examples makes it very clear what God's approach is regarding this.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 shows that God clearly permitted divorce and remarriage under the Old Covenant. And not only that, in Exodus 21:10-11, right within the terms of the Old Covenant, God permitted both multiple marriages and divorce even though it is clear—Jesus said, "from the beginning that it was not so"—that neither was in line with His original intent.

So, does God change? Yes, He does. He makes adjustments in order to extend mercy within circumstances where, as I said, situations are untenable, without peace, and destructive to His overall purpose to bring His people into His Kingdom. So the very fact that God's Word permits divorce even though He has an ideal, and states that He hates divorce, is an unstated admission of marriage's difficulty.

In addition to that, Jesus' symbolic marriage to Israel—that is what the Old Covenant was, it was a marriage—makes clear a fact which we all need to consider. What that marriage presents is one between a converted person, Jesus, and an unconverted one, and it failed because of the attitude and the conduct of the unconverted spouse. Now, not all marriages of this kind fail, but it points out that it takes access to the Tree of Life to give marriage its best chance for success. See, when God cut them off from contact with Him, marriage began to go down the tubes.

Some think, according to Romans 7:1-3, that Christ had to die in order to be free to marry Israel again, but that is not so. The Old Testament laws given by Christ Himself (Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever), state emphatically that He was free (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) to remarry her as long as she did not take another husband and divorce him.

Well, Israel did not do that. Jesus is free to marry whomsoever He will. And when He marries, which He is going to do in the future (Revelation 19), He is not going to marry the same woman. He is going to marry the church, which is made up of Israelites who are the descendants of the original covenanters, and Gentiles who had no part at all in the original marriage, because He is going to marry spiritual Israel.

An overall lesson that one can learn from marriage and divorce in the Old Testament, is that it takes two converted people for a marriage to reach the ideal that God intends, and even if only one is converted, the marriage will fall short of God's ideal.

Herbert Armstrong once made the statement that there is only one basic cause for a lawful divorce that will permit remarriage. He also gave the answer, he said it is unconversion. He was on solid biblical ground when he said that because he was just paraphrasing what Jesus said. Moses permitted divorce why? Because of the hardness of the heart. That is what unconversion is, it is hardness of the heart. David said create in me a clean heart.

Let us build on what Herbert Armstrong said, because he said the reason for divorce that will permit a remarriage is unconversion. But, like Jesus in Matthew 19, there is more in what he said than meets the eye. Not everybody expresses their unconversion in exactly the same way, do they?

Well, the answer is they most certainly do not. Even as sexual perversion is not expressed by everybody in exactly the same way. A person can commit sexual perversion by committing adultery but never involve himself in pedophilia or incest. Okay, you get the point. Not everybody expresses unconversion in exactly the same way.

Now, let us ask some questions. What if you were married to someone who beat you up every Wednesday and Saturday, *but*, was faithful sexually? You might think that is a really brutal way to express your unconversion. "But then again, they never cheated on me!" Does that mean that because they did not cheat on you sexually (I want you to think back on Jesus and what He said) 'Unless it be

for fornication.' Fornication is an example of a sexual sin. Does that mean that the only possible legal reason for a divorce that will permit remarriage based solely on what Jesus said is that the sin has to be sexual? Not on your life.

Not everybody expresses their unconversion sexually. There is violence against marriage that may have nothing at all to do with sex, but it makes the marriage untenable. It is filled with warfare and destructive to God's purpose. Not everybody expresses their unconversion in the same way. Is beating your spouse up every Wednesday and Saturday an act of love? But would you say that is an act of violence, of abuse against the marriage contract?

What if you lived with a person who continually lied as a way of life, so that almost nothing that he or she said could be believed, and trust evaporated into nothing? You cannot trust a liar. Marriage requires trust. Lying is violence against the marriage contract. What if the person was a thief? They are stealing, not only from others, but from you. Are you aware that if one spouse does not give the other their due of love and care within the marriage that that constitutes breaking the eighth commandment against stealing from that spouse? It does. You are stealing love from them.

What if they are a drug addict? What if they refuse to go to work and support the marriage? What if they are angry all of the time? Can you live with anger? What if they are constantly depressed, whining, and unwilling to communicate so that peace exists only for brief periods during long periods of sustained pressure and stress? That is not peace. What if they refuse sexual relations? That one is right in I Corinthians 7. What if they are controllers who enslave through fear? What if they have never broken away from Daddy and Mommy? What if they are involved with demons?

I want you to recall that Jesus used the term fornication in Matthew 19. Is it possible that there is yet more reason, a spiritual reason, that impacts upon divorce and remarriage for the use of that term?

Ezekiel 16 is a brief overview of God's relationship with Israel.

**Ezekiel 16:15** But you trusted in your own beauty, and played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone who passed by who would have it.

**Ezekiel 16:23-25** "Then it was so, after all your wickedness—Woe, woe to you!" says the Lord God—that you also built for yourself a shrine, and made a high place for yourself in every street. You built your high places at the head of every road, and made your beauty to be abhorred. You offered yourself to everyone who passed by, and multiplied your acts of harlotry.

**Ezekiel 16:29** Moreover you multiplied your acts of harlotry as far as the land of the trader, Chaldea; and even then you were not satisfied.

What are we dealing with here, brethren? We are dealing with a multitudinous variety of sins under the heading "harlotry" and "fornication." It was not merely false religion, which was at the foundation, but it was idolatry taken into every facet of life in the form of a wide variety of sins. They all fall under the description of sexual sins, but the reality is that they were spiritual sins. Do you see what this is?

Under fornication, with a spiritual interpretation, fornication becomes idolatry. And idolatry is the way that we express our unconversion. We express our hardness of heart against God, and we

express it in such a way that it destroys the marriage. It makes it untenable, filled with warfare, and destructive of God's purpose. Every broken commandment of God is covered under the heading of harlotry, and in this sense, sexually, it would be called fornication.

This is where I Corinthians 7 comes into the mix, and it reveals the mind of Christ in a more liberal vein than Matthew 19 even begins to show. Paul is writing about four groups of people: to those who are married; single and free to marry; those who are in a marriage where both husband and wife are converted; and the fourth group of people are in a marriage in which one person is converted and the other is unconverted.

The first two are very simple and Paul deals with them just like that. If you are single and free to marry go ahead and do it if you cannot contain yourself, for it is better to marry than to burn, but only marry in the Lord.

The second group, where both are converted but they are having marital problems and they cannot reconcile, he said then split, but you are *not* free to remarry. They have to remain eunuchs from that time on.

The other group, he breaks it down this way, if the unconverted person is willing to live with the fact that you are converted, *do not get divorced*. That is what he says there is verse 20, "Let every man bide in the same calling wherein he was called." You became converted but your spouse did not. Do not change it as long as they are willing to live with you.

Now, that has to be qualified. *If* they are *not* willing to live with you under this circumstance, that you are converted and they are not, and it is producing very stressful, untenable situations in the marriage so that there is no peace, then he says in verse 15, "but if the unbelieving depart, let them go. A brother or sister is not under bondage, they are not bound within the marriage in such cases, but God has called us to peace."

So he is showing there that for people who are in a marriage where one is converted and the other is not—and I hasten to add this, *the conversion* is largely responsible for creating problems within the marriage because the *unconverted* person will not adapt to that situation and finds it untenable and creates stressful problems within—Paul says that God in His mercy says that you have a way out, you are not bound.

I said that this thing needs to be explained a bit, because human nature is such that an unconverted person is often willing to *remain* in the marriage with a converted person. They will not leave even though it is a terrible marriage. Why? Why will they not leave? It is because human nature is so selfish and so self-centered they will stay in the marriage because they are getting something from the marriage that they want.

Why would a person be willing to stay there? Because somebody is cooking for them. Because they have a place to live. Because somebody is doing their washing and ironing. Because somebody is providing for them (this often happens with a woman) and she is afraid to leave and it is a terrible situation. You see, because the husband is providing for her and bringing in money. That is the way that human nature is. It is focused on itself and it will stay in a terrible situation because they are getting something that they feel is more valuable than the peace that they would have in leaving.

Sometimes people stay in a marriage because they fear the reaction of the family. They stay in the marriage because they fear that they will lose their job.

This sets up a situation for the converted person: They recognize that the marriage is going nowhere, it is filled with tension, there is no peace, and it is *destroying* them spiritually. But they are afraid to sue for divorce because the scripture says let the unbelieving depart. So, what do they do? They recognize a reality. The unconverted person who is causing all of this trouble has already left the marriage even though they are in the house.

It is not the house they have to leave, they already *left* the marriage, and they are not willing to dwell with them. That was not my decision, it was Herbert Armstrong's. It is so clear, just understanding human nature.

Let us go back to the book of James, and this is a very important principle:

**James 3:18** Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

I mentioned several times this principle of being in a marriage that is destructive to God's purpose. I have mentioned a lack of peace. This verse is giving us a general principle, that in order for the fruit of righteousness to be produced we need to be living in a peaceful situation, a peaceful environment.

There is a very simple reason why. If there is a war going on between the husband and the wife, what is it that is going to get the time and attention of those two people? The war! The Kingdom of God will be virtually forgotten as each tries to defend themselves and as each tries to control situations to win the war. God says *get out of it*, and if you do not get out of it it is going to destroy you, and you will not be in My Kingdom because you do not know how to live My way of life. It is that simple.

But it does require that the converted person be *brutally* honest with themselves in recognition that they might be just as responsible for the warfare in that family as the unconverted person because they are committing violence against the marriage covenant, because they are not carrying out their responsibility in the marriage before God. So when it comes to divorce, the converted person better be honest. If they are not, and they are lying to themselves and putting the blame on this unconverted person, God sees, and He is not going to be fooled.

And when it comes right down to it, God holds the converted person far more responsible than the unconverted person who does not know what you know, and does not have the wherewithal of God's Spirit to help. I will tell you there have been multitudes of abuse by church members through lying, and saying that the unconverted person is the one who is responsible when they themselves are not upholding God's law either.

It is a major test. But if we are striving to do things right, God in His mercy will freely grant the divorce in order to permit us peace to ensure that we are going to be in His Kingdom.