

Pleased to Dwell

By Warren Zehring – August 6, 2011

God instituted the marriage covenant between a man and a woman. This is one of the ways that God has chosen to reveal Himself to us.

God has created us to be like Him. Everybody is familiar with the verse, “*we are created in God’s image.*”

But the truth is that we are not yet in God’s image. We are becoming, and we are to be growing towards, being in the image of God.

There is no greater joy and fulfillment than that to be found within good Christian marriages.

God, in allowing us to be a part of His creation process, by bringing children into the world to eventually become His eternal sons and daughters, is giving us a slight glimpse of what it will be like to dwell with Him for all eternity. Are we pleased to dwell with our spouse? This is where the Church of God differs from the world.

A God-centered life is an absolute requirement, in order for a Christian marriage to exist. For a Christian marriage to exist, God’s spirit must be present. It is not possible for worldly marriages to reach the spiritual level of God-plane marriages.

Our God is a covenant God, and I might add, a *faithful* covenant God.

All that we know of God is found in His Word, the Bible, and in His creation. Yes, even creation itself reveals the wonderful hand of God’s work. And it tells us who God is, and what God is, by looking at His creation. God tells us where to look in order to be able to know and identify with Him.

Romans 1:19-20 “That which can be known of God is plain before their eyes; for God Himself has shown it unto them. For the invisible attributes of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His eternal power and divine character; so that they are without excuse.”

God is saying that we are free to deduce, as we look at the very high percentage of single parent homes, that without good marriages as the foundation of our society, we will not long endure. God’s plan is eternal, His Spirit is eternal, and His Law is eternal.

When God made Adam, He knew that there was no one to help him, and no one to be his mate. Adam needed someone to complement him physically, emotionally, psychologically, and especially, spiritually.

Genesis 2:18 The Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an helper, comparable to him."

Then God created Eve, a counterpart for Adam. Together the man and woman were complete. They were the first human family. It is God's intention that a husband and wife together, reach the pinnacle of love and unity.

In a godly marriage, between two called-out and converted Christians, there exists a covenant, not only between the man and his wife, but also with God.

The man vows with God and his wife, while the wife vows with God and her husband.

For this reason, a marriage between two of God's people rises to the level of a God-plane relationship. It rises above the mundane of this world.

What is God's intent and expectation for the duration of Christian marriages? How long should a Christian marriage last? The answer is simple and straightforward - marriage is for life.

Genesis 2:24 "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

That means that they are welded together, stuck together, and they are inseparably knit and woven together.

Is a divorce ever permissible by Jesus Christ? Is remarriage ever an option for a true Christian who is divorced? These are difficult questions, but we need to understand God's word on these matters.

Matthew 5:31 follows immediately after the beatitudes, and this seems to me to be a strange place to be talking so early in the scriptures about marriage.

Matthew 5:31 It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away [divorce] his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

That was a common saying as Jesus Christ walked the earth during His public ministry.

Matthew 5:32 But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, [*porneia*] causes her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced commits adultery.

So we see right there, in this verse, that '*putting away*' is the same as divorce.

Within the Church of God we have had difficulty in coming to grasp the full intent of the Scriptures with regard to marriage, separation, divorce and remarriage. It is difficult because in one case, a converted person may remarry, and on the other hand remarriage is forbidden, because the marriage is still bound. Do we know the

scriptural definition? Do we know the difference? Do we know what Jesus Christ meant?

Though marriage is a physical union, it is a divine institution, established by God at creation.

What does it mean to be bound in a covenant relationship? When a man and a woman come together as husband and wife, a covenant is established. A covenant is a binding compact or promise; it is a formal sealed agreement, or a contract that binds the parties until completion of the terms, or as in marriage, until the death of one of the parties.

It is a great travesty when a marriage covenant is broken, and it is a terrible thing. There are ramifications that go throughout the life of all of the parties involved, especially if there are children.

Man enters into covenants, and God enters into covenants, but only God has proven faithful to honor and keep the covenants He has entered into.

But Jesus explained that the marriage covenant was to be kept sacred and unbroken, and it is something very precious.

Matthew 19:3 The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

Today we have "alienation of affection." Is that a cause, brethren, for a divorce? What if she burns the toast, is that a cause? Getting her first wrinkle? – Can you trade her in for a new one? The Pharisees are asking Jesus Christ if you can put your wife away for any old reason at all. So this is a perfect set-up for Jesus Christ to teach the Word of God.

Matthew 19:4-5 And He [Jesus] answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

That is a covenant-bound marriage.

Matthew 19:6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Let not man grant a divorce decree is what this verse is saying.

Matthew 19:7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

The Pharisees thought that they had Jesus Christ over the barrel.

Matthew 19:8-9 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery: and whoso marries her which is put away [divorced] doth commit adultery.

We need to ask ourselves the question to define these terms, what is it that rises to the level or the standard of fornication, or porneia?

We have always recognized premarital fraud, and lying about your true character. Why is that? It is because everyone entering into a marriage has a right to know who they are marrying; what is the character of the person that you are entering into marriage with? I will just add that there are other perversions besides porneia. Drug addictions and other perversions rise to the level and often include porneia.

I believe a pattern of physical abuse of the mate or the children rises to the level of Christ's exception (**Matthew 19:9**), because we are called to peace (**1 Corinthians 7:15**). We are called to peace, and a wife and the children are not to be battered objects.

Matthew 19:10 His disciples say unto Him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.

In other words, "Man you could really get yourself into a jam really quick getting married. Maybe it is better to stay single."

Matthew 19:11 But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.

There is a difference between the mind of those in the world, and the converted mind. This word of God was preserved for the Church of God, the people of God, the saints, the called out people of God. But the reality of life all around the world is that people have human nature, and even in God's church we have human nature with which to contend.

Brethren, when we have the failure of one or both partners to live up to the expectation of their marriage covenant, it could result in divorce.

What do the scriptures say about divorce?

Malachi 2:16 "For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hates putting away [divorce]."

God hates divorce. God created marriage, and it is the natural state of man and woman. Divorce destroys marriage, the primary building block of a Godly society.

But converted Christians, who are led by God's Holy Spirit, are held to the highest standard by God.

The purpose of a Godly marriage is, first of all, for each partner to help complete the spiritual development and character within their spouse. Some people would say that it is to have kids, or it is to have happiness in life. Let me repeat that, the purpose of marriage is for each partner to help complete the spiritual development within their spouse.

Each mate's spiritual responsibility, their solemn duty within the marriage relationship, is to help and enable their partner. They have all of their lives together to achieve their full spiritual potential. It takes work, and it takes thought and prayer to help their spouse to grow in Godly character to the highest degree attainable. If a spouse says, "I am not going to say anything, I will suffer quietly, and I will let him or her go the way that they want, because God is going to have to take care of it", then we are not living up to our responsibility in the marriage.

Marriage among God's people must reflect the exact picture of Jesus Christ, and His loving relationship with the Church (**Ephesians 5:32**). Jesus Christ died for the Church, and He gave His all. In so doing, each spouse will ultimately arrive at the highest place that God has prepared for them. It will be the place in God's Kingdom that is attainable for them.

Marriage is also a symbolic type of the prophetic covenant relationship of Jesus Christ and the Church of God. It is a close, intimate, nothing-held-back, personal relationship between Christ and the Church, where each is willing to sacrifice themselves in Godly love for the other.

God is going to use the "good" marriages of today as beautiful examples to all those in the World Tomorrow. Good marriages are very hard to find. When you search the Scriptures, you will find very few exemplary marriages.

It is God's intention, and with His help, that wonderful marriages are absolutely possible at this time. It takes sacrificing, it takes prayer and fasting. Our marriages should be all that they can be. One of the greatest blessings from God in this life is a happy marriage.

Marriage reflects the exact picture of Jesus Christ and His loving relationship with His Church (**Ephesians 5:32**).

This is how we are able to see God in the creation. If we can picture in our minds, the most beautiful marriage of serving, happiness, creativity, and happy children who honor their parents, then we can picture God bringing sons and daughters to glory in the resurrection (**Hebrews 2:10**).

Sadly, very few marriages reach the level of marital harmony that God has intended.

Too many marriages are plagued with anger, resentment, hurt and infidelity.

As with all things, God has given us instructions on how to have a happy and successful marriage.

This world is destroying marriages, and Satan is involved.

In today's chaotic world, the sanctity of marriage is all but lost. I do not know what the statistics are in the United States of America right now, and it would not do any good to give it, because tomorrow and the next day it would be worse. I went back and looked at the divorce rate when I was dating my wife, fifty years ago, and it was 3% in the area that we lived. It was a very, very low divorce rate, and I thought that was the way that it was supposed to be. I remember when the divorce rate went past 50%, and I do not know what it is today. This world is destroying marriages, and of course Satan is involved.

Today, marriage as an institution is being rejected as unnecessary, and out of date. Brethren, keep in mind that God's view of marriage is entirely different from what you would find in the mainstream media.

God designed marriage for the purpose of bringing many sons and daughters to glory, and He has given man an integral part in the creation process (Hebrews 2:10). A man and woman come together and they make a little baby, and that little baby's ultimate reality and potential is to be a child of God, born into the Kingdom and God, and resurrected for all eternity.

The sacred establishment of marriage is under attack by Satan, because it is the foundation upon which the family and society is founded.

Paul is speaking to the converted brethren in the Church of God about marriage. When Paul says, "a brother" or "a sister," he is speaking of converted brethren in God's Church.

I remember when I was at Pasadena, a lady who had been in the Church for a good while, came over to the office and she asked for an explanation of a couple of these scriptures that we are looking at. The Scripture talked about the "wife," and the "widow," the "married," and the "unmarried," and the "brother" and the "sister." She was all confused because she did not understand that when Paul used the phraseology of a "brother" or a "sister," he was referring to a converted person in God's church – as distinguished from those in the world who are unconverted.

I Corinthians 7:8 I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I.

There are two categories of people being spoken of here, and that refers to the unmarried people in God's church, and to those who have lost their mate. Paul was

saying it is difficult to be a Christian, and it would be good if they could just set a high standard, remain unmarried and serve the Lord continuously.

I Corinthians 7:9 But if they cannot contain, [self-control, restraint, keep themselves in check] let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn [be inflamed with inordinate desire].

That word 'contain' has to do with self-control; restraint on your emotions and your affections that you need to keep in check. This word 'burn' is pretty strong, and it means to be inflamed with inordinate desire. That is not God's intention.

I Corinthians 7:10 And unto the [converted] married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband:

When God called both partners into the church they came into God's Church already married, their baptismal vows ratified their marriage vow, thus making them fully accountable to God at this present time. There are vows in the world, and men break them. There are vows that are made with God that should never be broken. What Paul is saying here in verse 10, is that we are talking about converted people who have a marriage covenant, and that vow is not to be broken. They are "bound" to remain that way. They have a marriage covenant unto death.

Under no circumstances is a converted man, married to a converted woman, ever allowed to "put away his wife" and re-marry. It is totally out of the question according to God's law.

For converted brethren, marriage is for life. We need to understand that those who are converted are being judged now (**1 Peter 4:17**).

I Corinthians 7:11 But and if she depart, [the reasons would have to be extremely serious] let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.

Converted brethren are allowed to SEPARATE, but are never allowed to DIVORCE. Paul is saying that between converted married couples, there could be a problem that is so horrendous, and so impossible to deal with that they would not be able to stay under the same roof. God allows for the person who is being abused to move out. It is not right, and there must be some terrible sin involved, but the point is that, neither one of them, is allowed to remarry. They cannot have a divorce.

We have covered married, unmarried, widows, and now Paul says:

I Corinthians 7:12 But to the *rest* speak I, not the Lord...

Who are the rest? We saw unmarried, widowed, and married, but what other category is there?

Paul is speaking to those converted Christians who have an *unconverted* spouse, and they constitute a unique category.

God has not addressed this anywhere in scripture before, and it needs to be set forth.

I Corinthians 7:12 But to the rest [those with an unconverted mate] 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.

So we have a situation here in Corinth, and we have this situation all over the world, where when a married man has an unconverted wife, the Christian man in the Church is not allowed to divorce her – even though she is not in the Church, and she is not converted.

Converted people must do everything humanly and spiritually possibly to build a Godly relationship within their covenant marriage. They have a covenant marriage, and their covenant is to each other. He has a covenant with God that is not to be broken.

If a converted person were to decide to divorce a non-believer who was pleased to dwell, that converted mate would not be free to remarry, because the marriage would remain bound by man and bound by God.

If an unconverted spouse is pleased to dwell with a converted person, that is, being willing to abide by their marriage covenant, then their marriage is bound by God. We are not talking about infidelity, or any kind of abuse here. The unconverted woman in this case agrees to stay in the marriage. Just like we would say, "I have seen some pretty good marriages in the world." God says that you do not dissolve a marriage like that.

A Converted person is not permitted to marry an unconverted person. Christians are to marry "Only in the Lord" (**1 Corinthians 7:39**). When we see that phrase '*that believeth not,*' (**1 Corinthians 7:12-13**) that is not saying that a believer is ever permitted to marry an unbeliever. This situation arises only when one or the other became a converted believer AFTER they were married.

There is no divorce allowed by God for two converted people, or in this case one who is converted and one who is not converted when she is pleased to dwell with him.

God makes no provision for a converted person to divorce. A converted person is not allowed to initiate or precipitate a divorce. Quite the contrary, a converted person will do everything possible to make their marriage a wonderful relationship, and a Godly marriage.

God has not addressed this situation in the scriptures, but Paul is facing the problem and must give an answer according to God's word.

I Corinthians 7:40 ...after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.

Paul says, 'I know the scriptures', and he is not bragging here, he is just saying that he is in a position to relate to them what God has said about this situation of divorce and remarriage.

I Corinthians 7:13 And the [converted] woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.

I have even heard people say that it works one way for the husband and wife, but it does not work the same way for the wife and husband. So Paul is saying it both ways here so that there can be no question.

Why? First of all, the marriage covenant has been ratified when two people are married, at least on the part of the converted believer. When a person goes into the watery grave and says, "God, I will put your Way first", that ratifies their marriage covenant, and they are going to remain faithful to their mate. At our baptismal vow we make God a party to all of our contracts, vows and covenants. We then, after baptism, for the rest of our lives, represent God in all our dealings. God is very involved in this situation – He is calling the unconverted through the converted mate's actions. Pick up on that, brethren, if God calls an unconverted man married to an unconverted woman, God is involved in the situation. He may be calling the unconverted also through the converted mate's actions, and they need to treat it as though He is calling their unconverted mate. We are going to see that from the scriptures.

There are many versions of "Divorce and Remarriage" that are extant today in the churches of God. Everybody wants to put a different spin on them. How can we know what is correct in God's eyes? We should be very careful as this is a very important subject!

Believe it or not, there is a church organization which tells their members that they are to divorce their spouse if He or she attends another Sabbath-keeping organization. That is a total lack of understanding of the mind of God, and of the will of God! God keeps covenant!

I Corinthians 7:14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.

We are talking about a situation here where there is a believing wife, who is married to an unconverted husband. The believing wife goes to church and keeps the commandments, has been baptized and receives God's Holy Spirit. She is married to a heathen. The unbelieving husband is sanctified and set apart, and he may even be being called by God through his mate's demeanor, her actions, her life, her sacrifices,

etc. This also goes for the unbelieving wife; she is sanctified by her converted husband. By the way that he acts, by the way that he treats her, and by the way that he reacts and deals with his family and those in the world. Also the children are holy, they do not need a special individual calling by God as their parents received, they understand and accept the holy things of God THROUGH their parents. We are "in God's stead" when the children are small and they are malleable, and they look up to us. We can say that God sent the rain, and the little child looks up into the sky and he thanks God. But if you wait until he is 35 years old and he does not hear about God, and you say that God sent the rain, and he will say, "No, we had a low pressure system come in here, and there was a front across here from the east to the north and that is what brought the rain. The clouds brought the rain." A child is different and they can grow up knowing God. Our children are holy if just one of the parents knows God, speaks of God, and tells them about God. It is not something that is automatic, and if God is never mentioned in the home then we are denying our children, and they are not going to be holy as God intends them to be.

Unfortunately, too many people violate their marriage covenant, and show by their actions that they are not pleased to dwell with their mate with whom a covenant has been made.

As a result, a Christian is left in a dilemma. We are talking about a Christian, in God's church, keeping God's Law, married to an unconverted person, and the unconverted person starts to run the streets, becomes unfaithful and starts to do things that are unseemly in their marriage. Here is God's instruction in such a case:

I Corinthians 7:15 "But if the unbelieving [mate] depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister [converted person] is not under bondage [bound or enslaved] in such cases: but God hath called us to peace."

Let us understand this. If the unbelieving person in a marriage, where there is one converted and one not converted, breaks the covenant relationship, finds somebody else, or behaves inappropriately, if they seek the divorce let him depart. That covenant has been broken by the one who ran away. So the converted man or woman left in half a relationship is **not under bondage**. There is no way the converted person can make life hard, run their mate off and say, "See? They left!" God will hold them guilty if they do something like that.

God intends for Christians who have been betrayed, frauded, abused or deserted, to be **free to re-marry** and to go forward, having peaceful productive Christian lives, and not remain in a lifelong bondage to a lawless mate who could not care less.

I Corinthians 7:15 But if the unbelieving depart, [departs the marriage – departs the marriage covenant, goes back into the world, finds another mate] let him depart. A brother or a sister [converted husband or wife] is not bound, not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.

The covenant has been broken, and ended by the one who departed the covenant [the one who broke or ended the marriage vow].

In the case of binding and loosening there is no in-between, one is either bound or free. I mention that because some in the church have said they are not bound, but they still cannot get married??? Let us understand that in the case of binding and loosening, according to God's word, there is no in-between. You are either bound or you are free. When Paul says that a brother or sister is not under bondage it means that they are free, and there is no covenant relationship that exists any more.

The converted believer is free to remarry, because an unconverted mate does not, in effect, depart a marriage and still continue to hold the converted Christian in bondage the rest of their life. The brother or sister in Christ is loosed, and they are not bound when the unconverted mate departs the relationship.

I Corinthians 7:16 For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knows thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?

Paul is saying that the unconverted spouse may be being called. When he says "*For what knowest thou,*" I think that he is saying it is entirely possible that their spouse may be being called through the converted person's actions, sacrifices, giving, loving, yielding, and giving 100% in the marriage. Let us say, for example, that the unconverted person is not quite as yielding, and (they will be not have God's Holy Spirit), and they may not be as forgiving or an understanding, not as sacrificing – what do you know? Maybe because of the way that you live your life as an example to your mate, they might one day say, "My husband/my wife is a changed person since they started going to "that church." I have seen him hold his tongue, I have seen him yield and sacrifice when he should have done something terrible. He is a changed person, and it seems that very good results come from the way that he is living. I might look into it and start listening to the Word of God."

Who knows whether you shall save your husband, who knows whether you shall save your wife? It talks about bringing them to the point of conversion, where they also enter into a God-plane covenant. That has tremendous ramifications for the marriage itself. What tremendous responsibility it is on the head of the converted person! We should feel that responsibility if the husband and wife are converted. We should still live our lives as converted Christians in everything. But, Paul is pointing out that much more so it is important to do it on account of the unconverted spouse because they might be called by God.

I Corinthians 7:17 But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches.

What Paul is saying is if two unconverted people are going along in Corinth and they are involved in all of this idolatry and fornication, temple prostitution and all of those kinds of things, and God calls one of them into the Church of God and he repents and

he accepts Jesus Christ as his personal Savior, and he has hands laid on him, and he receives God's Holy Spirit, he is still married to his unconverted mate. That is what it says: '*so let him walk*', in other words, stay married to that unconverted person. Paul says in a very authoritative way, '*And so ordain I in all churches.*' Apostles did set the doctrine in the church, as we read in **Acts 2:44**.

If God called you to His truth while you were married to an unconverted spouse, He knew what He was doing. You are to exemplify every aspect of Christianity and sacrifice to your spouse, and then perhaps God will see fit to call them also.

God has called us into a covenant relationship with Him. He is faithful. That means that God will never break His covenant promise to us. God is a faithful covenant keeper.

Here in Hebrews notice the subject is still the marriage covenant.

Hebrews 13:4 Marriage is honorable in all, and the [marriage] bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.

Marriage was designed by God, and it is a divine institution. God intended for man and woman to come together. But if one in the marriage leaves and commits adultery then God will judge those who leave.

Hebrews 13:5 Let your [conduct] be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

There are times in our life, brethren, when we depart the marriage covenant relationship. We sin. You may say that you have never left your marriage vow. Brethren, *sin* violates the covenant relationship with God. We are to repent and we are to come back.

In order for us to know the mind of God on the subject of divorce and remarriage, a lot of Godly wisdom is necessary. We can find it within the pages of the scriptures.

There was a time in the Church of God, when the first question the minister asked a person who contacted the Church was, "Have you ever been married before?"

There were many marriages where the newly called converts were required to separate because one or the other had been married before. Sometimes there was a marriage right out of high school. The girl had become pregnant, and they just hurried up and legitimized the marriage. They later found out, because they were immature and went their own ways, and it just did not last, that their marriage was not founded on any kind of principles. And so here, you have a couple of divorced kids, and later on they get their lives together and they grow up and get married to someone else and they get a house and a car, they have children and they put their lives together. And God calls them like that. The minister went out and he said, "You are going to have to leave your wife, your kids, and the house." The church broke up the marriage and so

often children found themselves in broken homes. Because of an incomplete understanding of what God requires.

The world is not being judged now – only the Church of God.

1 Peter 4:17 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

Converted Christians, you and I, are being judged now.

It does not matter if the original marriage took place by a Justice of the Peace, or in a major denomination church.

For those in the world, the unconverted, they are NOT now able to live by the laws of God. It takes God's Spirit to lead one into righteousness.

Jesus has shown the distinction between those that are in the world, and those converted brethren within the church. Jesus said, "Moses because of the hardness of your [unconverted] hearts allowed you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so." (**Matthew 19:8**) What took place in the beginning? How did God create the world? What was God's intent?

Certainly God hates divorce, and He hates all sin.

Our understanding within the Church of God finally matured after 1974 from a "letter of the law" interpretation to a better understanding of the "spirit of the law."

First, we came to understand that all worldly marriages were not bound by God, and subsequent divorces could be forgiven. You could come before God and repent of being an immature youthful lustful person, or whatever, and be forgiven.

That first point, that judgment is now on us, the Church of God, and not the world, was key to further understanding.

Two young unconverted people get married and then the marriage covenant and vow is broken by one or both. It is wrong. It is a sin, but not an unforgivable sin.

Later, one of these divorcees re-marries, and even later is called by God into His Church as a repentant sinner.

God forgives the sin of the divorce in the first marriage.

Paul shows that the repentant sinner, the converted person must remain married to the present mate when called.

"As the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches" (**1 Corinthians 7:17**).

That is not a double standard. God forgives.

Just like God forgives murder (even Moses'), He forgives adultery (even David's), He forgives divorce of the unconverted.

Very near the end of his life, Herbert W Armstrong came not only to understand, but also to apply a broader meaning of "porneia."

For most of his life, he had believed '*porneia*' to pertain solely to pre-marital fraud.

He came to understand that *porneia* also comprised sexual transgression within marriage including, but not narrowly limited to, adultery, sexual immorality, homosexuality, perversion, prostitution, incest, or any sexually deviant behavior. He realized that continual sexual transgression as a pattern and way of life violated the marriage covenant, and was cause for scriptural divorce.

It became clear to Mr. Armstrong that the actions and mind-set of the transgressor showed that there was no intent to really be married, or keep the marriage covenant.

This is exactly what Jesus meant when He gave us the rule for a marriage being loosed. He said, "...except for *porneia*."

Marriage is a covenant – a sacred covenant. It takes two to make a covenant. It takes two to keep a covenant. It only takes one sinner to break a covenant.

Abandonment of the marriage agreement by one of the parties destroys a covenant.

It is sometimes difficult for those who embraced the pre-1974 church position on divorce and remarriage to come to the fuller understanding of God's intention.

That position appears, to them, to be safe and righteous – "upholding the institution of marriage."

Spiritually and scripturally there is something missing in that approach.

Those people who had their marriage broken up when they came into the church were being unmercifully and further victimized. The innocent party was being victimized.

Jesus Christ desires to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke (**Isaiah 58:6**).

We know that the Pharisees kept the law with a super-righteous perfection; yet, we also know that there was much missing in their grasp of the fundamental principles of Christ.

With a discernment of what Christ's mercy is, we can begin to incorporate the elements of God's teaching on the subject.

God intends for Christians who are betrayed, frauded, abused or deserted, to be free to re-marry and go forward, having peaceful productive Christian lives, and not remain in a life-long bondage to a lawless mate.

God's desire is that we not enter into unequally yoked marriages, and for the very same reasons, He looses those Christians who have become victims of a broken marriage covenant through no fault of their own. This is why Paul wrote it this way. *"But if the unbelieving [mate] depart, let him depart."*

Jesus Christ means for marriage to be for life: *"He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so."* (**Matt 19:8**) (**Deut 24:1-4**).

In the beginning, the Tree of Life would have imparted God's Holy Spirit, and made it available. In the beginning, it was God's intent that all men become converted.

It did not happen, with the exception of a very few, including the prophets in Old Testament times. Most people have been *unconverted*, and that is what Jesus meant by *"the hardness of your hearts."*

Here is the understanding. The scriptures show that there is a difference between "believing" and "unbelieving", and between converted and unconverted. A converted person is being judged by God now – and is responsible to God now. The unconverted person will be judged in the second resurrection.

What a wonderful and beautiful thing it is to have a truly blessed covenant relationship in marriage.

WZ/pp/sl