THE QUESTION

Can a wife divorce an unfaithful husband, and may either spouse remarry?

Asked by a THF member on April 29, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 11 numbered quotations · the 23 early Christian passages and 133 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/can-a-wife-divorce-an-unfaithful-husband-and-may-either-spouse-remarry

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

These writers hold husband and wife to the same law of faithfulness, and adultery is the one named reason to separate. Justin even tells of a Christian wife who divorced a wicked husband. But they do not let either spouse remarry while the other lives; only a spouse's death frees one to marry again.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
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POINT 1 OF 7

Jesus called marriage back to the beginning

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Irenaeus explains that Moses allowed divorce because of hard hearts, but Jesus pointed back to how God made male and female. Tertullian says Christ by this calls us back to the original law of one marriage.

1 "This is why they received from Moses this law of divorce, tailored to their hard nature."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book IV* (c. 175–202 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 9, page 6 Read it in the library ›

2 "Therefore, those whom God joined from the beginning, two into one flesh, man must not now separate."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Monogamy* 5 (c. 196–220 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 18, page 7 Read it in the library ›

POINT 2 OF 7

Husbands are bound by the same law

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Lactantius does not give husbands a looser rule. A man who goes to another woman is just as much an adulterer. The husband is bound by the same law of chastity as the wife, because God joined them into one body.

3 "But just as a woman is bound by the bonds of chastity not to desire any other man, so the husband must be bound by the same law, since God has joined the husband and wife together in the union of one body."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 66 (c. 290–320 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 23, page 7 Read it in the library ›

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POINT 3 OF 7

Unfaithfulness is the one named reason

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Lactantius says a wife may not be sent away unless she is guilty of adultery. Origen likewise reads Jesus as allowing the breaking of a marriage for no sin except fornication. Both treat unfaithfulness as the only ground they name.

4 “For this reason, He has commanded that a wife must not be sent away unless she is found guilty of adultery, and that the bond of the marriage covenant must never be broken unless unfaithfulness has broken it.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 66 (c. 290–320 AD) **Source 23, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

5 “After this, our Savior speaks in a way that does not permit the breaking of marriages for any sin except fornication alone, when it is found in the wife: "Whoever puts away his own wife, except for the cause of fornication, makes her an adulteress,"”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Commentary on Matthew* 14 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 20, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

A Christian wife left a wicked husband

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Justin tells of a Christian woman whose husband kept living in vice. After trying to win him over, she gave him a bill of divorce so she would not share in his wickedness. He tells it as the story of a faithful believer.

6 “But when her husband went to Alexandria and was reported to be acting worse, she, to avoid becoming a participant in his wickedness through marriage, gave him a bill of divorce and separated from him.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Justin Martyr,** *Second Apology* (c. 130–165 AD) **Source 3, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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POINT 5 OF 7

The gospel speaks of women, too

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

In Tatian's gospel harmony, Jesus speaks to both sides. A woman who leaves her husband and joins another man commits adultery, just as a man does.

7 “And he said to them, "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another has exposed her to adultery. And any woman who leaves her husband and becomes another man's has committed adultery. And whoever marries her who is divorced has committed adultery."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tatian,** *Diatessaron* 25 (c. 150–180 AD) **Source 5, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

Separation does not open the way to remarriage

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Hermas says a husband whose wife keeps on in adultery should put her away, but then stay single. Clement says a new marriage while the other spouse lives counts as fornication. Separation is allowed; a second marriage is not.

8 “The husband should put her away, and remain by himself. But if he puts his wife away and marries another, he also commits adultery."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD) **Source 1, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

9 “It also counts as fornication the marriage of people who have been separated while the other spouse is still alive.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 2.23 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 11, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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POINT 7 OF 7

Death, not divorce, frees a spouse

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Hermas says that when a husband or wife dies, the one left behind does not sin by marrying again, though staying single brings more honor. Origen quotes Paul that a wife is bound while her husband lives, though he calls this a concession to weakness.

10 “There is no sin in marrying again. But if they remain unmarried, they gain greater honor and glory with the Lord.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD) **Source 2, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

11 “A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord," 1 Corinthians 7:39, was said by Paul because of our hardness of heart and weakness, to those who do not want to desire earnestly the greater gifts, 1 Corinthians 12:31, and become more blessed.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Commentary on Matthew* 14 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 21, page 7** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- No passage here spells out, rule by rule, whether a wife's divorce works the same way in law as a husband's.
- These passages do not settle what to do in cases of abuse or danger, beyond allowing separation.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 23 early Christian passages and 133 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–23, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 24–59, in Bible order), then 97 more verses THF links

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to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF's updated English unless marked "1885 English" (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). "… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *23 passages from 10 writers*

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · sources 1–2*

1 *Shepherd* **Quote 8, page 4** "he said to me, "As long as he remains ignorant of her sin, the husband commits no transgression in living with her… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Shepherd* (1885 English) **Quote 10, page 5** is no sin in marrying again, said he; but if they remain unmarried, they gain greater honour and glory with the Lord; but if they marry, they do not sin… [continues online] **read ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · sources 3–4*

3 *Second Apology* **Quote 6, page 3** "certain woman lived with a heavy-drinking husband; she too had once been heavy-drinking. But when she learned the teachings of Christ, she became sober-minded and tried to… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *First Apology* (on point 6) chastity, He expressed these views: "Whoever looks at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart before God." And, "If your right eye… [continues online] **read ›**

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · sources 5–6*

5 *Diatessaron* 25 **Quote 7, page 4** "you, whoever divorces his wife, except for fornication, and marries another, has exposed her to adultery." When he entered the house, his disciples asked him again about that. And he… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *Diatessaron* 8 (on point 3) "5:27 You have heard that it was said, Do not commit adultery. Matthew 5:28 But I now say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with… [continues online] **read ›**

Theophilus of Antioch, *c. 169–183 AD · source 7*

7 *To Autolycus* 13 (on point 6) "about chastity, saying, "Whoever looks at a woman who is not his own wife, in order to lust after her, has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Matthew… [continues online] **read ›**

Athenagoras, *c. 170–190 AD · source 8*

8 *A Plea for the Christians* 33 (on point 6) "a second marriage is only a specious adultery… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · source 9*

9 *Against Heresies: Book IV* **Quote 1, page 2** "command us to give a certificate of divorce and send a wife away?" He replied, "Because of the hardness of your hearts, he permitted these things to you; but from… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 10–11*

10 *Stromata* 3 (1885 English; on point 6) "19:10-11 Hoc enim qui rogabant, volebant ex eo scire, an uxore damnata et ejecta propter fornicationem, concedar aliam ducere… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Stromata* 2.23 (1885 English) **Quote 9, page 4** "it regards as fornication, the marriage of those separated while the other is alive… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 12–19*

12 *Against Marcion* 34 (on point 6) saying, "Whoever puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries a woman put away from her husband also commits adultery." Luke 16:18 To forbid divorce… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *On Monogamy* 11 But if you have any wisdom, be silent on behalf of the dead one. Let your silence be to him a divorce, already endorsed in the dotal gifts of another… [continues online] **read ›**

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14 *Against Marcion* 40 (on point 6) “Christ, however, when He here commands the wife not to depart from… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *On Monogamy* 9 (on point 6) already joined in the same flesh, He has given His seal to the union. Adultery is this: when, after the two have been disjoined in whatever way, other—no, rather… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *On Modesty* 16 (1885 English; on point 6) “withal, while prohibiting divorce, he uses the Lord's precept against adultery as an instrument for providing, in place of divorce, either perseverance in widowhood, or else a reconciliation of… [continues online] **read ›**

17 *On Monogamy* 10 easier understanding of his meaning, we must insist all the more strongly on this point: when a woman's husband is dead, she is more bound not to take another… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *On Monogamy* 5 **Quote 2, page 2** “to the beginning. In the matter of divorce, He said that Moses had permitted it because of their hardness of heart, but from the beginning it was not so. By… [continues online] **read ›**

19 *On Monogamy* 14 (1885 English; on point 1) “of modesty. Hardness of heart reigned till Christ's time… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 20–22*

20 *Commentary on Matthew* 14 **Quote 5, page 3** “reason a wife could rightly be cast away by her husband. But it must be said to him that, if a woman who committed adultery was to be stoned according… [continues online] **read ›**

21 *Commentary on Matthew* 14 **Quote 11, page 5** “to whom the law was given. Something like this is shown in the words, "Moses, because of your hardness of heart, allowed you to put away your wives," Matthew 19… [continues online] **read ›**

22 *Commentary on Matthew* 14 been disciplined in chastity and self-control? But from what is said in the law about the bill of divorce, I wonder whether, since the bishop and the presbyter and… [continues online] **read ›**

Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · source 23*

23 *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 66 (1885 English) **Quotes 3, 4, pages 2, 3** “this account He has commanded that the wife shall not be put away unless convicted of adultery, and that the bond of the conjugal compact shall never be dissolved, unless… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *36 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

24 **Matthew 5:31** “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ **read ›**

25 **Matthew 5:32** But I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except on account of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. **read ›**

26 **Matthew 19:3** Pharisees came to him, testing him and saying, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason?” **read ›**

27 **Matthew 19:7** They asked him, “Why then did Moses command us to give her a certificate of divorce and divorce her?” **read ›**

28 **Matthew 19:8** He said to them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it has not been so. **read ›**

29 **Matthew 19:9** I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries her when she is divorced commits adultery.” **read ›**

30 **Matthew 19:10** His disciples said to him, “If this is the situation of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” **read ›**

31 **Mark 10:2** Pharisees came to him testing him, and asked him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” **read ›**

32 **Mark 10:4** They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and divorce his wife.” **read ›**

33 **Mark 10:5** But Jesus said to them, “For your hardness of heart, he wrote you this commandment. **read ›**

34 **Mark 10:9** What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” **read ›**

35 **Mark 10:11** He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. **read ›**

36 **Mark 10:12** If a woman herself divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” **read ›**

37 **Luke 12:14** But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or an arbitrator over you?” **read ›**

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38 **Luke 16:18** Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery. He who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery. **read ›**

39 **John 2:14** In the temple he found those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, and the money changers sitting there. **read ›**

40 **John 2:16** To those who sold the doves, he said, “Take these things out of here! Do not make my Father’s house a marketplace!” **read ›**

41 **Acts 4:1** As they spoke to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came to them, **read ›**

42 **Romans 3:1** Then what advantage does the Jew have? Or what is the profit of circumcision? **read ›**

43 **Romans 3:7** For if the truth of God through my lie abounded to his glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? **read ›**

44 **Romans 3:8** Why not (as we are slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say), “Let us do evil, that good may come?” Those who say so are justly condemned. **read ›**

45 **Romans 3:9** What then? Are we better off? Not at all. For we have already charged both Jews and Greeks with all being under sin, **read ›**

46 **Romans 4:4** Now to him who works, the reward is not counted as grace, but as something owed. **read ›**

47 **Romans 7:3** So then if, while the husband lives, she is joined to another man, she would be called an adulteress. But if the husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is no adulteress, though she is joined to another man. **read ›**

48 **1 Corinthians 7:2** But because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. **read ›**

49 **1 Corinthians 7:8** But I say to the unmarried and to widows: it is good for them if they remain as I am. **read ›**

50 **1 Corinthians 7:10** But to the married I command, not I but the Lord, that a wife not separate from her husband— **read ›**

51 **1 Corinthians 7:11** but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband—and that a husband not send away his wife. **read ›**

52 **1 Corinthians 7:12** But to the rest I say, not the Lord: if any brother has an unbelieving wife, and she agrees to live with him, let him not send her away. **read ›**

53 **1 Corinthians 7:13** And if a woman has an unbelieving husband, and he agrees to live with her, let her not send him away. **read ›**

54 **1 Corinthians 7:15** But if the unbeliever separates, let him separate. The brother or sister is not enslaved in such cases; but God has called us in peace. **read ›**

55 **1 Corinthians 7:27** Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek release. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. **read ›**

56 **1 Corinthians 7:32** But I want you to be free from care. The unmarried man cares for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; **read ›**

57 **1 Corinthians 7:34** There is also a distinction between the wife and the virgin. The unmarried woman cares for the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But the married woman cares for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. **read ›**

58 **1 Corinthians 7:35** And I say this for your own benefit, not to put a trap upon you, but for what is fitting and for attending to the Lord without distraction. **read ›**

59 **1 Corinthians 7:39** A wife is bound by law for as long as her husband lives. But if her husband falls asleep, she is free to marry whom she wishes, only in the Lord. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *97 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Genesis 2:24 · 6:1

Ezra 10:10

Proverbs 4:25 · 6:27

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Isaiah 33:14

Jeremiah 13:1

Malachi 2:15

Matthew 5:28 · 5:42 · 5:46 · 6:1 · 9:13 · 11:18 · 19:4 · 19:5 · 19:6 · 19:11 · 19:12 · 20:1 · 22:30 · 24:19 · 24:37

Mark 12:25 · 13:17

Luke 1:52 · 6:28 · 6:30 · 6:36 · 9:20 · 9:35 · 12:48 · 16:19 · 16:22 · 16:23 · 16:29 · 17:28 · 20:35 · 21:23

John 1:1 · 1:14 · 2:19 · 14:2 · 14:6

Acts 1:7

Romans 4:11 · 7:1 · 14:3 · 14:17

1 Corinthians 3:2 · 3:8 · 3:16 · 3:21 · 3:23 · 6:9 · 6:14 · 6:15 · 6:18 · 6:19 · 7:1 · 7:29 · 7:40 · 8:4 · 8:5 · 8:6 · 9:5 · 9:7 · 9:9 · 9:13 · 9:15 · 10:4 · 10:6 · 10:7 · 10:11 · 10:25 · 11:1 · 11:10 · 12:31 · 15:22 · 15:46

2 Corinthians 3:6 · 4:4

Ephesians 1:9 · 4:5

Colossians 2:18

1 Thessalonians 4:3

2 Thessalonians 3:14

1 Timothy 3:1 · 3:12 · 4:1 · 5:9

Hebrews 2:2 · 5:11

James 4:6

1 Peter 1:19 · 5:5

Revelation 1:8

Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Can a wife divorce an unfaithful husband, and may either spouse remarry?” on April 29, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY