THE QUESTION

Did the early church count marrying a divorced woman as a real marriage?

Asked by a THF member on June 14, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 11 numbered quotations · the 19 early Christian passages and 78 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/did-the-early-church-count-marrying-a-divorced-woman-as-a-real-marriage

The short answer *From the text: says what the passages say*

No. Repeating Jesus' words, the early writers treated marrying a divorced woman as adultery, not a lawful marriage. Tertullian says she cannot marry lawfully while her husband lives, and Clement calls such unions fornication. They saw marriage as God joining two into one flesh. These passages do not settle whether the man may marry again afterward.

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HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

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POINT 1 OF 7

Jesus called marrying a divorced woman adultery

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

Tatian's harmony of the Gospels and Justin Martyr both pass on Jesus' saying plainly. The man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. The early writers start from this word of Christ.

1 “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 3, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

2 “Whoever marries a woman who is divorced from another husband commits adultery.””

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Justin Martyr,** *First Apology* (c. 130–165 AD) **Source 2, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

Writers in many places repeated the same rule

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

Theophilus of Antioch quotes the same Gospel rule. Tertullian explains its purpose: by making it unlawful to marry a woman who has been put away, Christ was forbidding divorce itself.

3 “He who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Theophilus of Antioch,** *To Autolycus* 13 (c. 169–183 AD) **Source 5, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

4 “To forbid divorce, He makes it unlawful to marry a woman who has been put away.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *Against Marcion* 34 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 11, page 6** Read it in the library ›
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POINT 3 OF 7

A divorced woman cannot marry lawfully

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

Tertullian answers the question directly. A divorced woman cannot enter a lawful marriage while her husband lives, and calling it marriage does not change what it is. He says adultery is a crime committed in the way of marriage.

5 “A divorced woman cannot even marry lawfully. And if she does any such thing without the name of marriage, does it not fall under the category of adultery, since adultery is a crime in the way of marriage?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Monogamy* 9 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 12, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Marriage is God joining two into one

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

Tertullian defines marriage as God joining two into one flesh, and adultery as another person's flesh being joined to either one after they are parted. Jesus' words in Tatian's harmony say man must not separate what God has joined.

6 “Marriage is this: when God joins two into one flesh; or else, finding them already joined in the same flesh, He has given His seal to the union.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Monogamy* 9 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 12, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

7 “So they are no longer two, but one body. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no man separate.""

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tatian,** *Diatessaron* 25 (c. 150–180 AD) **Source 3, page 6** Read it in the library ›
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POINT 5 OF 7

Such a union blocks the way back

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

Clement of Alexandria counts the marriage of separated people as fornication while the other spouse lives. He says the man who takes the divorced woman shares the guilt, because without him she would return to her husband.

8

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

later in the same passage

"Not only is the man who puts her away guilty of this, but also the man who takes her, because he gives the woman an opportunity to sin. For if he did not take her, she would return to her husband."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 2.23 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 8, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**

THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

Human law can allow what God calls sin

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Justin Martyr says that people who marry twice under human law are still counted as sinners by Christ. This suggests the early writers saw a union as legal in society yet not lawful before God.

9

"Therefore, all who, by human law, marry twice are deemed sinners in the eyes of our Master, as well as those who look at a woman to lust after her."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Justin Martyr,** *First Apology* (c. 130–165 AD) **Source 2, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**

THF's updated English

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POINT 7 OF 7

Separated spouses remain single, leaving room for repentance

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

Hermas says a husband who puts away an unfaithful wife should stay unmarried, and that marrying another is adultery. Justin adds that God desires the sinner's repentance more than punishment. The aim was repentance and restoration, not only a rule.

10 “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

11 “For the heavenly Father desires the repentance of the sinner more than their punishment.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Justin Martyr,** *First Apology* (c. 130–165 AD) **Source 2, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not say whether a man who leaves such a union may later marry someone else.
- They do not describe how the church received people already living in such unions.
- 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 19 early Christian passages and 78 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–19, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 20–23, in Bible order), then 74 more verses THF links 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**,

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Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *19 passages from 11 writers*

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · source 1*

1 *Shepherd* **Quote 10, page 5** “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 ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · source 2*

2 *First Apology* **Quotes 2, 9, 11, pages 2, 4, 5** than, having two eyes, to be cast into everlasting fire.” And, “Whoever marries a woman who is divorced from another husband commits adultery.” And, “There are some who have been… [continues online] **read ›**

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · sources 3–4*

3 *Diatessaron* 25 **Quotes 1, 7, pages 2, 3** “his custom. The Pharisees came to him to test him, and they asked him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He said, "What did Moses command… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Diatessaron* 8 (on point 1) has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matthew 5:29 If your right eye injures you, put it out and throw it away from you. For it is… [continues online] **read ›**

Theophilus of Antioch, *c. 169–183 AD · source 5*

5 *To Autolycus* 13 **Quote 3, page 2** “adultery with her in his heart." Matthew 5:28 And, the Gospel says, "He who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery. And whoever puts away his wife… [continues online] **read ›**

Athenagoras, *c. 170–190 AD · source 6*

6 *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 7*

7 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (on point 4) to obey. When they asked Him, “Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of divorce and send a wife away?” He replied, “Because of the hardness of… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 8–10*

8 *Stromata* 2.23 (1885 English) **Quote 8, page 4** “that takes a woman that has been put away, it is said, commits adultery… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Stromata* 3 He who is able to receive it, let him receive it." Matthew 19:11-12 They do not understand that, after He had spoken about divorce, when some asked, "If… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *Stromata* 2.23 (1885 English; on point 4) “is the first conjunction of man and woman for the procreation of legitimate children. Accordingly Menander the comic poet says… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 11–13*

11 *Against Marcion* 34 **Quote 4, page 2** “unlawfully put away is just as much an adulterer as the man who marries a woman not divorced. Marriage is permanent when it is not rightly dissolved. Therefore, to marry… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *On Monogamy* 9 **Quotes 5, 6, page 3** “than men's, that universally, whether through marriage or promiscuously, the admission of a second man to intercourse is pronounced by Him to be adultery. For let us see what… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *On Monogamy* 10 (on point 3) on this point: when a woman's husband is dead, she is more bound not to take another husband in marriage. For let us consider that divorce either is caused… [continues online] **read ›**

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Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 14–15*

14 *Commentary on Matthew* 14 is written that the Pharisees came to Him, tempting Him and saying, “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” Matthew 19:3 Mark… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Commentary on Matthew* 14 (on point 3) “him. For if, while her husband is living, "she will be called an adulteress if she is joined to another man," as Romans 7:3 says, then when he puts… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 16–17*

16 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) “marry after a lawful manner, for such marriage is unblameable… [continues online] **read ›**

17 *Apostolic Constitutions* a bishop, a presbyter, or a deacon is appointed, he must have been married only once, whether his wife is still living or has died. If he is unmarried when… [continues online] **read ›**

Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · sources 18–19*

18 *Divine Institutes* 23 (on point 2) “every false charge and every occasion for deceit may be removed: that the man who marries a woman divorced by her husband is an adulterer, and also that the man… [continues online] **read ›**

19 *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 66 (on point 4) let this be kept in all the duties of life, and let it also be kept in marriage. For it is not enough if you keep away from another man… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *4 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

20 **Genesis 2:24** For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. **read ›**

21 **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 ›**

22 **Matthew 19:6** So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate.” **read ›**

23 **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 ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *74 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 6:1

Proverbs 4:25 · 6:27

Isaiah 33:14

Jeremiah 13:1

Malachi 2:15

Matthew 5:28 · 5:31 · 5:42 · 5:46 · 6:1 · 9:13 · 10:2 · 11:18 · 19:3 · 19:4 · 19:5 · 19:8 · 19:9 · 19:10 · 19:11 · 19:12 · 20:1 · 22:30 · 24:19 · 24:37

Mark 10:2 · 10:5 · 10:9 · 10:11 · 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 14:2 · 14:6

Acts 1:7

Romans 4:11 · 7:1 · 14:3 · 14:17

1 Corinthians 3:8 · 6:15 · 7:2 · 7:10 · 7:11 · 7:27 · 9:5 · 11:1

2 Corinthians 4:4

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Ephesians 4:5
Colossians 2:18
1 Thessalonians 4:3
2 Thessalonians 3:14
1 Timothy 3:2 · 4:1 · 4:3 · 5:9
Titus 1:6
Hebrews 2:2
James 4:6
1 Peter 5:5

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

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Did the early church count marrying a divorced woman as a real marriage?” on June 14, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY