THE QUESTION

Is a remarriage from before conversion still adultery?

Asked by a THF member on April 29, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 9 numbered quotations · the 29 early Christian passages and 135 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/is-a-remarriage-from-before-conversion-still-adultery

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

These early writers do not settle this exact case. They teach that marrying again while a former spouse lives is adultery, and they make no exception for unbelievers. They also say a marriage made before conversion can stand, and that baptism takes away past sins. How these fit together is left open.

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.
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.
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POINT 1 OF 6

Jesus called remarriage after divorce adultery

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

Tatian's gospel harmony gives Jesus' answer to the Pharisees: what God has joined no one should separate, and marrying another after divorce is adultery. Lactantius repeats that the marriage bond must not be broken except where unfaithfulness has already broken it.

1 "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."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tatian,** *Diatessaron* 25 (c. 150–180 AD) **Source 8, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

2 "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 29, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 6

The rule applied while the first spouse lives

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

Clement of Alexandria states the rule in general terms: marrying after separation while the other spouse is alive counts as fornication. Hermas says that even a husband who rightly sends away an unfaithful wife commits adultery if he marries another.

3 "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 13, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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4 “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 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 6

Death of a spouse frees one to remarry

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

Hermas says a widow or widower who marries again does not sin, though staying single brings greater honor. This shows the problem these writers saw was a living former spouse, not marrying a second time as such.

5 “There is no sin in marrying again. But if they remain unmarried, they gain greater honor and glory with the Lord. But if they marry, they do not sin.”"

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD) **Source 2, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 6

Tertullian says God seals unions already joined

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

Tertullian defines marriage as God joining two into one flesh, or giving his seal to a union he finds already joined. He defines adultery as another person joining with either one after the two have been parted in any way.

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.”

later in the same passage

“Adultery is this: when, after the two have been disjoined in whatever way, other—no, rather, alien—flesh is mingled with either one; flesh concerning which it cannot be said, "This is flesh out of my flesh, and this bone out of my bones."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Monogamy* 9 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 15, page 6** Read it in the library ›
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POINT 5 OF 6

A marriage made before conversion can stand

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

Tertullian writes about women who became Christians while married to pagans. They are told to stay married, and he says such a marriage, made before conversion, stands approved before God. He is speaking of a first marriage, not a remarriage.

7

“They are told to remain in their married state. They are sanctified, and they have hope of making a gain held out to them.”

later in the same passage

“If, then, a marriage of this kind, contracted before conversion, stands ratified before God, why should not one contracted after conversion also go forward prosperously, so as not to be harassed by pressures, straits, hindrances, and defilements, since it already has, as it does, the partial sanction of divine grace?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *To His Wife* 2.7 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 17, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 6

Baptism takes away the sins of the past

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

Cyprian says the baptized person has his sins taken away and is remade as a new man. Hermas promises that former sins will be forgiven to those who keep the commandments and walk in purity from now on.

8

“For the one who has been sanctified, with his sins taken away in baptism, and has been spiritually remade into a new man, has become fit to receive the Holy Spirit, since the apostle says, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Epistles* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 22, page 7** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

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9 “And your former sins will be forgiven, if you keep my commandments. And all will be forgiven who keep these commandments of mine and walk in this chastity.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 2, page 5 **Read it in the library ›**

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- None of these passages discusses a couple who divorced and remarried before either of them became a Christian.
- They do not say whether such a couple should stay together or part after baptism.
- They do not show how the early church handled such cases in practice.
- 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 29 early Christian passages and 135 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–29, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 30–71, in Bible order), then 93 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**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *29 passages from 13 writers*

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · sources 1–2*

1 *Shepherd* **Quote 4, page 3** “husband to do, if his wife continues in her vicious practices?" And he said, "The husband should put her away, and remain by himself. But if he puts his wife… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Shepherd* (1885 English) **Quotes 5, 9, pages 3, 5** a wife or husband die, and the widower or widow marry, does he or she commit sin? There is no sin in marrying again… [continues online] **read ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · sources 3–5*

3 *First Apology* (on point 1) 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 ›**

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4 *Dialogue with Trypho* (1885 English; on point 6) “reason, therefore, of this laver of repentance and knowledge of God, which has been ordained on account of the transgression of God’s people, as Isaiah cries, we have believed… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Second Apology* (on point 5) “a wife with a husband who sought pleasure in ways contrary to natural and moral law and wanted a divorce. Though persuaded by friends to stay with him, believing he… [continues online] **read ›**

Minucius Felix, *c. 150–270 AD · source 6*

6 *Octavius* 24 (1885 English; on point 2) “we maintain our modesty not in appearance, but in our heart we gladly abide by the bond of a single marriage… [continues online] **read ›**

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · sources 7–8*

7 *Diatessaron* 8 (on point 1) Matthew 5:31 It was said that whoever puts away his wife should give her a certificate of divorce. Matthew 5:32 But I say to you that everyone who… [continues online] **read ›**

8 *Diatessaron* 25 **Quote 1, page 2** “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 ›**

Theophilus of Antioch, *c. 169–183 AD · source 9*

9 *To Autolycus* 13 (on point 1) “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 10*

10 *A Plea for the Christians* 33 (1885 English; on point 2) “19:9 not permitting a man to send her away whose virginity he has brought to an end, nor to marry again… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · source 11*

11 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (on point 1) 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 your hearts, he… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 12–13*

12 *Stromata* 3 marriage, when by agreement it gives time to prayer, is a teaching of self-control. For he added the words “by agreement,” so that no one might dissolve a marriage… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *Stromata* 2.23 **Quote 3, page 2** “and does not allow a person to end that union. This is plainly stated in the law: "You shall not put away your wife, except for the cause of fornication… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 14–17*

14 *Against Marcion* 34 (on point 1) “Christ prohibits divorce, 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… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *On Monogamy* 9 **Quote 6, page 3** not another, but one that imposed the law from the beginning and moved the will of God to forbid divorce: whoever dismisses his wife, except on the ground of adultery… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *On Modesty* 5 then, the Law of God is the first thing that shows us how great the guilt of adultery is, since adultery is also a matter of fornication, in keeping with… [continues online] **read ›**

17 *To His Wife* 2.7 **Quote 7, page 4** “then, a marriage of this kind, contracted before conversion, stands ratified before God, why should not one contracted… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 18–20*

18 *Commentary on Matthew* 14 (1885 English; on point 1) “5:25 The Saviour then commanded, What God has joined together, let not man put asunder, Matthew 19:6 but man wishes to put asunder what God has joined together… [continues online] **read ›**

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19 *Commentary on Matthew* 14 (on point 1) “wonder, therefore, why He did not say, "Let no one put away… [continues online] **read ›**

20 *Commentary on John* 6 (on point 6) repentance,” teaching that the benefit of baptism is connected with the intention of the person baptized. To him who repents it is salutary, but to him who comes to it… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 21–23*

21 *Epistles* (on point 6) mean from that death which the blood of Christ once destroyed, and from which the saving grace of baptism and of our Redeemer has delivered us, but from that death… [continues online] **read ›**

22 *Epistles* **Quote 8, page 4** Or if they say that the power of baptism comes from the greatness of the name, so that those who are baptized anywhere and in any way, in the name… [continues online] **read ›**

23 *Epistles* (on point 6) are not born in the Church can be sons of God! For the blessed apostle declares and proves that baptism is where the old man dies and the new man… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 24–28*

24 *Apostolic Constitutions* and fulfilling the ten commandments of the law: "It is written in the law, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you"—that is, I said it in… [continues online] **read ›**

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

26 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 2) “if they be then married, to marry a second time, but to be content with that wife which they had when they came to ordination… [continues online] **read ›**

27 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 3) “second marriages, after the promise, are wicked, not… [continues online] **read ›**

28 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 3) Choose your widows to be no less than sixty years old, so that their age may in some measure prevent suspicion of a second marriage. But if you admit a… [continues online] **read ›**

Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · source 29*

29 *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 66 **Quote 2, page 2** “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 *42 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

30 **Matthew 3:6** They were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. **read ›**

31 **Matthew 3:11** I indeed baptize you in water for repentance, but he who comes after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit. **read ›**

32 **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 ›**

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

34 **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 ›**

35 **Mark 1:4** John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching the baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins. **read ›**

36 **Mark 1:5** All the country of Judea and the people of Jerusalem went out to him, and they were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. **read ›**

37 **Mark 2:5** Jesus, seeing their faithfulness, said to the paralyzed man, “Child, your sins are forgiven you.” **read ›**

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

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

40 **Luke 3:3** He came into all the region around the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for remission of sins, **read ›**

41 **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 ›**

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42 **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 ›**

43 **Acts 4:3** They laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was now evening. **read ›**

44 **Acts 10:32** Send therefore to Joppa and summon Simon, who is also called Peter. He is staying in the house of a tanner named Simon, by the seaside. When he comes, he will speak to you.’ **read ›**

45 **Acts 19:3** He said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.” **read ›**

46 **Acts 19:4** Paul said, “John indeed baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe in the one who would come after him, that is, in Christ Jesus.” **read ›**

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

48 **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 ›**

49 **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 ›**

50 **Romans 7:2** For the woman that has a husband is bound by law to the husband while he lives, but if the husband dies, she is discharged from the law of the husband. **read ›**

51 **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 ›**

52 **Romans 7:9** I was alive apart from the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. **read ›**

53 **Romans 11:5** So then, at the present time too, there is a remnant chosen by grace. **read ›**

54 **Romans 14:9** For to this end Christ died, rose, and lived again, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. **read ›**

55 **1 Corinthians 7:2** But because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. **read ›**

56 **1 Corinthians 7:5** Do not deprive one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to fasting and prayer, and come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. **read ›**

57 **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 ›**

58 **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 ›**

59 **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 ›**

60 **1 Corinthians 7:14** For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. **read ›**

61 **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 ›**

62 **1 Corinthians 7:18** Was anyone called when circumcised? Let him not undo his circumcision. Was anyone called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised. **read ›**

63 **1 Corinthians 7:20** Let each remain in the calling in which he was called. **read ›**

64 **1 Corinthians 7:22** For the slave called in the Lord is the Lord’s freedman; likewise also the one called as a free man is Christ’s slave. **read ›**

65 **1 Corinthians 7:24** Brothers, let each remain with God in the condition in which he was called. **read ›**

66 **1 Corinthians 7:26** Therefore I think this is good because of the present distress: it is good for a man to remain as he is. **read ›**

67 **1 Corinthians 7:28** But even if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such people will have trouble in the flesh, and I want to spare you. **read ›**

68 **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 ›**

69 **1 Thessalonians 5:24** He who calls you is faithful, and he will also do it. **read ›**

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70 **Hebrews 12:27** This phrase, “Yet once more” signifies the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain. **read ›**

71 **Hebrews 13:4** Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled; but God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *93 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 · 4:25 · 6:1

Leviticus 15:18

Deuteronomy 8:18 · 20:5 · 20:19

Proverbs 4:25 · 6:27 · 9:17

Isaiah 33:14 · 46:12 · 50:9

Jeremiah 2:13 · 23:24

Malachi 2:15

Matthew 5:9 · 5:28 · 5:31 · 5:46 · 6:1 · 6:19 · 6:24 · 7:21 · 9:13 · 10:2 · 18:20 · 19:3 · 19:4 · 19:5 · 19:8 · 19:12 · 23:9

Mark 10:2 · 10:5

Luke 1:52 · 2:36 · 6:28 · 6:30 · 6:36 · 6:46 · 9:20 · 9:35 · 12:48 · 16:19 · 16:22 · 16:23 · 16:29 · 20:25 · 20:27 · 20:34

John 1:26 · 3:6 · 6:27 · 6:67 · 14:6

Acts 19:2

Romans 4:11 · 7:1 · 7:4 · 7:12 · 14:19 · 14:21

1 Corinthians 6:12 · 6:15 · 6:18 · 7:8 · 7:9 · 7:10 · 7:16 · 7:32 · 7:40

2 Corinthians 4:4 · 11:3 · 12:12

Galatians 5:13 · 5:17

Ephesians 4:5

Philippians 3:12 · 4:3

Colossians 2:20

1 Thessalonians 4:3

2 Thessalonians 3:14

1 Timothy 3:2 · 4:1 · 4:3 · 5:9 · 5:11 · 5:14

Titus 1:6

Hebrews 2:2 · 13:5

1 Peter 3:1

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

ABOUT THIS STUDY

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THE END OF THIS STUDY