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WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Until 1974 the Church of God taught that if someone was divorced and the ex-husband or the ex-wife was still alive, then such a person was not free to remarry if they wanted to become a member of God's Church. In 1974 this was changed just before Pentecost. Since that time the Church has accepted that if people married, got divorced and then remarried, perhaps even several times, and then came into contact with the Church and wanted to become members, THEN "the past was past" and they were free to stay with this second (or even third or fourth?) mate and become members of the Church.

Some people feel that it was a mistake for the Church to change its teachings in this regard in 1974, and that the Church's teaching prior to 1974 is really the one that is biblically correct. So what is the truth? What does the Bible teach about this question of divorce and remarriage?

THE REAL CRITERIA

In examining the question of divorce and remarriage different people tend to focus on different criteria. Here is what is important as far as I can understand.

The most important point is: exactly what are God's instructions FOR US TODAY? What would God LIKE us to do regarding this subject? What PRINCIPLES can we see applied in the instructions for us today? What does God "ALLOW" today? And what are God's INTENTIONS for anything He may "allow"?

What God may have allowed in Old Testament times is not necessarily important for us today. Thus, for example, the fact that God allowed men in Old Testament times to have more than one wife is really inconsequential to our discussion here. IF we can clearly see that TODAY God does not allow polygamy, then what God allowed 3000 years ago in this regard is not relevant to our discussion. We should not get sidetracked by things God allowed in previous times. Important is whether or not God "allows" something TODAY. This is not to imply that a historical perspective may not be helpful, but just to make clear that, for example, we cannot get any leverage for today's situations by appealing to God's acceptance of polygamy in Old Testament times.

Similarly, what Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong taught at any given point in time is also immaterial to this question. Yes, I believe that God used Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong to teach us, God's people, many things. But I do not believe that anything Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong taught us is true simply because Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong is the one who taught it! EVERYTHING I learned from Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong must be able to be verified by the Bible before I accept it as truth. That's what he himself taught me to do ... many times I heard him say: "Don't believe me, believe your Bible". And that's what I applied even while Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong was still alive.

So I am not really concerned with whether a certain teaching was taught by Mr. Armstrong in the 1930's

or before 1974 or only after 1974. The question that concerns me is: is that particular teaching supported by the Bible or not? IF I can see that it is indeed supported by the Bible, THEN I don't care at what stage of his ministry Mr. Armstrong accepted and taught this teaching. BIBLICAL SUBSTANTIATION must be the foundation for every teaching of the Church, NOT history (i.e. neither what God may have allowed in the days of Moses nor what Mr. Armstrong taught before or after 1974). If a teaching can indeed be biblically substantiated, then historical information can certainly be added to the overall picture. But the biblical substantiation must come first.

That's also what the Apostle Paul taught when he wrote ...

Be ye followers of me, EVEN AS I ALSO AM OF CHRIST. (1 Corinthians 11:1 AV)

The Word of God always has to be the final authority, not history and not any man's reputation. And it is certainly good to examine our premises. Sometimes we may accept something as self-evident and obvious, thereby seemingly obviating the need for biblical proof; yet what we have accepted may not really be fully supported by the Bible. That was the case when the Church changed its teaching regarding divorce and remarriage in 1974 ... we came to see that because of a bias we had not correctly understood certain Scriptures.

MARRIAGE A GOD-PLANE RELATIONSHIP?

As an example of examining our premises: Mr. Armstrong would commonly make the statement that "MARRIAGE IS A GOD-PLANE RELATIONSHIP", and it never occurred to any of us to think otherwise, because it seems so self-evident. But is that statement really correct?

The statement in the Church's wedding outline was: "Marriage is a NATURAL union, but a DIVINE institution, ordained of God". That statement is certainly correct, since God is the One who instituted marriage in Genesis 2:24 (thus it is a DIVINE institution), and it is a natural or physical union because it is a union between two PHYSICAL people.

But is marriage really a "God-plane" relationship? Exactly what do you mean when you say that marriage is a God-plane relationship? Exactly what are we trying to infer from that statement? What leverage are we trying to get from that statement?

In Genesis chapter 2, after He had created Eve, God instituted marriage. It was an institution that would join two physical people into a close relationship. But God the Father has NEVER been "married", and from what we understand, God the Father also will never ever "get married". So IF we describe marriage as a "God-plane" relationship, then it is a relationship in which THE SUPREME BEING IN THE UNIVERSE, God the Father, will never participate. God the Father will NEVER experience marriage; because from all we understand God the Father will never have a wife. And yet He is a FATHER!

Now there have been up to this point in history only two God Beings in existence, and there are only two God Beings right now (God the Father and Jesus Christ) ... and if One of these two never has and never

will experience “marriage” is marriage really “a God-plane relationship”? It is certainly a relationship that was instituted by God, but is it “on the God-plane”? Would God the Father ever be excluded from any relationship that is “on the God-plane”?

The statement in our marriage ceremony that “marriage is a NATURAL union” implies that it is a PHYSICAL relationship. And physical relationships are not really “on the God-plane” since God the Father and Jesus Christ are Spirit Beings (John 4:24) and not physical beings. Many things were specifically made for man, to give man the best possible conditions and circumstances. Thus Jesus Christ tells us plainly that “the Sabbath was made for man” (Mark 2:27). Likewise, God also instituted FOR MAN the natural, physical union of marriage. But that doesn’t necessarily make it a God-plane relationship.

The more correct statement, I believe, would be that ... “THE FAMILY represents God-plane relationships”, rather than saying that “MARRIAGE is a God-plane relationship”. When we talk about “THE FAMILY”, then this will include EVERYONE who already is or else will in the future become God ... God the Father, Jesus Christ, those in the first resurrection, and those from the millennium and the second resurrection period who will eventually become “children of God”. But if we talk about “MARRIAGE”, then this will only refer to Jesus Christ and those in the first resurrection; but neither God the Father nor those from the millennium and the second resurrection period will be involved in any “marriage relationship”. ALL will be part of a family relationship, but only a very tiny, minute minority (i.e. Jesus Christ plus the 144,000 in the first resurrection) will be a part of a marriage relationship. [Comment: This is in view of the total number for the millennium plus the second resurrection period being anywhere from fifty billion people to perhaps one hundred billion people or even more?]

Yes, Jesus Christ will “marry” the Bride, those who will comprise the first resurrection. But will that relationship be like the marriage we are familiar with in our physical lives? For a start, Jesus Christ will have ONE wife, but that ONE wife will consist of 144,000 individuals, including within that number people who had been men and people who had been women. Each one of those 144,000 beings comprising Christ’s “wife” will have a distinct and individual mind and identity. And yet each individual member of that group of 144,000 beings will only be a “very tiny part of Christ’s wife”. That certainly represents a MAJOR difference to marriage as we know it.

Consider further that very likely the relationship of those in the first resurrection being “a wife” to Jesus Christ will only last for the millennium plus the period of the second resurrection. The purpose of being “Christ’s wife” for that period of time is to help Jesus Christ to produce CHILDREN for God the Father during those 1000 years plus the length of time allotted to those in the second resurrection. Those children for God the Father will be “produced” by TEACHING AND INSTRUCTING PEOPLE during that period of time, rather than by some physical begettal process ... it is “the teachers” who will never again be removed into a corner (Isaiah 30:20). Once that part of God’s plan has been concluded, THEN Christ will no longer need any “wife” and I suspect that “the marriage relationship” will indeed become obsolete! But THE FAMILY RELATIONSHIP will continue ... God the Father plus an incredibly large number of sons and daughters of God, Jesus Christ being “the FIRSTBORN” among that group.

Referring to the resurrection into the kingdom of God, Jesus Christ clearly said:

For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God

in heaven. (Matthew 22:30 AV)

Does that sound like Jesus Christ was going to teach them that “marriage is a God-plane relationship?”

Consider what Paul explained to the Corinthians ...

Then *cometh* the end, WHEN HE SHALL HAVE DELIVERED UP THE KINGDOM TO GOD, EVEN THE FATHER; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. (1 Corinthians 15:24 AV)

[Comment: In the Greek the verb that is translated as “shall have delivered up”, implying the past tense is actually the second aorist tense, active voice and subjunctive mood. The two aorist tenses are NOT past tenses at all, even though they are commonly rendered thus into English. The verse would be better translated as follows: “... when HE SHALL deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when He SHALL HAVE PUT DOWN (correct in the KJV) all rule and all authority and power”. There is a sequence of events here, and Christ will FIRST put down all rule ... AND THEN He will deliver the Kingdom to the Father. The American Standard Version of 1901 translates this verse correctly as “...when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God”. The NIV translates this verse as “...when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father AFTER he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power”.]

And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, THAT GOD MAY BE ALL IN ALL. (1 Corinthians 15:28 AV)

Jesus Christ “delivers up” to the Father ALL who will have been changed from human beings to God beings. That INCLUDES those who had up to that point been “His wife”. Jesus Christ does not hold back from the Father the small (relatively speaking) group that had been “His wife”. It is God the Father who is going to be “IN ALL”, including those who had until then been “Christ’s wife”. And if God the Father is “IN ALL”, then there is no room for any group that is “exclusively the wife of Jesus Christ”. Think about this verse very carefully. I believe that 1 Corinthians 15:28 precludes any possibility of the marriage relationship between Jesus Christ and those in the first resurrection continuing after the time of the lake of fire.

So I personally suspect that from that time onwards there will be no husband-wife relationship on “the God-plane”, though the Family relationship will no doubt continue.

JESUS CHRIST MARRIED OLD TESTAMENT ISRAEL

As we are told by the prophet Jeremiah:

Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; FOR I AM MARRIED UNTO YOU: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: (Jeremiah 3:14 AV)

So Jesus Christ was “married” to Israel. What does that mean? My wife and I have been married for 30 years. Many of you who will read this are married or were married at some point in the past. What does it mean “to be married”?

Some (many) married couples have children, and some married couples have no children. Some married couples sleep in the same bedroom, and some married couples sleep in separate bedrooms. Some married couples have a fairly frequent sexual relationship, and some married couples have no sexual relationship at all in their present state. Some married couples work together professionally, and some married couples work at totally diverse jobs. Some married couples are almost never separated, and some married couples frequently spend long periods of time away from each other. So once again: what does it mean “to be married”?

While the specific details may vary from one marriage to another, the first and foremost thing that is meant by being “married” to someone is that one has A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP with the person one is married to than with all the rest of humanity that one is NOT “married to”. Yes, marriage involves duties and responsibilities and certain rights, but it first and foremost refers to A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH ANOTHER PERSON OF THE OPPOSITE SEX, a relationship that is recognized by both, God and human societies.

The Old Testament gives us a record of Jesus Christ’s dealings with Israel. And there are certainly many Scriptures that present this relationship in terms that refer to a marriage. But IN PRACTICAL TERMS exactly what did that relationship between Jesus Christ and Israel amount to? How can we compare it to the relationship between a husband and his wife, as we are familiar with it on the PHYSICAL everyday level? What aspects of a marriage, as we know marriage from our human experiences, can we see in Christ’s relationship with Israel during the Old Testament?

When we get right down to it, there is ONLY ONE aspect in Christ’s relationship to Old Testament Israel that justifies the comparison to a marriage as we know marriage. And that is simply this: Jesus Christ had A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP with the nations of Israel than with any other nation on earth. It is that “close relationship” which Israel rejected time and again. To understand this more clearly, we need to go back to an earlier time.

GOD’S PLAN IN BUILDING A FAMILY

Originally there were only two God Beings. We know the One Being as “God” or as “God the Father”, and the other One as “the Word” or as “Jesus Christ”. These two Beings have an EXTREMELY CLOSE RELATIONSHIP TO EACH OTHER! They are not “married” to one another, but they are so close that Jesus Christ said things like “I and my Father are ONE” (John 10:30) and “... he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou *then*, Shew us the Father?” (John 14:9 AV), and “Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? (John 14:10 AV). You can probably think of a few more Scriptures (e.g. Hebrews 1:3; etc.) that make the same point ... that God the Father and Jesus Christ have an EXTREMELY CLOSE relationship to each other.

It goes far beyond the closeness that could be developed in ANY human marriage. However, the closeness that a husband and wife in an ideal marriage could (hypothetically) achieve would be the

closest thing on earth to the relationship that God the Father and Jesus Christ have always enjoyed. And even then it would still be far, far removed from the closeness between God the Father and Jesus Christ.

These two God Beings determined to “reproduce” themselves ... to create multiple billions of other beings like themselves, with whom they would share their existence. In doing this it is their goal to achieve the same extremely close relationship with all of these multiple billions of other beings that they already enjoy with each other. No one in the God Family is to be excluded from such a close relationship. That is what God wants to convey to us by telling us that He is building A FAMILY!

Understand this:

It was not their intention that ONE of them would form a particularly close relationship with SOME members of their Family (i.e. Jesus Christ and those He “marries” at the time of the first resurrection), while the other One of them (i.e. God the Father) would form a close relationship with all the rest (i.e. those who come out of the millennium and out of the period allotted to the second resurrection). That would give them two different groups. But they are going to build ONE Family, in which EVERY MEMBER OF THAT FAMILY (except obviously God the Father Himself) would be a son or daughter of God the Father! ALL will form a close relationship with God the Father.

Clearly the closeness between God the Father and Jesus Christ and the closeness they intend to eventually have with every member of their Family CAME FIRST, and “marriage” only came second!

It is not that marriage somehow already existed “on the God-plane”, and that when God then created Adam and Eve He instituted marriage to picture a relationship that God was somehow already involved in. Rather, what already existed “on the God-plane” was an extremely close relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ, a relationship they intended to expand to include, eventually, multiple billions of other beings ... and in order to vaguely picture this already existing close relationship they instituted MARRIAGE on the human level, and then used marriage to represent that relationship.

We need to be careful to not get the cart before the horse. We need to be careful to not try to view what will happen “on the God-plane” (i.e. Christ marrying the Church) by forcing it into OUR understanding of what constitutes a marriage, viewing Christ’s future relationship with those in the first resurrection from the perspective of a physical marriage. Rather, we need to try to understand God’s intentions for marriage on the physical level by understanding THE RELATIONSHIP that God the Father and Jesus Christ have ALWAYS had, and the relationship they INTEND to have with all those who will eventually be changed from human beings to God beings. THE RELATIONSHIP between God the Father and Jesus Christ existed FIRST, and the institution of marriage only came later. And while the institution of marriage can in certain ways “picture” the relationship Christ will for a certain period of time have with those in the first resurrection, the institution of marriage cannot compete with the closeness that exists between God the Father and Jesus Christ, and the closeness that they intend to establish with EVERY member of their Family.

So let’s be cautious about applying OUR ideas of what constitutes a marriage to “the God-plane”. From our human perspective the things that immediately spring to mind when we think of “marriage” are a sexual relationship between the husband and the wife, and the birth of children. Other things can be

added to this list. I believe that from GOD's perspective the most important things to learn from marriage are: to learn to willingly sacrifice for the good of the other person (like Ephesians 5: 25), to learn to willingly and eagerly strive to come to see everything from the same perspective (which is what God the Father and Jesus Christ do), to always SEEK harmony and cooperation with the other, to seek to become "likeminded" especially towards one's spouse (like Romans 15:5 and Philippians 2:2), to have an unswerving loyalty and commitment to one's spouse.

Yes, I understand the reasoning of saying: since Jesus Christ will marry the Church, THEREFORE that is obviously a marriage "on the God-plane". My concern is that such a focus can easily lead us to view "Christ's marriage to the Church" in far more human terms than is appropriate or intended by God. I have no problem with people stating that "marriage is a God-plane relationship" AS LONG AS we keep in mind that, together with certain similarities, there are also going to be VAST DIFFERENCES between how a husband and wife interact on the human level and how Jesus Christ will interact with those in the first resurrection. And overall I believe it is more helpful to state that "THE FAMILY represents God-plane relationships", and that includes the husband-wife relationship and it includes parent-child relationships.

However, IF people use the reasoning that "SINCE marriage is a God-plane relationship THEREFORE there can never be any divorce for any reason", THEN they are drawing an unjustified conclusion from their assertion about "a God-plane relationship". Whatever "plane" the marriage relationship may be on has nothing to do with whether or not GOD actually permits divorce. Whether or not God permits divorce under certain conditions must be established by what God plainly tells us in this regard, and not by something we may "INFER" about the state or level of the relationship. We need to be very clear about exactly what it is that people wish to conclude from the statement about marriage being a God-plane relationship. The statement itself may be quite innocuous, but the conclusions drawn from that statement may be totally unjustified.

Furthermore, while Jesus Christ will be "the husband" of all those in the first resurrection, He will AT THE VERY SAME TIME also be "the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29), i.e. He will be A BROTHER to all those who constitute "His wife". To us these terms (i.e. being the brother and at the same time also the husband of a woman) are mutually exclusive, since God prohibits us from marrying a sister or a brother (Leviticus 20:17; etc.); but in the Bible God describes our relationship to Jesus Christ in both these terms.

During the millennium those in the first resurrection will have an extremely close relationship with Jesus Christ. That will be in the absence of God the Father, who will remain in heaven until after the time when the wicked become ashes under the feet of the saints. To help us understand this closeness, the relationship is at times described as a marriage, and at other times as a brotherly relationship. Both of these picture, in the ideal circumstances, an extremely close relationship. After the time of the lake of fire that relationship will be extended out to ALL who will have been added to the Family of God. It is that very close relationship to God and to Jesus Christ that is important, rather than the technical terms that are used to describe that relationship. And ultimately that "closeness" for everyone is to be ESPECIALLY with God the Father, to whom Jesus Christ will "deliver up" the whole Family (1.Cor. 15:24) when He, God the Father, comes to the new earth. And the whole "Family" is named after God the Father, as Paul explained in Ephesians 3:14-15 ...

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole

family in heaven and earth is named, (Ephesians 3:14-15 AV)

Keep in mind that the Apostle Paul also said that at this present time we only “see through a glass darkly” (1.Cor. 13:12), as far as things like what relationships on the spirit level are going to be like are concerned. Jesus Christ Himself also said: “If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?” (John 3:12 AV), meaning that things that pertain to life in the spirit realm are far more difficult for us to comprehend, even when Jesus Christ tried to explain those things in “earthly” terms. This statement by Jesus Christ should also make clear that “heavenly things” (i.e. life in the spirit realm including interactions and relationships) are NOT really like “earthly things” (i.e. life and interpersonal relationships, etc.) at all! The “earthly things” are really only analogies to the “heavenly things”.

So God established marriage, amongst other things, to give human beings the opportunity to have AN EXTREMELY CLOSE RELATIONSHIP with one other human being of the opposite sex. In that sense marriage was to be “a training ground” for what our relationship to God is ultimately to be like, to help prepare us for becoming one with God.

During the millennium and the 100-year period the relationship of Jesus Christ to those in the first resurrection will be the “husband-wife” relationship. The purpose of the relationship will be to assist Jesus Christ “like a wife” in bringing the rest of mankind to the point where they can also become a part of the Family of God. From the time that God the Father comes to the new earth, I suspect the relationship will be changed to all of us being “brethren” and children of the Father, Jesus Christ being the Firstborn Son. Then there will be no more husband-wife relationship.

BUT MAN REBELLED AGAINST GOD!

It was God’s intention that a man would “leave” his parents and “cleave” unto his wife (Genesis 2:24), in some measure approaching the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ, who are also “one” (John 10:30). But man rejected God’s ways and God’s rule.

It seems quite clear to me that our perversity and our depravity SHOCKED God; we human beings turned out to be FAR WORSE than what God had anticipated. That is why we are told:

And IT REPENTED THE LORD THAT HE HAD MADE MAN ON THE EARTH, AND IT GRIEVED HIM AT HIS HEART. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for IT REPENTETH ME THAT I HAVE MADE THEM. (Genesis 6:6-7 AV)

The flood in the days of Noah was an extremely drastic measure to deal with the problem of man’s perversity. God had certainly not pre-planned the flood! Man on the whole had violated and treated with contempt ALL of God’s plans and intentions for man. That included God’s intentions for “marriage”. Lamech was the first bigamist (Genesis 4:19), totally violating God’s intentions (see Matthew 19:8). Others then copied Lamech’s bad and selfish example, to the point where polygamy became common place.

After the flood mankind again VERY QUICKLY rebelled against God ... the tower of Babel incident was less than 150 years after the flood. And mankind continued to live in opposition to God's laws from then on out. This was also true for the nations of Israel as a whole.

So here is the point to understand:

God had INTENDED for a marriage between a man and his ONE wife to picture the very close and intimate relationship that will be the hallmark for the entire future Family of God. But since mankind was OBVIOUSLY not seeking any kind of "close relationship" with God, THEREFORE for God to "allow" polygamy was nothing more than a recognition of the perverse way of living that man had voluntarily (i.e. with Satan's tempting and prompting) chosen. God "allowing" people in Old Testament times to engage in polygamy was an acknowledgment of THE REALITY of the depth of selfishness man had sunk to. It was an acknowledgment that humanity wasn't really interested in the closeness about which God intended to teach us. God "allowing" divorce in Old Testament Israel falls into the same category. As Jesus Christ said: God "ALLOWED" these things because of the hardness of their hearts (Matthew 19:8), a hardness that was worse than what God had anticipated.

Man's rebellion against God meant that this God-intended purpose for marriage would not be achieved. This was probably true even for many of God's servants in Old Testament times. We could look at examples from the lives of servants of God like Abraham (who had children by concubines, plural, see Genesis 25:6), Isaac (whose wife Rebekah schemed with her son Jacob to deceive Isaac), Jacob (with his four wives), Moses (whose wife Zipporah had given Moses such a hard time that Moses had sent her back to her father Jethro, Exodus 18:2), David (with his many wives), etc. to illustrate this point. The point is this: all of these servants of God were in many ways the products of the societies they were born into and in which they lived their lives. And while they formed right relationships with God and became servants of God, God's intentions and purposes for marriage were possibly somewhat blurred to them by the norms and standards commonly accepted by the society around them. This was also still true later for Jesus Christ's own disciples ... God's purposes for marriage were somewhat blurred to them. That is why, when Jesus Christ told them that divorce was only permissible in cases of "porneia" having been committed, they said: if that is the case, "IT IS NOT GOOD TO MARRY" (Matthew 19:10). They didn't really understand at that point in time.

This should also make one other point clear:

I am NOT saying that we cannot develop a close relationship with God unless we have "a good marriage". Certainly, people who are single and people who find themselves in unfortunate marriage situations can still develop a good relationship with God. But the point is: God's intention was that marriage, if conducted in a godly manner, would provide us with an ideal opportunity to learn some vital lessons about "close relationships". These same lessons can certainly also be learned in situations outside of a marriage (e.g. with single people). But these lessons were totally lost on Israel of old and on mankind as a whole.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MARRIAGE

So God established marriage for human beings to give us an opportunity in training to “become one” with another person. If we could learn to cooperate for the common good and if we could develop a totally outgoing concern for this person we had married, then that would be a preparation for eventually becoming one with God. If we could learn to joyfully accept and fulfill our God-given roles within marriage, then that would in some ways show God how we will fit into the role of “becoming one with Him”.

We are commanded to love God with all our heart. However, it is a fact that we FIRST have to learn how to have a genuine outgoing concern for OTHER HUMAN BEINGS before we will ever be capable of “loving God”. That’s what the Apostle John explained ...

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, HOW CAN HE LOVE GOD WHOM HE HATH NOT SEEN? (1 John 4:20 AV)

We simply have to have a real love (i.e. an outgoing concern) for other human beings before we can become capable of loving God. And while marriage is by no means the only way to receive such “training”, marriage was nevertheless instituted by God as one very specific way of providing training in the area of “becoming one”. Note also from the above verse that it is not just a matter of “not hating other people”; it is really that if we “DON’T LOVE” the people we can see and interact with, then we don’t really love God either. This shows how vitally important it is for us to develop a genuine outgoing concern for other people ... and marriage was designed to provide us with just such an opportunity.

God also gave two specific commands to protect the institution of marriage; the seventh commandment (don’t commit adultery) and the tenth commandment (don’t covet your neighbour’s wife). But even as Israel (and humanity as a whole) rejected God’s ways in every other area of life, so also did they reject God’s intentions and instructions in the area of marriage.

Before we come to the New Testament instructions for marriage there is one other concept that is very helpful to understand in this regard.

WHAT DOES THE EXPRESSION “THE GOD OF PEACE” MEAN?

We all want “peace”, yet this world is filled with war and strife. Let’s understand what “peace” really is.

First of all, while peace may include a state of quietness and solitude, these things are by themselves NOT “peace”! Solitary confinement is in fact extremely stressful. And when GOD identifies Himself with peace, He does NOT mean “solitude”. God has no desire to go off and be alone somewhere. God desires to build a Family. Yet He is the God of “peace”.

In order to have peace requires at the very least TWO different individuals. One alone can never have peace, though one alone can certainly have quietness. Peace describes a condition that exists between two or more individuals.

The Old Testament Hebrew word for “peace” is SHALOM. This refers to: being well and safe, and by extension, being happy and friendly. But that is only the start. The Hebrew word “shalom” describes a condition, but without showing us the reason or the cause for that condition. “Being well and safe” obviously implies an absence of war and strife.

The New Testament Greek word for “peace” goes one step further, because the Greek word for “peace” actually points to THE CAUSE for peace.

Notice the following Scriptures:

Now THE GOD OF PEACE *be* with you all. Amen. (Romans 15:33 AV)

And THE GOD OF PEACE shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. Amen. (Romans 16:20 AV)

Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and THE GOD OF PEACE shall be with you. (Philippians 4:9 AV)

Now THE GOD OF PEACE, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, (Hebrews 13:20 AV)

In each of these expressions the Greek word that is translated “peace” is “eirene”. This Greek noun is formed from the primary verb “eiro”, which means “TO JOIN”. Our English word “harmony”, which we think of when we think about peace, comes from the Greek word “harmos”, which means “A JOINT in the body”.

Do you grasp what this tells us about peace?

In order to achieve “peace” WE HAVE TO BECOME “JOINED” TO SOMEONE! And “becoming joined” to someone results in “harmony”.

So where the Hebrew word for “peace” focuses on the conditions that are produced by peace (i.e. safety and well-being and happiness), the Greek word for “peace” focuses on the factor that produces peace (i.e. becoming joined to those with whom one is at peace). Put another way, the Hebrew word focuses on the result, and the Greek word focuses on the cause. And both words together give us a complete picture of “peace”.

A careful examination of the New Testament shows that Paul, who used this word “eirene” over 40 times in his letters, was well aware of this meaning of “BEING JOINED TO” those we are at peace with. Notice some Scriptures in this regard:

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

(Eph 2:13-16 AV)

Comment: The non-Israelites who had been “far off” from the covenants and the promises have been “brought near” to these; i.e. they have become “joined” to Israel in having access to these things.

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*;

Comment: Jesus Christ is our “PEACE” (i.e. He is our JOINING TOGETHER!). By “joining us together” Christ has made “BOTH” (i.e. the Jews and the non-Israelites) into ONE body. This reference to being made “one” is very clearly a reference to becoming joined together. “The middle wall of partition” was between God and man, our sins having separated us from God. So Jesus Christ FIRST joins Jews and non-Israelites into one body in the Church, and THEN He by His sacrifice breaks down the middle wall of partition between us human beings and God.

Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

Comment: “The enmity” that is contained in human commandments and ordinances is the enmity of the human mind against God (see Romans 8:7). Christ’s sacrifice has cleared the way for that enmity of the human mind to be removed from our contact with God and His laws. Through His sacrifice Christ made “of twain” (i.e. Jews and non-Israelites) “one new man”, and then enabled that one new man to have peace (i.e. a joining) with God. Note again that the reference to “one new man” clearly refers to two different groups BEING JOINED TOGETHER! And that joining into one body within the Church in turn opens the way for us to be joined to God, all of us, Jews and non-Israelites alike in the Church. Paul is clearly using the word “peace” to refer to being joined together.

And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: (Ephesians 2:13-16 AV)

Comment: BOTH groups need to be reconciled to God. And both groups need to be joined together into one body. Real peace requires such a joining together.

A little later in Ephesians Paul wrote:

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Comment: “The bond” here refers to “that which binds together”. Again, being joined together is the context of the use of the word “peace” here.

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord,

one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all. (Ephesians 4:3-6 AV)

Comment: The references to “one” in these verses again clearly refer to a joining together of people, even as God the Father and Jesus Christ are joined as “one”. And we all have to become joined to God in order to experience real peace.

The point is this: There can be no real peace UNLESS we become “joined to” the people we want to be at peace with.

We’ll come back to this later when we examine Paul’s statements to the Corinthians. But now let’s examine the New Testament instructions regarding marriage.

JESUS CHRIST’S TEACHINGS

Early in His ministry, in Matthew chapter 5, Jesus Christ said the following:

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, SAVING FOR THE CAUSE OF FORNICATION, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery. (Matthew 5:31-32 AV)

Here Jesus Christ addressed the matter of divorce and remarriage. If we ignore the expression “saving for the cause of fornication” for the moment, then we see the following:

[Comment: We’ll address this subject here from the perspective of the man divorcing his wife. However, this obviously works both ways, and many times the woman will be the one who will seek the divorce. The same points will then apply to the woman’s conduct.]

1. To divorce one’s wife amounts to causing her to commit adultery.
2. The man who marries this divorced woman is also committing adultery.

So the very action of divorce unavoidably produces adultery. The man who divorces his wife is CAUSING her to commit adultery, even if she never gets sexually involved with another man! Jesus Christ is obviously using the word “adultery” in Matthew 5:32 in a far stricter sense than we are accustomed to using the word. Keep in mind that in this section (Matthew 5-7) Jesus Christ applies EVERY LAW that He refers to far more strictly than people might have expected. Read again very carefully Christ’s statement that “whosoever divorces his wife ... CAUSES her to commit adultery”. Read also Christ’s statement a few verses earlier (i.e. Matthew 5:28), where Christ pointed out that we can become guilty of adultery by the thoughts we think.

Jesus Christ is making quite clear that divorce is a very serious matter. Divorce destroys and takes away the innocent party's opportunity to fulfill the commitment made at the start of the marriage, and to experience the close relationship that God intended to be developed within marriage. And as far as "the spirit of the law" (i.e. the spiritual intent of the law) is concerned, divorce produces adultery. This is "a magnification" of the law (see Isaiah 42:21). Divorce ALWAYS takes something away from a person, irrespective of who "the guilty party" might be.

Understand one thing very clearly:

NOBODY EVER GETS A SECOND CHANCE AT HAVING A HAPPY FIRST MARRIAGE!

I am not at all saying that second marriages cannot be very happy. But there is a certain POTENTIAL inherent in a first marriage, which potential simply does not exist in any subsequent marriage. That potential involves THE RELATIONSHIP that a man and a woman, in a first marriage for both of them, can develop. I realize that in a vast number of "first" marriages that potential is never achieved. But it was there at the start of their marriage, the potential for developing a closeness and a reliance and an emotional bonding to a degree that will not be possible in any subsequent marriage. This is because ANY marriage that was previously entered into will INEVITABLY have made an impression on the minds and the emotions of the two people involved in that marriage. So where two people entering a first marriage do so "with a clean slate" as it were (i.e. they have no previous marriage experiences to influence how they will respond to any situation; they'll be learning together how to deal with every situation that will arise), when someone who was previously married enters into a second marriage, that person will already have "some information recorded on their slate" (i.e. what they experienced in their previous marriage will remain with them and influence their minds and their emotions; in modern parlance: they will unavoidably bring some baggage with them). And that "information already on their slate" will not add to the new marriage relationship; it will detract to some degree from the relationship they will be able to develop over time.

Now certainly, there are situations where a person's first marriage was extremely unfortunate for one reason or another. And I don't doubt for a minute that in those cases a second marriage may provide them with a far better relationship than they ever experienced in their first marriage. But those "extremely unfortunate experiences" from their first marriage still remain with them, and will have influenced their minds in some way. And it would obviously have been better for them if they had never had those unfortunate experiences in the first place.

When people discuss Matthew 5:32 it seems that "the exception clause" is the first thing, and many times it is the only thing, that they comment on. What Jesus Christ was expounding here was the problem with divorce, and "the exception clause" is mentioned almost incidentally by Him. Never overlook the real message in these verses. Only when we have done that is it appropriate to focus on "the exception clause". So let's now look at this "exception".

The expression "saving for the cause of fornication" is a translation of the three Greek words "parektos logou porneias". The adverb "parektos" means "except". "Logou" is the genitive case of the noun "logos", which means "a word". "Porneias" is the genitive case of the noun "porneia", which is here translated as "fornication".

Now the main concern about this expression hinges on this word “porneia”. What does “porneia” mean?

In cases of uncertainty there are two ways to establish the meaning of any biblical Hebrew or Greek word. FIRST, whenever this is possible, we should examine other Scriptures in which the same word is used. Often the context in other Scriptures will make a meaning obvious. THEN, we can verify the meanings we have found, based on usage of a word, by checking the meanings given in dictionaries.

THERE IS ALSO A THIRD ROAD WE CAN TAKE.

Sometimes we can trace a word that seems a little ambiguous in our English translations back to how it came to be used in our English versions of the Bible. Keep in mind that the earliest English translations were made from the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible. And so it should not surprise us that, when we trace things back, many “ambiguous” or “slightly incorrect” words and expressions in our Bibles today can be led back to either the Latin Vulgate version of Jerome, or even to the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament made by Origen.

Let’s now look at some other passages that use the word “porneia”:

It is reported commonly *that there is* FORNICATION among you, and such FORNICATION as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have HIS FATHER'S WIFE. (1 Corinthians 5:1 AV)

The situation in Corinth was as follows: A man with a grown son (perhaps the man had been widowed?) had married again, and his grown son was having a sexual relationship with his step-mother. Paul used the word “porneia” to describe this affair between a married woman and her step-son. What did Paul mean? He was obviously not referring to “sex before marriage”, since for the man’s step-mother it was in fact ADULTERY! Yet Paul chose not to use the Greek word for “adultery” (i.e. “moichos”) or the verb for “committing adultery” (i.e. “moicheuo”). Instead Paul used the word “porneia”.

Clearly, Paul used “porneia” to refer to “sexual immorality” in general, without specifying the specific type of immorality. The fact that a married woman was involved here puts this meaning beyond question. So the Greek word “porneia” INCLUDES all forms of sexual transgressions, including sex between unmarried people, adultery, homosexuality, and other perversions. It is a general term for immorality. It is NOT a very specific and limited term, as Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong used to believe, when he attempted to limit “porneia” to “sex between two unmarried people”.

Let’s look at some other Scriptures:

And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath OF HER FORNICATION. (Revelation 14:8 AV)

With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth

have been made drunk with the wine OF HER FORNICATION. (Revelation 17:2 AV)

And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness OF HER FORNICATION: (Revelation 17:4 AV)

For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth HAVE COMMITTED FORNICATION WITH HER, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. (Revelation 18:3 AV)

How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I SIT A QUEEN, AND AM NO WIDOW, and shall see no sorrow. (Revelation 18:7 AV)

For true and righteous *are* his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth WITH HER FORNICATION, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. (Revelation 19:2 AV)

All these Scriptures speak about “Babylon” and that she is “the great whore” who has corrupted the earth with her “PORNEIA”. In Revelation 18:7, quoted above, we see that Babylon views herself as “A MARRIED WOMAN”, as a queen and not as “a widow”. Revelation 18:7 is very clearly spoken from the perspective of a married woman. And again the word “porneia” is used to describe her immoral conduct, rather than the word for “adultery”.

And obviously, whores don’t limit themselves to having sex with “unmarried men”. Babylon’s activities are in these verses depicted as “TOTAL IMMORALITY”, rather than a very limited area of sexual transgressions (i.e. only sex between unmarried people).

Notice another use of the word “porneia”:

And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to A REPROBATE MIND, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, FORNICATION, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents ... (Romans 1:28-30 AV)

Here Paul was describing the things the carnal, perverse human mind which has rejected God becomes involved in. Once again, the mind that has rejected God will not limit its perverse conduct to “sex before marriage”, but somehow respect God’s instructions as they pertain to the use of sex within marriage. Clearly, Paul used the word “porneia” in this passage to refer to ALL forms of immoral conduct, because that is precisely the way the reprobate mind will tend to work.

Let’s see how the Apostle James used the word “porneia” at the Jerusalem conference in Acts chapter 15:

Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they ABSTAIN from pollutions of idols, and FROM FORNICATION, and *from* things strangled, and *from* blood. (Acts 15:19-20 AV)

Again, in these instructions James was not thinking only about “sex before marriage” in this admonition to the non-Israelites that were coming into the Church. James clearly meant: instruct the non-Israelites to abstain from all forms of immoral conduct, be it sex before marriage, be it adultery, or be it any form of sexual perversion.

Let’s now look at a statement Jesus Christ made, where he used both, the Greek word for “adultery” (i.e. moicheia), and also the word “porneia”:

For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, ADULTERIES, FORNICATIONS, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: (Matthew 15:19 AV)

Matthew here lists seven specific items that Jesus Christ referred to. But in the parallel account of this incident, Mark lists thirteen specific items as being mentioned by Jesus Christ:

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, ADULTERIES, FORNICATIONS, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: (Mark 7:21-22 AV)

Mark omits to mention “false witness”, as recorded by Matthew, while Matthew omits to mention “covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, pride and foolishness”, as recorded by Mark. Both lists are obviously correct, as the Gospels do not by any means claim to be a record of every word that Jesus Christ spoke, as John explained at the end of his gospel account ...

And THERE ARE ALSO MANY OTHER THINGS WHICH JESUS DID, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen. (John 21:25 AV)

The point of these two accounts of this incident is this: Jesus Christ was covering ALL of the perverse thoughts and actions that emanate from the carnal human mind. And in the context of this list, especially when we view Mark’s expanded list, Jesus Christ was also including, though without directly mentioning these things, things like homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, etc., things which the Apostle Paul later spelled out in more detail in Romans chapter 1, where he wrote ...

Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through THE LUSTS of their own hearts, TO DISHONOUR THEIR OWN BODIES BETWEEN THEMSELVES: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; MEN WITH MEN WORKING

THAT WHICH IS UNSEEMLY, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. (Romans 1:24-27 AV)

Jesus Christ certainly also included these things, that Paul here refers to, when He spoke about the things that “proceed out of the human heart”.

So while Jesus Christ first specifically listed “adulteries”, the word “porneia” was intended to convey all immoralities not covered by the word “adultery”. It doesn’t make sense to attempt to limit the word “porneia” in these verses to “sex before marriage”, since that would have then ignored other forms of immoral conduct not covered by these two specific categories (i.e. by adultery, and by sex before marriage).

The full meaning of Christ’s statement in Matthew 15:19 is probably best conveyed by the NIV, which renders this verse as:

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, ADULTERY, SEXUAL IMMORALITY, theft, false testimony, slander. (Matthew 15:19 NIV)

Young’s Literal translation of 1898 renders this verse as follows:

for out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, ADULTERIES, WHOREDOMS, thefts, false witnessings, evil speakings: (Matthew 15:19 YLT)

However, it is the Latin Vulgate version of Jerome that uses the Latin word “fornicationes” in this verse, and so the great majority of English translations have simply retained the anglicized version of this Latin word. Here is the Vulgate translation.

de corde enim exeunt cogitationes malae homicidia ADULTERIA FORNICATIONES furta falsa testimonia blasphemiae (Matthew 15:19 VULGATE)

Let’s also look at 1 Corinthians chapter 6.

Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now THE BODY IS NOT FOR FORNICATION, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. (1 Corinthians 6:13 AV)

Again, it should be clear that Paul meant “all sexual immorality” here, rather than just “sex before marriage”. A few verses later Paul wrote:

FLEE FORNICATION. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that COMMITTETH

FORNICATION sinneth against his own body. (1 Corinthians 6:18 AV)

Again, it is really ALL immorality from which we are to flee, not just from “sex before marriage”. The sin of adultery can certainly not be excluded from the thought of this verse here.

I realize that the reference in 1 Corinthians 5:1 would have been sufficient to demonstrate FROM THE BIBLE that the Greek word “porneia” is by no means limited to “sex before marriage”. But the use in other passages really makes the same point as well.

Having seen the biblical usage, let’s now see some dictionary definitions.

In Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament the Greek word “porneia” is defined as: “of illicit sexual intercourse in general”. In the “New American Standard Greek Lexicon”, used for the 1977 New American Standard Version of the Bible, it is noted under “porneia” that it is translated in that version: 16 times as “immorality”, 1 time as “immoralities”, 1 time as “sexual immorality”, 1 time as “unchastity”, 4 times as “fornication”, and 2 times as “fornications”. This shows that for the majority of the uses of this word in the New Testament the translators understood the more general term “immorality” to be the most appropriate translation.

In Strong's Greek Lexicon the word “porneia” is defined as: “harlotry (including adultery and incest); figuratively, idolatry: fornication”. Strong's editors also recognized that the word “porneia” includes a whole lot more than just “sex before marriage”.

So in Greek dictionaries it is well recognized that the meaning of “porneia” is not in any way limited to “sex before marriage”.

Let’s now look at the English word “fornication”:

Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary defines “fornication” as: “human sexual intercourse other than between a man and his wife; sexual intercourse between a spouse and an unmarried person; sexual intercourse between unmarried people”.

So Webster's first acknowledges the more general meanings before listing the specific application of “sex between unmarried people”.

Now the English word “fornication” comes to us from the Latin word “fornicatus”, which in turn is derived from the Latin word “fornix”. “Fornix” was the Latin word for “an arch” or “a vault”. Thus “arched” or “vaulted” in Latin became “fornicatus”. As Roman society developed, these “arches” and “vaults” became the places where “THE BROTHELS” were established, and so “fornix” also came to mean “a brothel”; and the Latin word “fornication” described the activity that went on at such a brothel. Thus the Latin meaning was clearly “IMMORALITY”, rather than just “sex between unmarried people”.

So by the time Jerome prepared his Latin Vulgate translation, which was THE standard, as far as Bible translations are concerned, for the next 1000 years (!), he used the words “fornicatus” and “fornication” over 30 times in the New Testament part of his translation, as well as over 60 times in the Old Testament.

It is from these Latin words that the English translators then coined the English word “fornication”. They simply copied Jerome’s Latin word into their English text. However, it should be quite clear that when Jerome used the word “fornication” in his translation, he did NOT intend to limit this word to the meaning of “sex between unmarried people”. Rather, he used the word to mean “all sexual immorality”, the activities that would be associated with brothels. Our English language application of this word to “sex between unmarried persons” is a later development, a development that came only after this word “fornication” had already found its way into our English language translations of the Bible.

Thus, from the biblical usage of “porneia” and from the definitions found in dictionaries and also from the Latin origin of the English word “fornication” it should be quite clear that “porneia” refers to ALL SEXUAL IMMORALITY!

Now we are ready to examine Christ’s statement in Matthew 5:32 again.

MATTHEW 5:32 EXPLAINED

Here is another look at this verse.

But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving FOR THE CAUSE OF FORNICATION, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery. (Matthew 5:32 AV)

So we can now state this verse more correctly in today’s language as follows:

But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife FOR ANY REASON EXCEPT SEXUAL IMMORALITY causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery. (Matthew 5:32, NKJV of 1982)

In addition to the explanation for this verse that I have already given earlier, in this particular statement Jesus Christ was making allowance for divorce IF either spouse in a marriage had become involved in some sexual immorality ... either the husband or the wife had an affair, or the husband became a homosexual, or the wife became a lesbian, or the husband became involved in “child sex”, etc.. Jesus Christ was here primarily talking about what had happened IN THE MARRIAGE! The primary focus of Christ’s statement is conduct that had occurred DURING THEIR MARRIAGE!

I do not mean to imply that immoral conduct by one party BEFORE the marriage is not included in this statement. It IS included. But what happens during the marriage constitutes the greater part of this

exception clause.

Because of our lack of understanding and discernment, we in the Worldwide Church of God in those years attempted to apply this very Scripture exclusively to conduct that had taken place BEFORE the marriage in question was ever contracted. And so the ministers were required to “delve into personal histories” in an attempt to “get all the facts” to see whether any particular marriage was eligible for a divorce or an annulment. And after long, drawn-out processes eventually decisions were made by some team of ministers in Pasadena ... either they gave approval for divorcing or annulling a marriage, or they decided that a divorce was not acceptable.

But that was really inappropriate. I believe that it was wrong! They had no right, I believe, to make any such decisions based on THE PAST CONDUCT they had sifted through. They almost invariably ignored THE PRESENT CONDUCT. The decisions they really should have made should have been based primarily on THE PRESENT CONDUCT OF THE COUPLE! Except for some extreme cases, the past wasn't really all that important. The really important question was: is there immoral conduct RIGHT NOW, or at least SINCE THE MARRIAGE STARTED? Has one partner of the marriage been unfaithful DURING THE MARRIAGE? Because THAT is the criterion Jesus Christ was spelling out in Matthew 5:32, and not so much what may have happened before the marriage.

Yes, I can think of extreme examples where the past before the marriage would have made a major difference. What if someone had been in prison for murder, and upon his release from prison moved to another part of the country and married a woman there without ever revealing anything about his criminal background? What if a man is a homosexual and, in order to cover that up, he marries a woman without ever revealing his homosexual past? What if a man has fathered some children in another part of the country and then marries a woman without telling her that he already has some children somewhere else? Certainly we can think of extreme examples where hiding some negative aspects of one person's past would be fraud on a scale that would justify annulling the present marriage. But the sexual immorality Jesus Christ was referring to in Matthew 5:32 was primarily something that took place DURING the marriage, not before the marriage ... in other words, adultery and other immoral conduct.

Can we get past our old and incorrect interpretation of “porneia” having to be limited to something that happens BEFORE marriage? Can we understand that God's laws are “the way of love and mercy and compassion and empathy for suffering”?

Can we understand that the pain and the suffering a wife endures when her husband goes out and commits adultery is FAR, FAR GREATER than the pain she might endure if she were to find out that a year or two or five or ten BEFORE he ever married her, he had “committed fornication” with some other woman? This is not to in any way condone sex before marriage or to somehow minimize the wrong in such an action, and the hurt that its revelation may cause; but it is FAR MORE PAINFUL for a woman to be defrauded by her husband DURING HER MARRIAGE TO HIM! [Comment: The roles are frequently obviously also reversed.]

Adultery is a betrayal RIGHT NOW! It is a pain RIGHT NOW! It INSTANTLY causes intense suffering RIGHT NOW! What a spouse may have done prior to marrying us, if it was intentionally hidden from us, may also cause us some pain, but it will not be nearly as painful as if our spouse betrays us RIGHT NOW!

Can we not understand this?

We too need to go and learn RIGHT NOW what Jesus Christ admonished in Matthew 9:13 ...

But GO YE AND LEARN what *that* meaneth, I WILL HAVE MERCY, AND NOT SACRIFICE: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. (Matthew 9:13 AV)

A little later Jesus Christ repeated this admonition. Is that because we need to hear it more than once before it dawns on us that God is speaking TO US with this admonition? I myself also never really understood this in the past, and so I also taught that “adultery isn’t really a reason for divorce”, and on occasion I would try to encourage the defrauded member to continue with the marriage ... when in reality in their case something had been destroyed irreparably. In those cases my advice was not really right.

But IF YE HAD KNOWN what *this* meaneth, I WILL HAVE MERCY, AND NOT SACRIFICE, ye would not have condemned the guiltless. (Matthew 12:7 AV)

I have also sat with married couples the morning after the husband had gone out and committed adultery. I have seen women’s lives absolutely shattered by their husbands’ acts of infidelity! In one case a woman, upon hearing that her husband was committing adultery, went into such shock that she OVERNIGHT developed arthritis throughout her body ... and lived the life of a cripple for the next fifty excruciating years before finally dying alone.

Have we really understood God’s laws correctly in the past? Do we think that GOD will somehow grant a person a divorce if it should come to light that years before marrying their current spouse they “committed fornication” with someone ... but when a wife KNOWS that her husband is committing adultery RIGHT NOW, then that is somehow not a reason for divorce, and so the wife is supposed to continue in such a “marriage”?!?

Which of those two situations causes THE GREATER PAIN? GOD certainly does care! And we ought to care also!

If there have been any sexual activities prior to marrying someone, activities the prospective spouse does not know anything about, THEN those activities need to in some way be acknowledged to the prospective husband or wife. It can be a general acknowledgement without going into details, but something needs to be said to avoid any possibility of the innocent party later feeling “defrauded” by something that happened even before their marriage. However, IF such “sexual activities” weren’t for one reason or another revealed and five or ten years down the road this then comes to the attention of the innocent party, THEN this knowledge should not suddenly be “THE SOLE REASON” to seek a divorce out of this marriage!

I believe that in Matthew 5:32 Jesus Christ was primarily thinking of things that might happen DURING THE MARRIAGE! So if the innocent party really has no other reasons at all (other than this suddenly

revealed “fornication before marriage”) to seek a divorce, then the way the marriage has been going up to that point where this knowledge of past guilt suddenly became known, should weigh very heavily on any decision regarding getting divorced or staying together that might be made.

In the past “sex before marriage” was considered a far greater reason for divorce than infidelity during the marriage, when in some cases the innocent spouse was expected to “forgive and forget” transgressions during the marriage, because “hidden sexual activities before the marriage” did not apply in their cases. I believe that the opposite approach is probably the godlier one: acknowledging that sexual transgressions DURING the marriage are a far greater reason for divorce (based on Matthew 5:32) than sexual transgressions committed before marriage. Yes, some sexual activities that occurred before the marriage, and which were carefully hidden from the prospective spouse, may still be grounds for terminating the marriage. But the greater focus should be on total faithfulness DURING the marriage. Infidelity during the marriage is the main problem the exception clause in Matthew 5:32 is addressing.

Our reasoning in the past was flawed. BECAUSE we assumed that Matthew 5:32 simply “had to” refer to “fornication before the marriage”, therefore we had to reason out WHY such conduct before the marriage could possibly be a justification for DIVORCE. And then our only option was to reason as follows: when an unmarried person commits “fornication” with someone whom they have no intention of ever marrying, then they are in effect “defrauding” the person they may marry at some future point. And IF the person they may marry at some future time had known about this earlier “fornication” by the other party, THEN they might have decided not to marry that person. [Comment: This is not to imply that “fornication” with someone one plans to marry is somehow less of a sin; it is not!]

Now obviously, any immoral conduct before marriage will affect the mind. And people who live immorally before marriage are also more likely to engage in immoral conduct (i.e. extramarital sex) after they get married. So there is no question that marrying someone who has already lived an immoral lifestyle is never a good idea ... because of the greater likelihood of those problems reappearing later. A search into someone’s past should really be undertaken BEFORE committing to marry that person ... and the results of such an enquiry may very well have a major impact on whether or not to proceed with getting married to that person.

So, to summarize Matthew 5:32, divorce is a bad thing and automatically results in adultery for both parties. The only exception to this being the case which Jesus Christ stated in this particular instance is IMMORAL CONDUCT, primarily, though certainly not exclusively, during the marriage.

Let’s keep in mind that Jesus Christ’s PURPOSE in making this statement here was to show the sinful consequence that divorce inevitably produces. His main purpose was NOT to highlight “the exception clause” but to highlight the evils of divorce. Christ was highlighting that those men who were giving their wives “a writing of divorcement” were in fact guilty of adultery, irrespective of how they had interpreted what “Moses’ law” may have allowed! BUT He did state that there was one exception to this being the case ... if the reason for the divorce was immoral conduct that had taken place (i.e. if the wife had committed adultery or if she had carefully hidden her past sexual activities before marriage).

Jesus Christ was saying: IT IS A FACT that a man who divorces his wife is guilty of adultery (i.e. except if it is for sexual immorality). Jesus Christ was NOT saying: Divorce may have been okay until now, BUT FROM TODAY ONWARDS it will amount to committing adultery. He was just stating THE FACT that

divorce for any reason other than sexual transgressions had always amounted to adultery. Christ wasn't here making "a change" in the law at all; He was stating the way it had always been! Divorce "for EVERY cause" had always been wrong!

We'll look at Moses' instructions in a while. But now let's first examine Matthew chapter 19.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 19

In Matthew chapter 19 the Pharisees came and tried to trick Jesus Christ ...

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? (Matthew 19:3 AV)

To start with, these hypocrites (which is how Jesus Christ identified them repeatedly, see Matthew chapter 23, etc.) came "to tempt" Jesus Christ. This already tells us that they were going to in some way twist the Word of God. They knew better; they knew that the Old Testament nowhere says "FOR EVERY CAUSE"! This was simply their personal selfish interpretation.

If you do a search on the phrases "for every cause" and "for any cause" in the KJV, Matthew 19:3 is the only verse you will find. Moses had NOT approved divorce "for every cause"!

Anyway, Jesus Christ didn't fall for their bait. Instead He pointed them back to the time when God instituted marriage.

And he 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? (Matthew 19:4-5 AV)

So Jesus Christ pointed out that God's INTENTION for marriage had been to bind a man and his one wife together for life. God had at that point in time no intention of instituting any "divorce". In the next verse Jesus Christ then presents a conclusion based on what He had just said.

Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. WHAT THEREFORE GOD HATH JOINED TOGETHER, let not man put asunder. (Matthew 19:6 AV)

In verse 5 Jesus Christ had stated God's statement from Genesis 2:24. In the first sentence of verse 6 He rephrases this statement as a fact (i.e. "so, as a result, they are no longer two but one"). Then Christ presented the conclusion:

"THEREFORE what God has joined together, man has no right to divorce!"

What God did is create the institution of marriage, whereby one man and one woman are joined in a close relationship for life. Whenever a man and a woman anywhere on earth enter that relationship of marriage, it is God's intention that they stay together for life. Jesus Christ is saying that God did not really give man the right to pronounce "divorces" (except for the one situation already referred to earlier). So when human authorities grant divorces "for every cause", then that is wrong before God, in the same way that breaking the Sabbath and lying and stealing are wrong before God.

We should clearly understand Jesus Christ's statement "what therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder". Some people assume that Jesus Christ here said: it is God who has joined together every marriage that is ever contracted. But does God ACTUALLY GET INVOLVED in every single marriage that takes place anywhere on earth ... be it in America or in China or in the Amazon jungle between two illiterate natives or in central Africa between two pygmies who are perhaps nine or ten years old? What about the child marriages that were arranged in some societies in bygone ages (and in some cases still today)? Does God enter into those marriages and perform some kind of "joining"? Did God enter into the marriages of Baal-worshippers of old and "join" those individuals? What Jesus Christ was saying is this: It is God who established THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE, without reference to any specific marriage that may be entered into by a man and a woman at any given location on this earth. And it was God's intention that this institution be a lifelong commitment, and therefore God did NOT give human governments the right to put marriages "asunder", except for "porneia". It is the concept that Jesus Christ was addressing, not specific instances of marriages. When human governments and "authorities" do assume the right to grant divorces, they are overstepping their mark (except if it be for "porneia"). That is what Christ was pointing out.

The Pharisees understood the far-reaching implications of Christ's answer. So they now presented what they believed was their justification for divorce (which, as we'll see in Malachi chapter 2, God hated).

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

This statement was not true! Nowhere had Moses COMMANDED men to divorce their wives! What Moses had done is MAKE A CONCESSION! That is not nearly the same as a command! But, as Israel had rejected God's laws throughout their history in every other area of life, so they had also rejected God's laws pertaining to marriage. In this case they had liberalized to the extreme the "concession" Moses had made. Where Moses had given them "a little finger", they had grabbed not only the whole hand, but even the whole arm! They had gone to extremes, which made a mockery of the intention behind the original "concession".

Notice how Jesus Christ responded to their statement.

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. (Matthew 19:8 AV)

Jesus Christ said: Moses "suffered you to do this"; i.e. Moses "allowed" this, he made a concession in this regard. Notice that Jesus Christ did NOT endorse their claim that Moses "COMMANDED" this.

Next, understand very clearly that Moses most assuredly did not allow them this concession of divorce “FOR EVERY CAUSE”! That is simply not true! We’ll shortly look at what Moses had allowed.

Next, Jesus Christ here spelled out THE REASON why Moses had made this concession of allowing divorce in certain circumstances. Moses made this concession BECAUSE OF the hardness of their hearts.

Now understand something:

Jesus Christ’s reference to their “hardness of heart” is true for the vast majority of divorces. It is certainly true when people seek a divorce “for every cause”. Almost always there is a hardness of heart on the part of at least one party in a divorce. However ...

The hardness of heart Jesus Christ was referring to here was directed PRIMARILY AT GOD! They had a hardness of heart towards God! That hardness of heart towards God also carried through into their application of God’s intentions for marriage. Their desire to divorce “for every cause” was a symptom, and the cause for that symptom was their hardness of heart. Recall that the Apostle Paul also admonished the Hebrews to guard against developing such a hardness of heart (see Hebrews chapters 3-4) towards God. It is the same today ... in the vast majority of divorces there is a hardness of heart on the part of at least one party, and mostly that is on the part of the “guilty” party.

Jesus Christ made clear that in the beginning it was not God’s intention to make any provision for divorce. Then Christ spelled out the same point we saw earlier in Matthew 5:32.

And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except *it be* for fornication, AND SHALL MARRY ANOTHER, COMMITTETH ADULTERY: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. (Matthew 19:9 AV)

Again, the only acceptable reason Christ gives for a divorce here is “sexual immorality” (NKJV). In cases where a divorce occurs for reasons other than sexual immorality, at least one party, and usually both parties, will inevitably end up committing adultery, if not physically then certainly in the mind (see again Matthew 5:28) ... that is what Jesus Christ is spelling out in this verse.

And once again, Jesus Christ was NOT really making a change here. He was really spelling out the practical application of what Moses had “commanded” regarding divorce and remarriage.

Let’s now examine what Moses had “commanded”.

UNDERSTANDING DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 24

Here is the passage that the Pharisees referred to.

When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, **BECAUSE HE HATH FOUND SOME UNCLEANNESS IN HER**: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give *it* in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, **SHE MAY GO AND BE ANOTHER MAN'S WIFE**. (Deuteronomy 24:1-2 AV)

Let's carefully examine this verse.

Firstly, **THE REASON** for seeking a divorce is clearly spelled out. It is **NOT** "for every cause" that Moses here granted the right to divorce. It is for a very specific cause: "**BECAUSE THE MAN HAS FOUND SOME UNCLEANNESS IN HER**"!

What does this mean?

The Hebrew verb translated as "he has found" is the verb "matsa" used with the Hebrew "qal" stem and in the "perfect" mood or tense. This tense refers to "**A COMPLETED ACTION**". So this refers to the man having completed something ... he has completed an action or investigation into something.

The Hebrew translated as "some" is "dabar", which means: a word, a thing, a matter, an act, etc.

The Hebrew word translated as "uncleanness" is "ervah", which literally means "**NAKEDNESS**", being derived from the verb "arah", which means "to uncover, to make bare".

So when we put this **REASON** that Moses spelled out together, here is what we find: Moses was making allowance for divorce in those cases where the man found **SEXUAL IMMORALITY** (i.e. a matter of nakedness) in the woman. That would most likely have been in one of three ways:

- She had professed to be a virgin, but on the wedding night he found out that she was not a virgin.
- She was not a virgin and either he had not discerned this on the wedding night or he knew before marrying her that she was not a virgin, **BUT** she was already pregnant with someone else's child. This he would have discovered when the child was born earlier than if he were the father.
- She committed adultery at some point of her marriage to him, and he discovered this immediately or later at some point.

So the divorce would have occurred either after the wedding night (when the man discovered that the woman was not a virgin), or it occurred within the first year of marriage (if she was already pregnant before marrying him) or it occurred as soon as the man found out that his wife had committed adultery. In theory adulterers were to be stoned, but that would only very seldom, if ever, have been applied. Consider that the whole nation had gotten involved in immoral conduct while Moses was on the mountain and when Aaron had made the golden calf (Exodus 32:4-7), and at the time when Moab sent

in their women on Balaam's advice, etc. Israel repeatedly got involved in pagan religious practices, and those invariably included immoral sexual conduct. The laws God gave notwithstanding sexually immoral conduct was common throughout ancient Israel's history and stoning for sexual transgressions was rare. Even at the time of His ministry, Jesus Christ referred to the Pharisees as "an adulterous generation" (Matthew 16:4), yet none of them were being stoned.

[Comment: It is interesting that Judah planned to have his daughter-in-law Tamar put to death by burning because he thought she had had sex with some stranger (Genesis 38:24), but when Judah found out that he himself was the one who had impregnated Tamar (which was just as bad!), he no longer insisted on Tamar being put to death. Also, it hadn't bothered Judah that he himself had had sex with a woman he had taken to be a harlot (Genesis 38:15-16). There very clearly was a double-standard when it came to comparing sexual transgressions committed by men with those committed by women.]

So the point is simply this:

What Moses had allowed was nothing other than: allowing divorce "for PORNEIA"! And this "allowance" by Moses is actually upheld by Jesus Christ in Matthew 5:32 and in Matthew 19:9. Jesus Christ did NOT somehow introduce "a new reason" for divorce in these verses. He was only upholding the one reason Moses had previously stated in Deuteronomy 24.

So let's understand this very clearly:

In Deuteronomy 24:1-2 Moses had "allowed" divorce if there was a matter of "sexual immorality". This reason for divorce is upheld by Jesus Christ in Matthew 5:32 and again in Matthew 19:9. Moses had most assuredly NOT allowed divorce "for every cause"!

JESUS CHRIST DID NOT MAKE ANY CHANGE IN THE LAW REGARDING DIVORCE!

Simply because THE PHARISEES believed and taught that even the flimsiest of excuses was sufficient to divorce one's wife, that did not make it so. And Moses had not commanded anything of the sort. They had liberalized and watered down the instructions Moses had given.

That brings us to God's stern warning in Malachi chapter 2.

MALACHI 2:13-16

While the Book of Malachi certainly has a prophetic application, it also had a literal application to the Jews at Malachi's time. And we should not overlook the literal historical application, which certainly also contains admonitions for us. Here is the situation God was addressing through Malachi:

And this have ye done again, COVERING THE ALTAR OF THE LORD WITH TEARS, WITH

WEEPING, AND WITH CRYING OUT, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth *it* with good will at your hand. (Malachi 2:13 AV)

The situation was this: men were acting hypocritically and divorcing their wives of many years for totally unjustified reasons ... "FOR EVERY CAUSE"! It was these wives who had been unfairly divorced by their husbands, who were crying out to God with weeping and with tears. This becomes quite clear in the following verses.

Yet ye say, Wherefore? BECAUSE THE LORD HATH BEEN WITNESS BETWEEN THEE AND THE WIFE OF THY YOUTH, AGAINST WHOM THOU HAST DEALT TREACHEROUSLY: yet *is* she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. (Malachi 2:14 AV)

The expression "the wife of your youth" refers to women they had married many years earlier. The fact that God says that THE HUSBANDS were dealing treacherously makes clear that this did not involve any "sexual immorality" on the part of the wives. So the husbands had resorted to divorcing their wives of many years standing "FOR EVERY CAUSE"! They had twisted and perverted the instructions that Moses had given in Deuteronomy 24, in order to justify divorcing their wives who were in fact faithful to them.

AND DID NOT HE MAKE ONE? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. (Malachi 2:15 AV)

God's reference to "did not He make one?" refers to the fact that the men being addressed by God were divorcing their wives. This matter of making them "one" is precisely the same point Jesus Christ referred to in Matthew 19. The purpose for marriage is also referred to ... a marriage that is conducted in the ways God intended is a training ground for producing "a godly seed". The last part of this verse then states the common problem with divorce ... that one party is dealing treacherously against the other. And God sternly warns against this common problem.

For the LORD, THE GOD OF ISRAEL saith that he HATETH PUTTING AWAY: for *one* covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously. (Malachi 2:16 AV)

Here God spells it out very clearly: GOD HATES DIVORCE!

Now WHY does God say this? Was God saying that He HATED the law Moses had given in Deuteronomy 24:1-2? What does this verse tell us?

No, in Deuteronomy 24 God had made allowance for divorce if there was a matter of sexual immorality. And this law Jesus Christ upheld in Matthew 5:32 and in Matthew 19:9. So "divorce because of sexual immorality" is NOT what God is speaking about in Malachi 2:16.

Note very carefully!

The thing for which God is in Malachi 2:16 expressing A HATRED is the matter of “divorce FOR EVERY CAUSE”! God HATED how the Jews had perverted the instruction He had given to Israel through Moses! God had acknowledged that in the case of sexual immorality the offending spouse could be divorced; but they had taken this concession and gone to extremes. They had started to divorce their wives for the flimsiest of reasons. And faithful wives found themselves with “a writing of divorcement” in their hands, because their husbands desired to have some younger women. This was out and out treachery, and that God hated intensely!

So to state this very plainly:

God hates any divorce that is not justified by the standards GOD has established for divorce!

God is not expressing a hatred for the things He Himself “allows” in Matthew 5:32 and in Matthew 19:9. It is the misapplication of what Moses “allowed” that God hates, because such misapplications invariably involve treachery.

It might be good to consider another point. Malachi is a book of prophecy that is directed at the “end time”, i.e. at the very age we are living in right now. It is especially “the priests” who are addressed by God in this book (see Malachi 1:6; 2:1,7). The expression “and this have YOU done again ...” in Malachi 2:13 seems to also be addressed especially to the priests. The end time religious counterparts of “priests” are the ministers of the Church. So in addition to this section in Malachi being an admonition to the Jews in Malachi’s day, I would take this to be a prophetic admonition that is addressed as a warning especially for the ministry of the Church at the end time. God is admonishing us in the end time ministry not to deal treacherously in OUR marriages.

In view of our previous understanding that “marriage is for life and can therefore never be divorced, it can only be annulled”, the question that arises is this:

WHY does God ALLOW divorce for the reason of sexual immorality?

WHY SEXUAL IMMORALITY IS A VALID REASON FOR DIVORCE

We saw that marriage was intended by God to produce a very close relationship between a man and his wife, a relationship that should picture the closeness that is going to exist between individual members within the Family of God.

Marriage would be a suitable training ground in teaching two individuals with different likes and different preferences and different desires to work together and to get to the point where they would modify and subjugate their own likes and preferences and desires to accommodate the likes and preferences and desires of the other person. It would provide training in learning to work like a team towards common

goals. The differences that would arise in likes and preferences and desires would NOT be a reason to break up the marriage. Put another way: selfish conduct and behaviour in general would not be a reason for divorce; it would only serve to illustrate that selfish behaviour invariably causes problems and difficulties for other people.

However, God acknowledged, through Moses giving the law of Deuteronomy 24 and through Jesus Christ reaffirming this law in Matthew 5:32 and in Matthew 19:9, that SOME selfish conduct just goes too far!!

When it comes to the intimate sexual contacts within marriage, between a husband and his wife, then to engage with someone else in those same intimate contacts represents a betrayal of one's spouse. When God established the first marriage and then said that the man "... shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24), God was establishing a relationship that should never be shared with anyone outside of the marriage. To break the trust entailed in that intimate relationship would simply destroy the relationship; it would render the relationship dysfunctional. And so, while God had never intended for marriages to be severed before the death of one of the spouses, God recognized that sexual infidelity within marriage was simply going to destroy something that could never be restored, even if the marriage did continue outwardly.

Keep in mind that God had never created human beings with independent minds before. And God had never before created the institution of marriage. And even as God learned in the centuries leading up to the flood that we human beings are far more perverse and depraved than He had anticipated (see again Genesis 6:5-7), so God also learned that we human beings are naturally far too selfish to sincerely strive for the high goals He had planned for marriage; we are generally far too selfish to subjugate our desires for the good of another person (this is speaking in general terms, certainly there are exceptions to this).

Keep in mind also that God was well aware of the fact that people actually CAN go too far in the wrong direction for a relationship to ever be restored ... that's what had happened in the case of Satan's relationship with God Himself ... Satan had simply gone too far in the wrong direction for a correct relationship between him and God EVER to be re-established.

God had "married" Israel when the Old Covenant was made. By the time of the Book of Deuteronomy we are into the 40th year of the exodus. When God made the "marriage covenant" with Israel, it was not God's intention to ever "divorce" Israel. But by the time Moses wrote Deuteronomy 24 (stating that sexual immorality was a valid reason for divorce), it was also very clear to God that Israel was simply heading down a one-way road that would unavoidably lead to the point where Israel had simply "gone too far" and where the relationship between them and God would become dysfunctional. It would inevitably get to the point where there was nothing to salvage, and where therefore God would have to "divorce" them.

While physical, material things (e.g. the universe, this planet earth, etc.) can always be restored by God, there are SOME things that can destroy A RELATIONSHIP to such an extent, that it can NEVER be restored. That is also true for all those who will end up in the lake of fire ... because they have with their minds gotten to such a point where it would be impossible to ever establish or restore a right relationship with God. So God has to permanently sever all contact with them.

For the physical relationship of marriage that “point of no return” is sexual infidelity (including obviously sexual perversions like homosexuality, etc.). For Israel’s relationship with God that “point of no return” was “idolatry”, though God applied many other punishments before resorting to “divorce”.

We need to also understand the correct priorities from God’s perspective. Sometimes some people don’t understand what is really important to God. They think THE LAW is the ultimate thing, and simply EVERYTHING must be subordinated to the law. In this particular case, they think that MARRIAGE is the most important thing, and everything else must be subservient to the institution of marriage.

But that is simply not so!

Keep in mind that the Sabbath was made FOR MAN; it was NOT that man was made for the Sabbath (see Mark 2:27). Likewise, it was marriage that was made FOR MAN; it was not that man was somehow made to give the institution of marriage some meaning. In God’s scheme of things it is MAN that is important, rather than the institution of marriage.

And when something REALLY doesn’t work, then God has repeatedly MODIFIED the circumstances, so that His plan may continue. The flood in the days of Noah represented a modification that God had not yet intended when He created Adam and Eve. The confusion of the languages at the tower of Babel represents another modification from what God had earlier intended. The division of Israel into two distinct groups of nations after Solomon’s death (i.e. the House of Israel and the House of Judah) represents another modification that God had not intended originally. The respective captivities of these two “Houses” represent further modifications. Allowing polygamy, slavery and divorce (all things God had not intended when He created Adam and Eve) are further modifications. Many other examples could be mentioned, where God has made some modifications to what He originally intended (e.g. shortening man’s lifespan, changing the monthly and yearly cycles, etc.) and we human beings then have to live and function with those modified circumstances.

God created marriage to be the means to achieve an end; He did not create marriage to be an end in itself!

We need to recognize, because that is what God acknowledged through allowing Moses to give the instructions in Deuteronomy 24, that sexual unfaithfulness within a marriage destroys something that can never be restored! Yes, marriages may survive unfaithfulness, and they may continue even after one spouse has committed adultery; but the relationship in such a marriage will NEVER again be what it would have been had the adultery never been committed. SOMETHING has been destroyed by the sexual infidelity, and that something will never be restored. THAT is why Jesus Christ endorsed the statement that “porneia” is indeed a valid reason, which God will accept, for terminating a marriage.

To seek a divorce in case of marital infidelity is not a matter of “hardness of heart”. Where the “hardness of heart” enters the picture is on the part of the one committing the adultery! There has to be an enormous degree of “hardness of heart” towards one’s spouse to go out and betray the trust they have placed in the person they married, by committing adultery. When Jesus Christ said “... EXCEPT it be for porneia” in Matthew 19:9, He was making clear that to seek a divorce in the case of “porneia” (i.e. adultery, etc.) was not “hardness of heart”. It was certainly not “hardness of heart” when God

divorced Israel because of spiritual “porneia”.

By attempting to incorrectly limit “porneia” to “sex before marriage” in years gone by, it was difficult to see exactly what God was really instructing in these various Scriptures. It is absolutely vital to understand that in no way can the Greek word “porneia” be limited to “sex before marriage”. God was simply not focusing on what may have happened BEFORE two people ever got married. God was PRIMARILY concerned about what happened DURING their marriage.

To have people live together as man and wife for five or ten or even twenty years ... and to THEN grant a divorce or annul a marriage because of what may have happened BEFORE these two people ever got married only creates MORE PROBLEMS! So they have lived together with someone as man and wife for five or ten or twenty years ... but now both are free to marry someone else! So is THE NEW PERSON they may marry not also “being defrauded” because they now marry someone who has already lived with someone else for several years but in a situation that the Church does not recognize as a valid marriage. Is this “cure” of years gone by not worse than the original problem? The original marriage is broken up because one partner had “committed fornication” once or many times; yet now both partners are free to remarry someone else even though both have now “had sex” PERHAPS A THOUSAND TIMES or more? (This is assuming that no infidelity ever occurred during the marriage that is breaking up. IF there was any adultery, then “the exception clause” of Matthew 19:9 certainly applies.)

Consider also the consequences if God had NOT allowed divorce “for porneia” and if God did not allow divorce today “for porneia”. If your spouse shames you by committing adultery, but you are absolutely bound to stay married to him or her, what will happen? They may as well commit adultery as often as they like ... and there is nothing you can do; i.e. nothing other than doing the same, also going out and committing adultery. Thus a couple can be “married” and both of them can go out and sleep with a different person every night ... yet their marriage remains “for life”, because that institution of marriage is the most important consideration in this whole scenario. That such a “marriage” would be a farce and hypocrisy and a mockery doesn’t deter some people from feeling that “adultery” is not a valid reason for divorce.

I know of a situation where the non-member wife of a member of the Church lived under the same roof with her husband for the whole working week, but she would spend the week-ends away from her home with another man fairly regularly ... yet he felt that God required him to stay married to this “wife”. Somehow he felt “bound” to this woman, even though she openly lived with someone else most week-ends. God does not expect any member of His Church to remain in such a marital situation. That very clearly fits “the exception clause” of Matthew 19:9.

It is once situations like this one I have mentioned here arose, that the leadership of the Church reasoned: “well, God doesn’t really allow divorce for ADULTERY; BUT ... in this case we can apply 1 Corinthians 7 and say that such a “wife” (or “husband”) is showing by her (or his) conduct that she (or he) is not really “pleased to dwell with the believer” and THEREFORE it would be okay for the believer to divorce such a “spouse”. Or it was reasoned: since the unbeliever is committing adultery so commonly, THEREFORE the believer is going to be exposed to the potential of contracting AIDS or some other venereal disease, and THEREFORE it would be okay for the believer to seek a divorce, to avoid getting some sickness. It was a strange way of reasoning to get to the right answer.

The point was: It is OBVIOUSLY intolerable to live with someone who REGULARLY and openly commits adultery. We just needed to reason out some “biblical justification” for taking a course of action that we could intuitively feel is the right course to take. It didn’t occur to us that throughout the Old Testament adultery is A FAR MORE SERIOUS SIN than “sex before marriage”! Somehow that was supposed to all be turned around in the New Testament, and now the most important issue was (supposedly) “sex BEFORE marriage”? So we found some roundabout ways of reasoning out the obvious ... that adultery more than anything else will destroy a marriage to the point where it can never be repaired.

When your spouse is clearly and openly committing adultery, then God gives you the right in Matthew 5:32 and again in Matthew 19:9 to divorce that mate ... and God grants you the freedom to remarry someone else in the Church if you so desire.

Now we should look at what Paul told the Corinthians in 1. Corinthians chapter 7.

1.CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 7

In this chapter Paul was responding to questions the Corinthians had asked about marriage. In verses 8-9 Paul addressed “the unmarried and the widows” in the Church. In verses 10-11 he then addressed those who were “married” in the Church, i.e. where both spouses in a marriage were members of the Church.

Then in verses 12-16 he addressed a third group he called “THE REST”. In verses 12-13 Paul defines this group as “a man whose wife is not in the Church” and as “a woman whose husband is not in the Church”; i.e. he is speaking to Church-members whose spouses were not a part of the Church.

But to the rest 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. And THE WOMAN WHICH HATH AN HUSBAND THAT BELIEVETH NOT, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. (1 Corinthians 7:12-13 AV)

Paul’s advice regarding the marriages of such members is simple: don’t seek a divorce simply because your mate is not in the Church. If your non-member mate desires to maintain your marriage, even though you have now changed your religion and have accepted the teachings and practices of the Church of God, then you should do your utmost to also maintain the marriage. Don’t use your religion as an excuse to terminate a marriage to someone who desires to remain married to you.

In verse 14 Paul explains one of the benefits that maintaining a marriage in such a situation brings with it. For the sake of the children God actually extends a blessing to the unbelieving mate. For the sake of the children and also for the believer God sets the unbelieving mate apart from the rest of all human beings who are also not members of God’s Church. This “setting apart” enables the unbelieving mate to actually SEEK CONTACT WITH GOD. The unbeliever in such a marriage is in a different category from the rest of humanity who are on the level of John 6:44,65 and who can’t come to God without a special calling from God.

No man can come to me, EXCEPT THE FATHER WHICH HATH SENT ME DRAW HIM: and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:44 AV)

And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, EXCEPT IT WERE GIVEN UNTO HIM OF MY FATHER. (John 6:65 AV)

Then we come to the key verse in this section ...

But if the unbelieving depart, LET HIM DEPART. A BROTHER OR A SISTER IS NOT UNDER BONDAGE IN SUCH CASES: BUT GOD HATH CALLED US TO PEACE. (1 Corinthians 7:15 AV)

Here Paul addresses the situation where the unbelieving mate takes exception to the believing mate's new religion to the point of terminating the marriage. This the unbeliever could do in several ways. Firstly, the unbeliever could physically walk out of the marriage (i.e. seek a divorce). The unbeliever could also change THE RELATIONSHIP that had previously existed towards the believer by either engaging in adultery (in which case Matthew 19:9 comes into effect), or by doing his or her utmost to make life miserable and intolerable for the believer in any number of ways. The key is that such conduct would be intentional and malicious. Such intentional conduct towards the believer would over a period of time also destroy any bond that may have existed between the two people before the one became a member of the Church. The unbeliever's intention is to pressure the believer to give up "the new religion". I know of cases where such pressure to compromise with the Church's teachings (e.g. to not keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days, etc.) has been quite fierce.

There are three points we should note in this verse:

- Don't try to hold the unbeliever back in such a situation. Let him or her go if they are really intent on breaking up the marriage; i.e. they have in effect become hostile towards the believer.
- In such a situation where the unbeliever (either by physically walking out of the marriage or by intolerable conduct makes life impossible for the believer) "departs" from the marriage agreement, the believer IS NO LONGER BOUND by the marriage that had previously existed, and thus free to remarry in the Church.
- THE REASON Paul gives for this judgment is that "God has called us to peace".

Now keep in mind that Paul prefaced this section by saying: "to the rest speak I and NOT the Lord". This tells us that Paul was MAKING A JUDGMENT HERE which was not based on a direct quotation from what God had previously spoken (i.e. in the Old Testament). Yet Paul felt confident enough to present this judgment to God's people in Corinth.

Realize that not all the letters Paul ever wrote are a part of the New Testament. The New Testament only includes 14 letters from Paul, but he certainly wrote many more letters than 14. The fact that THIS letter with THIS statement here in 1 Corinthians 7:15 was chosen by God to be a part of HIS (i.e. God's) Word, shows that God fully supports the advice Paul here gave to those of God's people who are

married to an unbeliever.

So exactly how was Paul able to make this judgment? How could Paul possibly know that God would accept the believer's right to remarry someone in the Church, if his or her previous spouse had severed the previous marriage because of religious differences? After all, this didn't necessarily have to involve "porneia" at all. Yet Paul made the judgment that, when an unbelieving mate departs from a marriage to a believer, then the believer is no longer bound to that marriage and is therefore free to remarry someone else in the Church. How could Paul know that this judgment had God's approval?

This is where a correct understanding of "peace" enters the picture!

Paul understood that God's original intention for marriage, as stated in Genesis chapter 2, was to achieve "a joining together" of two people. Paul also understood the meaning of the Greek word for "peace", that it ALSO refers to "a joining together" of different people. Put another way, Paul understood that God's original intention for marriage was to achieve "PEACE". It follows that when an unbelieving mate refuses to live "in peace" with the believer, the unbelieving mate is really refusing to be "joined together with" the believer. In that case the unbelieving mate is actively opposing the very basic and most fundamental intention for which God had established marriage ... to learn to become "one" (i.e. to be joined to, to be "at peace with") with another person. So when the unbeliever resists and opposes God's first and most basic intention for marriage, with the intention of pressuring the believer to compromise his religious convictions and obligations, THEN the unbeliever has just gone "too far" to ever restore a right relationship with the believer. The unbeliever has by his opposition in fact shown contempt for the believer's deepest inner convictions. If the unbeliever's condition for restoring a right relationship within that marriage is that the believer reject or compromise his commitments towards God, THEN the unbeliever has clearly gone too far.

Paul's stated reason for his judgment that "God has called us to peace" should not be understood as a reference to "quietness" or to "solitude", because those very things (i.e. avoiding the believer, giving the believer the silent treatment, refusing to communicate at all, etc.) are at times used by the unbeliever for "punishing" the believer for his religious beliefs. We need to clearly understand that Paul was using THE MEANING of the word "peace" as the basis for the judgment he made here. The Greek word for "peace" refers EXACTLY to the very thing God ordained for marriage in Genesis 2:24.

Because of this understanding of God's basic intent for marriage, Paul was not at all hesitant in giving his judgment here ... and God backed up this judgment Paul gave by specifically including it in HIS Word, the Bible.

So let's now summarize everything we've examined so far.

IN SUMMARY

Here are some statements to tie this all together:

1. Is marriage “a God-plane” relationship? It is probably better to say that “the family represents relationships on the God-plane”. That focus should help to avoid people drawing any unwarranted conclusions from the statement. Specifically, the appeal to “a God-plane” relationship does NOT mean that God may not allow divorce for certain reasons. And while marriage may indeed be “a God-plane relationship” for the duration of the millennium and for the period for the second resurrection, it is unlikely there will be any marriage-relationship beyond that point in time.

2. Is divorce “for every cause” wrong and unacceptable in God’s sight? Yes, it IS wrong and always has been wrong. That is not what Moses had ever allowed!

3. For specifically what cause did Moses allow divorce? It was only for the cause of “nakedness”, i.e. for sexual immorality. This was intended primarily, though not exclusively, for what might happen DURING a marriage, rather than what might have happened before the marriage was contracted.

4. Weren’t people who committed adultery to be stoned? Yes, theoretically. But when the whole nation commonly engages in adultery, stoning wasn’t going to be applied. Keep in mind that, as Jesus Christ explained, men who were divorcing their wives “for EVERY cause” were also guilty of adultery before God ... and they weren’t going to be stoned for divorcing their wives either. People who engaged in idolatry were also to be stoned, but that didn’t happen either, except perhaps very rarely.

5. Do Christ’s teachings in Matthew 5:32 and in Matthew 19:9 represent a change from what God had previously allowed? No, Christ was simply reiterating the same point for which Moses had made provision in Deuteronomy 24. Christ was putting into practice what He had said in Matthew 5:17, where He had said: “... I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill”.

6. WHY would God even consider allowing divorce? God knows that in any relationship, be it a relationship between God and human beings, or be it only a relationship between two or more human beings, one party can simply GO TOO FAR for the relationship to ever be salvaged. There IS a “point of no return” beyond which relationships can never be restored to their former state. Within marriage that point of no return is sexual unfaithfulness.

7. So can marriages not continue after one spouse has committed adultery? Yes, they can certainly continue. BUT the adultery will have permanently marred the relationship ... and whatever the relationship may be AFTER one spouse has committed adultery, it will NEVER again be what it would have been had the adultery never been committed. Furthermore, where people remain married even after the innocent party has found out about the adultery committed by the guilty party, even the innocent party will become A DIFFERENT PERSON from what they would have been had their spouse never committed adultery; something will have been taken from their lives and they will change in some way.

8. What does the Greek word “porneia” mean? It does not refer to one specific category of sexual transgressions. Rather, it is somewhat of an umbrella term meaning “sexual immorality” and includes every possible type of sexual transgression that human beings may become involved in. It most emphatically cannot be limited to “sex before marriage”, as Mr. Armstrong attempted to do.

9. What is the most immediate consequence of this understanding about “porneia”? The most immediate consequence of this is that it becomes quite clear that Jesus Christ was primarily speaking about what may happen DURING the marriage. Adultery is the most likely application for this exception clause, with “sex before marriage” being a distant second application.

10. But isn't “sex before marriage” a major sin? Yes, most certainly. But the EVEN GREATER SIN is “sexual infidelity” DURING marriage! God's laws pertaining to marriage (the 7th and the 10th commandments) were specifically aimed at protecting what might happen DURING the marriage. The act of adultery committed by one spouse is far MORE painful to the innocent spouse than what the offending spouse may have done prior to ever marrying the innocent spouse.

11. What was God expressing a hatred for in Malachi 2:16? God hates intensely the treacherous attitude of men divorcing their wives for any reason other than the one that God allowed through Moses in Deuteronomy 24:1-2 and for the reason Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 7:15.

12. What are the reasons for which God may allow members of His Church to get a divorce? There are just two reasons directly stated in the Bible. Jesus Christ mentioned the first reason, and Paul mentioned the second reason. The first reason is if the other spouse has committed “sexual immorality”, either in the course of the marriage (adultery, homosexuality, etc.) or if the other spouse has intentionally hidden premarital sexual conduct. The other reason, stated by Paul, is if an unbelieving mate either severs the marriage to a believer, or if the unbelieving mate makes life intolerable for the believer, evidencing an obvious hostility to the believer and his or her religion.

13. What about “fraud”? An appeal to “fraud” was the way to justify annulling a marriage on the grounds of “fornication before marriage” ... such “fornication” was deemed to have been “fraud” towards the person the “fornicator” may have later married, unless this was revealed before the marriage was contracted. But appeals to “fraud” can very easily be taken too far! Such appeals open the door to seeking a divorce for any number of reasons which aren't specifically mentioned in the Bible. Realize that only the above two reasons are clearly spelled out in the Bible. Fraud, other than in the area of sex, is not really spelled out anywhere as a clear justification for divorce. And fraud in the area of sex is already clearly covered by Deuteronomy 24.

Frankly, there is no way that two people can ever reveal EVERYTHING about themselves to their prospective mates before they get married ... all their past experiences and emotions and feelings and goals and hopes and dreams and intentions. It is to be expected that after two people are married to each other, THEN they find out some things they hadn't known or understood about the person they have married. That is inevitable. But any premarital sexual experiences should certainly be discussed before marriage. And it is in the interest of each spouse to make specific enquiries about this before agreeing to marry the other person.

I believe that the only kind of “fraud” that is a valid reason for seeking a divorce is fraud that in some way pertains to past sexual conduct or to a sexual inclination (e.g. a homosexual hiding his homosexual desire in order to persuade a woman to marry him). But then this kind of “fraud” will typically already be covered by the “porneia” clause of Matthew 19:9. So I am not aware of the Bible specifically spelling out that any other “fraud” is another valid reason for divorce. We need to be very careful before we create additional categories for granting a divorce, however “logical” those categories may seem to be to us.

14. So what does a person who is married for the third time, with both previous spouses still living, have to do when he learns the truth and desires to become a part of the Church? The principle is that “God winks at the times of ignorance” (see Acts 17:30), and we clearly cannot undo the past. There is no possibility of returning to the first mate without creating MORE problems; besides that, God clearly tells us that a man may not remarry a previous wife who has in the meanwhile been married to another man.

[Comment: That is what happened with David’s first wife, Michal the daughter of King Saul. She was taken from David by her father and given to another man for several years to be his wife. After Saul’s death Michal was eventually returned to David, but it never really worked out again. As an aside: David’s demand that Michal be returned to him, after she had been married to another man for over ten years, shows that here was something even David did not really understand.]

So upon coming into God’s Church people are expected to remain married to their present spouses, even if that is in some cases perhaps a third or even a fourth marriage.

15. Does a woman have to remain in a marriage with a man who is physically abusing her? No, she doesn’t have to remain in such a marriage. If a woman in God’s Church is married to a man who beats her up and is physically abusive towards her, then he is OBVIOUSLY not pleased to dwell with her. The key in the relationship between a woman and her unbelieving husband is not so much the words that he says to her, as it is HIS ACTIONS towards her. If his actions make clear that he isn’t really “pleased to dwell with her”, then it is possible for her to get out of such an abusive relationship.

Now one last matter should be addressed.

WILL PEOPLE MISUSE THESE “VALID REASONS” FOR DIVORCE?

Well, if God does indeed allow divorce for “sexual immorality” in general and also in the case where an unbelieving mate departs from the marriage ... won’t people abuse that and manipulate it for their own personal ends?

OF COURSE THEY WILL! MOST ASSUREDLY PEOPLE WILL ABUSE THIS “PERMISSION” BY GOD!

There is no question but that people have in the past and will continue in the future to manipulate these things for their own selfish ends. And so a man, who desires to get divorced from his wife, either pressures his wife out of the Church, or he himself just “leaves the Church”; then he can divorce his wife because one of them is no longer “a believer” ... and he is free to marry someone else ... and in due time he again returns to the Church (if he was the one who had left). The same is true when a woman wants to be divorced from her husband; she can engage in the same forms of manipulation. Both these examples have happened many times in recent decades. That is a part of “the games people play”.

When someone is REALLY determined to get rid of their present mate, they always find a way to do this

and to then still somehow end up “in the Church”. And there is very little that the ministry can do about it.

Understand this:

IF, as in the past before 1974, people are told that a divorce is only available to them if there was “porneia BEFORE the marriage was contracted”, THEN they will find ways to appeal to things that happened BEFORE the marriage took place.

IF, as is the case since 1974, people are told that a divorce is ALSO available if either they or their mate become an unbeliever, THEN those same people will find a way for one of them to become an unbeliever, even if only for a period of time.

IF, as I am now suggesting in this paper, people are told that what happens DURING THE MARRIAGE is really the deciding factor, more so than what may have happened before the marriage, as to whether they can get divorced, THEN they’ll find something from the present marriage to justify a divorce.

I don’t mean to imply that every decision to get a divorce is manipulated, because it is also a fact that one spouse can simply go too far to ever restore a right relationship. BUT it is also a sad fact that there are always a number of people who will get their way by whatever set of rules you may choose to apply. They’ll play it by your rules, and they’ll still get what they want.

GOD is obviously not mocked by such manipulations ... Malachi 2:13-16 makes that quite clear. But the ministry can no more control subtle manipulations of allowances that God has made, than the ministry can control anything else in a person’s religious life. For example:

1. We can’t really put people out of the Church because they are not praying regularly or not studying the Bible or because they never fast except on the Day of Atonement.
2. We can’t really put people out of the Church because, while they are officially baptized, it is pretty clear to us that they are not really converted.
3. We can’t really put people out of the Church because we are convinced they have a wrong attitude, if they don’t ever say anything that brings this wrong attitude out into the open in a major way.
4. We can’t really put people out of the Church simply because it is pretty obvious that they actively hate other Church members or anyone else.
5. We cannot very easily put people out of the Church if they hold some strange and highly unbalanced ideas which are “unprofitable for the Church”, to put it mildly, if they basically keep their odd ideas to themselves.

6. We cannot very easily put people out of the Church for gossiping, as long as the gossiping remains “on a small scale”.

7. We can't very easily put people out of the Church because they aren't really coming to grips with their problems.

There are in fact MANY things that people can do wrong in their relationship with God, and for which the ministry can take no, or only very little, action. People can manipulate the way they tithe and they can manipulate how they conduct their business practices. They can manipulate how to get a divorce. They can also manipulate how they conduct themselves in private in front of their own families and how they conduct themselves when they are visible to the whole Church at services and at social functions. They can manipulate lots of things.

That is all a part of our testing before God. As God tells us ...

THE HEART *IS* DECEITFUL ABOVE ALL *THINGS*, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, / I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, *and* according to the fruit of his doings. (Jeremiah 17:9-10 AV)

The human mind is an expert at scheming to get its own way. So understand something very clearly!

God's laws are NOT designed to eliminate all human scheming and all human manipulating!

God has in fact designed His way of life and His laws in such a way that the human mind has AN ENORMOUS SCOPE FOR SCHEMING AND FOR CONNIVING! The human mind can appear right on the outer surface, and yet be corrupt inside. Obviously, God will also judge us for any scheming and conniving we may engage in.

God is always fully aware of what is going on inside of us. He is always aware of our innermost thoughts and intentions (Hebrews 4:12-13). But we can often fool one another, even if we don't fool God. So God “tries our reins”, He tests our real motivations by sometimes allowing us to have the things we scheme to get. IF the things we had set our hearts on “getting” are not really right before God, THEN the consequences will catch up with us sooner or later.

NOBODY EVER GETS AWAY FOR VERY LONG WITH DOING WHAT IS WRONG!

As Moses told Israel ...

But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and **BE SURE YOUR SIN WILL FIND YOU OUT.** (Numbers 32:23 AV)

So I know that some people will misuse the allowances God has made for divorce. Yes, God has provided for GENUINE CASES, where a mate has simply gone too far to ever repair a relationship, or where an unbeliever literally makes life intolerable for the believer; and in such cases God allows the believer to get divorced and to then remarry someone else if they so desire. I KNOW that in practice many people will claim these allowances for their situations, when they may not be “genuine cases” in the eyes of God. But that I cannot do anything about, apart from perhaps speaking to them. They themselves need to realize that nobody ever gets away with trying to manipulate God’s laws and instructions for selfish ends.

But people’s misuse of His allowances notwithstanding, God HAS made allowance for divorce in the two situations that have been discussed in this paper.

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