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Chapter 1 Marriage and the One-Flesh Union

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The Neglected Creative Act

Ask someone about the creative acts of the LORD God and they might recall several including man and woman, but very few people mention the next verse, namely, the creation of the "one-flesh union":

"God said, Let there be light ... let there be an expanse between the waters ... let dry ground appear ... and let the land produce vegetation ... let there be lights in the expanse of the sky ... let the water teem with living creatures and let birds fly above the earth ... let us make man in our own image, in our likeness (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7) ... then the LORD God made a woman (Genesis 2:18,21-23) ... for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh ." (Genesis 2:24 NIV)

"This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined (Hebrew "dabaq": adhere or join together) to his wife, and the two are united into one." (Genesis 2:24 NLT)

"Therefore, that which God once and for all yoked together, let man not be separating." (Matthew 19:6 ETGNT)

The Psalmist confirms our Lord's work by the power of his spoken command and the fact that his plan doesn't change:

"The Lord merely spoke and the heavens were created. He breathed his word and all the stars were born." (Psalms 33:6 NLT)

"For when he spoke, the world began! It appeared at his command." (Psalms 33:9 NLT).

"But the Lord's plans stand firm forever; his intentions can never be shaken." Psalms 33:11 NLT).

The Apostle John also confirms our Lord's work:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word as with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." (John 1:1-3 NIV)

In his letter to the Hebrews, the Apostle Paul confirms that Jesus was with God at the time of creation and it was

through him that God created the universe:

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe." (Hebrews 1:1-2 NIV)

"In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands." (Hebrews 1:10 NIV)

The prophet Malachi confirmed the "one-flesh union", making it clear the LORD God made that union and thus the couple were his own, both in body and spirit, for a very good reason:

You cry out, "Why has the LORD abandoned us?" I'll tell you why! Because the LORD witnessed the vows you and your wife made to each other on your wedding day when you were young. But you have been disloyal to her, though she remained your faithful companion, the wife of your marriage vows. Didn't the LORD make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are his. And what does he want? Godly children from your union. So guard (Hebrew "shamar": be circumspect [careful to consider all circumstances and possible consequences]) yourself; remain loyal to the wife of your youth. "For I hate divorce!" says the LORD God of Israel. "It is as cruel as putting on a victim's bloodstained coat," says the LORD Almighty. "So guard yourself ; always remain loyal to your wife" (Malachi 2:14-16. NLT)

In the New Testament, Jesus confirmed the "one-flesh union" in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Notice the authority with which he speaks! I especially like Wuest's Expanded Translation of the Greek New Testament due to its focus on the tense and aspect of Greek verbs :

"Have you not read, The Creator from the beginning, a male and a female He made them, and said, On this account a man shall forsake his father and his mother and shall be joined to his wife, and they shall be, the two, one flesh, insomuch that no longer are they two, but one flesh? Therefore, that which God once and for all yoked together, let man not be separating." (Matthew 19:4-6 ETGNT)

Most of the Bible translations use the word "LET" in both in the Old Scriptures and the New Testament. However, if you look up the word "LET" in Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible for the Genesis Ch. 1 creative commands, you will find no Hebrew word for "LET" listed! Thus, it seems reasonable and consistent with Psalms 33:6 & 9 to literally translate those verses as commands: "BE LIGHT ... BE AN EXPANSE ... DRY GROUND APPEAR ... LAND PRODUCE VEGETATION" , etc.

Now look up the word "LET" in Matthew 19:6 where Jesus says, "... that which God once and for all yoked together, let man not be separating". Again, you will find no Greek word for "LET" listed! Thus, it seems reasonable that you could literally translate this verse as an emphatic "that which God once and for all yoked together, NO MAN BE SEPARATING" !!!

Now, does that mean man **should not** separate the one-flesh union God created or does it mean man **can not** separate it? It seems to me the context is clear: "... once and for all yoked together" clearly makes it permanent!

The Apostle Paul agrees when he makes it clear that only death can break this "one-flesh union" the LORD God creates and options are very limited in the case of death, separation and divorce:

"A wife is married to her husband as long as he lives. If her husband dies, she is free to marry whomever she wishes, but this must be a marriage acceptable to the Lord". (1 Corinthians 7:39 NLT).

"Now, for those who are married I have a direct command from the Lord. A wife must not leave her husband. But if she does leave him, let her remain single or else go

back to him. And the husband must not leave his wife." (1 Corinthians 7:10-11 NLT).

Apparently Paul didn't think it necessary to repeat himself, but if he had, I'm sure he would have written, "But if he does leave her, let him remain single or else go back to her."

These two options for separation and divorce, remaining single or reconciling, do not compromise the genuine "one-flesh union" that God creates when a man leaves his parents and is joined to his wife and they consummate the marriage.

On the other hand, there is another kind of "one-flesh union" that a human being makes when he or she has sexual intercourse while unmarried ; or is unfaithful while married ; or remarries while their spouse is still living ; or marries a divorced person ; or engages in sexual relations with a same-sex partner or participates in other distortions and perversions .

Those kind of activities produce counterfeit or man-made "one-flesh unions". They're the kind the Apostle Paul was referring to when he wrote,

"Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." (1 Corinthians. 6:16 NIV)

Obviously, God cannot bless fornication which creates a counterfeit or man-made "one-flesh union", any more than He can bless spiritual adultery or unfaithfulness !

In conclusion, how would you go about separating that which God once and for all yoked together? God took two and made one ... now, how are you going to reverse that? Find an attorney and file a petition for dissolution of marriage? Write your spouse a letter of divorcement? Go to the courthouse and apply for a new marriage license? Can those actions reverse what the God of Heaven did once and for all time ... until death intervenes?

Shamar!

The prophet Malachi warned, "Shamar": be circumspect [careful to consider all circumstances and possible consequences]

Think about it! If man had the power to split apart that which God joins together, then ADULTERY and UNFAITHFULNESS would cease to exist.

The only one-flesh unions a person has the power to do away with are those they have made when they've had sexual intercourse while unmarried; or were unfaithful while married; or remarried while their spouse was still living; or married a divorced person; or engaged in sexual relations with a same-sex partner or participated in other distortions or perversions .

This PROCESS is called CONFESSION OF SINS (1 John 1:9) and REPENTANCE!

Chapter 2 Teachings of the Apostle Paul

In his letters to the church at Ephesus, Corinth and Rome, the Apostle Paul also confirmed the permanence of the "one-flesh union", designed to remain unbroken except by death:

As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one." (Ephesians 5:31 NLT).

"A wife is married to her husband as long as he lives. If her husband dies, she is free to marry whomever she wishes, but this must be a marriage acceptable to the Lord." (1 Corinthians 7:39 NLT).

"When a woman marries, the law binds her to her husband as long as he is alive. But if he dies, the laws of marriage no longer apply to her. So while her husband is alive, she would be committing adultery if she married another man. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law and does not commit adultery when she remarries." (Romans 7:2-3 NLT).

"Now, for those who are married I have a direct command from the Lord. A wife must not leave her husband. But if she does leave him, let her remain single or else go back to him. And the husband must not leave his wife." (1 Corinthians 7:10-11 NLT).

Apparently Paul didn't think it was necessary to repeat himself, but if he had, it would read:

"But if he does leave her, let him remain single or else go back to her".

Continuing, in Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus, he explains why the "one-flesh union" is so important:

As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one." This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one" (Ephesians 5:31-32 NLT).

The "one-flesh union" between a man and his wife is a picture of the "one-spirit union" between Christ and the church. In the Bible, the natural side of a parable is always true and helps us understand the spiritual side. If we change or distort the natural side of the equation, the "one-flesh union" , then we must also change or distort the spiritual side of the equation, the "one-spirit union" ... and where would this leave us in terms of the Gospel? Shamar --- think about it! Be careful to consider all circumstances and possible consequences! An advocate of remarriage after divorce or marriage to a divorced person must modify the Gospel to allow another "lord (or lords) of our life" to COEXIST with the Lord Jesus Christ, thus creating a condition called "spiritual adultery"!

Why Would a Person Want to Change God's Plan?

The decision to rebel against what God has planned and take our own way doesn't come from the rational part of our brain ... it comes from our heart ... and Paul admonishes us:

"In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold." (Ephesians 4:26-27 NIV) .

It should be obvious that anger is at the root of marital conflict (just as it is in any conflict) ... and anyone who is unfaithful OR puts away their spouse AND marries again while their spouse is still living OR marries a divorced person, is taking their own way with their anger. It is less obvious that anyone who encourages or condones that is also taking their own way with their anger.

Now that's the WHY of what we believe when what we believe is contrary to the Bible's clear teaching.

The "Great Mystery": Marriage and Salvation

God designed MARRIAGE this way:

A man leaves his father and mother and exchanges vows with his wife in the presence of witnesses. When the husband and wife consummate the marriage, the LORD God creates a genuine "one-flesh union", joining the husband to his wife for as long as they both shall live. Jesus said,

"Since they are no longer two but one, let no one separate them, for God has joined them together." (Matthew 19:6 NLT)

The Expanded Translation of the Greek New Testament makes it even clearer: **"Therefore, that which**

God once and for all yoked together, let man not be separating." (Matthew 19:6 ETGNT)

You can choose to break your marriage contract in a court of law and you can choose to remarry, but that divorce decree and remarriage license cannot cancel or break the genuine "one-flesh union" that the LORD God created! The divorce decree and remarriage license are on Earth; the "one-flesh-union" that the Lord God creates is in Heaven.

The only thing that divorce and remarriage or marriage to a divorced person can accomplish is the creation of your own man-made or counterfeit "one-flesh union" (or "unions" in the case of multiple divorces and remarriages) existing in addition to the original genuine "one-flesh union" the LORD God created. The COEXISTENCE of a GENUINE "one-flesh union" and a COUNTERFEIT "one-flesh union" results in a CONTINUING UNFAITHFULNESS OR STATE OF ADULTERY. Now, that might bring a temporary degree of happiness, but can not bring the true peace and joy of God and even more importantly, it can jeopardize your salvation!

The Pharisees were divorcing and remarrying at will and even tried to use the "command to divorce" of Moses to excuse their unfaithfulness. Jesus told it like it was, that Moses "permitted" divorce because of the hardness and wickedness of their heart. Apparently there were some believers in the church at Corinth who were also thinking they could live outside of God's plan and purpose for them. The Apostle Paul was impressed to write a letter to the Corinthian church:

"Don't you know that those who do wrong will have no share in the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, who are idol worshippers, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexuals, thieves, greedy people, drunkards, abusers, and swindlers --- none of these will have a share in the Kingdom of God! ... Don't you realize that your bodies are actually parts of Christ? Should a man take his body, which belongs to Christ, and join it to a prostitute? Never! And don't you know that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her? For the Scriptures say, "The two are united into one". But the person who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Run away from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does, for sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. Or don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God has bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 15-20 NLT).

God designed SALVATION this way:

A man or woman, boy or girl, guided by God's Holy Spirit, leaves the attachments of the world, the flesh and the devil, and follows [Greek: akoloutho: to be in the same way with; to accompany (spec. as a disciple)] Jesus Christ, publicly professing their faith in him as Saviour and Lord, vowing to remain true and faithful. At that time,

"the person who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him." (1 Corinthians 6:17 NLT).

Thus they are **"born from above"** (John 3:3). Only God is able to create this genuine "one-spirit union" .

By the way, to follow Jesus means far more than simply saying you are a Christian. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary gives these definitions: 1-to go, proceed, or come after; 2-to engage in as a calling or way of life; and 3a: to be or act in accordance with and b: to accept as authority :OBEY.

The Holy Bible refers to the church as "the bride" and to Jesus Christ as "the bridegroom". The church is looking forward to that "blessed hope" of the return of the bridegroom, Jesus, and being taken to be with him for eternity. Only those in the church who have Christ's Spirit within (i.e. a genuine "One-Spirit Union") will qualify. Obviously, those who reject Jesus can not possess his Spirit. Less obviously, those who have professed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ but don't possess Christ's Spirit because of "spiritual adultery", will also be left out. We're not to be the judge of another person's salvation but God, who is just and who knows the heart, will judge righteously.

In Matthew 24, Jesus speaks with his disciples about the signs of his return and the perilous times to come. He

speaks also of the faithful and unfaithful servants. Then in Matthew 25, he tells the story of the ten virgins.

"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' 'No', they replied 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir! they said. 'Open the door for us!" But he replied, 'I tell you the truth. I don't know you.' Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." (Matthew 25:1-13 NIV)

From all appearances, our lives might be exemplary but if anyone lacks the indwelling presence of God's Holy Spirit when Jesus returns for his church, that person will be left behind. It's imperative that we remain willing for God to do his work in our lives as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippian church:

"And now that I am away you must be even more careful to put into action God's saving work in your lives, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do what pleases him." (Philippians 2: 12-13 NLT).

Chapter 3 The Challenging Passages

The scriptures mentioned in "Chapter 1: Marriage and the One-Flesh Union" and "Chapter 2: Teachings of the Apostle Paul, are crystal clear in their teaching of the quintessential "one-flesh union", and its spiritual counterpart, the "one-spirit union", that only God can create . Both unions are essential parts of God's plan and purpose for his people. It's not unexpected that nonbelievers often ignore these concepts. Regretfully, believers also often misunderstand or ignore their meaning and intent or try to find "loopholes" in the Scriptures to justify their personal choices. The scriptures they usually find to support divorce and remarriage and thus the creation of man-made "one-flesh unions "are these three:

1- **"But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God has called us to peace."** (1 Corinthians 7:15 KJV).

2- **"Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned."** (1 Corinthians 7:27-28 KJV)

And finally, the infamous "exception clause" passage:

3- **Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"**

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,

and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?

So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of

divorce and send her away?"

Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.

I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."

Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.

For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it." (Matthew 19:3-12 NIV)

Here are a few guidelines to help you understand difficult or challenging passages.

First, pray that God will help you understand and then be willing to apply his help properly.

Second, understand the importance of keeping the passage totally in context and finding everything in the Bible that pertains to that context.

Third, if you don't fully understand a word, look it up in Strong's Concordance, a Bible Dictionary or a regular dictionary. If you don't understand a particular teaching, look up all the passages on that topic. Remember, let the Bible be its own best commentary!

Chapter 4 Resolving the Challenges-1 Cor. 7:15

Lets take a closer look at the first challenging scripture:

"But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God has called us to peace." (1 Corinthians 7:15 KJV).

The word "depart" or "departed" is often used at funerals, but it's clear from the context that Paul isn't talking about death! The word "depart" means simply to leave. Also, remarriage advocates take the phrase "not under bondage" to mean "no longer obligated to keep marriage vows and thus free to remarry". However, the word "bondage" in the Greek is douloo - enslaved or to make a servant . Thus, "not under bondage" simply means a Christian believer is "not enslaved to or a servant of the unbelieving spouse who left".

Now, let's put this passage in context and read it in a modern language translation to help make it clear:

"If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him, for the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances. God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him " (1 Corinthians 7:12-17 NLT).

The key phrase "each one should retain" definitely does NOT permit new relationships or remarriage! If your unbelieving spouse leaves, you must accept that and just continue on as you were, retaining the place in life that the Lord assigned and to which God has called. Your faithfulness to your marriage vows and your willingness to remain faithful to the "one-flesh union" that God created, along with any necessary apologies and forgiveness for your part, might help "save your unbelieving spouse" or perhaps even bring about a reconciliation which would be

difficult or most nearly impossible if you were to remarry.

What's true for the marriage where one is an unbeliever, is also true for the marriage between believing partners

"Now, for those who are married I have a direct command from the Lord. A wife must not leave her husband. But if she does leave him, let her remain single or else go back to him. And the husband must not leave his wife ." (1 Corinthians 7:10-11 NLT).

Remember, remaining single and reconciliation are the only options the believer has in the case of separation or divorce. Any other option is of man and not of God.

Chapter 5 Resolving the Challenges-1 Cor 7:27-28

And now, the second challenging scripture:

"Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned." (1 Corinthians 7:27-28 KJV).

You might be able to take this verse and make a good case for remarriage but only IF you totally ignore the context!

The Apostle Paul, in the 7th chapter of his first letter to the believers at Corinth, writes on the topic of "Marriage". The chapter is divided into three parts :1- General Questions, 2- To Married Believers, 3- To Unmarried Virgins.

1- Now about the QUESTIONS you asked in your letter. In 1 Corinthians 7:1-9. the Apostle Paul answers certain questions that some believers in the church had asked.

2- **"Now, for those who are MARRIED I have a command that comes not from me, but from the Lord."** (1 Corinthians 7:10 NLT). Then in verses 11-24, he gives specific instructions to married couples.

3- **"Now concerning VIRGINS: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy."** (1 Corinthians 7:25 NAS) . Then in verses 26-40, he gives specific instructions to virgin unmarried men and women.

This second challenging scripture, 1 Corinthians 7:27-28, is clearly within the instructions to virgin unmarried men and women, thus it cannot be used to refer to a married man or woman or to one who is divorced.

At this point, I can hear the shouts of protest, "But you're forgetting the word 'wife' is used three times ..."

Let's look at the word "wife" . In the original Greek, the word is "gune": a woman, a wife but in the New Testament KJV, the word is translated "wife" every time but one! The word "husband" comes from the Greek "aner": a man, a husband but in the New Testament KJV, the word is translated "husband" every time but one. The modern language translations usually translate these words "wife" and "husband" as well.

However, the only way you can determine if gune means unmarried woman or engaged woman or married woman and if aner means unmarried man or engaged man or married man IS FROM THE CONTEXT OF THE PASSAGE!

We're all familiar with Matthew 1:18-20, the birth of Jesus. Matthew refers to Joseph as "husband" and later in the passage Mary as "wife, who had "not yet come together" (or given their marriage vows and consummated the marriage). In other words, they were "espoused" or "betrothed" . Today we would say "Joseph and his fiancé "and we wouldn't use the terms "husband and wife" until they were married! But the Jewish betrothal and wedding customs were more strict. The promise to marry was binding and the only way a man could put away his betrothed was if she had been found to be unfaithful during the betrothal or separation period.

But you ask, "What about the words 'bound' and 'loosed'? Don't they refer to the married state?" Actually, they refer to both the betrothed and the married state. Again, you must determine from the context whether the couple is betrothed or married.

The Apostle Paul makes it quite easy for us to know for sure who he's talking to!

In 1 Corinthians 7:10, he tells us clearly he's writing to **married men and women** and this continues on to verse 24.

In 1 Corinthians 7:25 on, he tells us clearly he's writing to **virgins (and virgins can either be unmarried or betrothed)** and this continues on to verse 38.

Thus, in verses 27 and 28, the message is: **"Are you (virgin betrothed man) promised? don't break it off! Are you (virgin unmarried man) free to marry? don't! But if you (virgin unmarried man) marry, you've not sinned; and if a virgin (unmarried woman) marry, she hasn't sinned."**

In verse 39, Paul summarizes his thoughts with **"A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. In my judgment however, she is happier if she stays as she is - and I think that I too have the Spirit of God."** (1 Corinthians 7 :39 NIV)

Considering the Jewish wedding customs and looking at the context, it's impossible to use Paul's instructions to justify remarriage after divorce!

Ch. 6 Resolving the Challenges-Matt. 5:31-32 and 19:3-11

Now, finally, let's look at the third and most challenging scripture:

"And there came to Him Pharisees, putting Him to the test and saying, Is it lawful for one to dismiss his wife for every cause? And answering, he said, Have you not read, The Creator from the beginning, a male and a female He made them, and said, On this account a man shall forsake his father and his mother and shall be joined to his wife, and they shall be, the two, one flesh, insomuch that no longer are they two, but one flesh? Therefore, that which God once and for all yoked together, let man not be separating. They say to Him, Why then did Moses command to give her a bill of divorce and dismiss her? He says to them, Moses, on account of the hardness of your heart permitted you to dismiss your wives. But from the beginning it (namely the right of divorce) has not been thus, right down to the present moment, and as a result it continues to be at variance with the original enactment. Moreover, I am saying to you, Whoever dismisses his wife [Greek: "gune": a woman, a wife] FOR ANY OTHER CAUSE THAN FORNICATION [Ancient Greek: porneia: prostitution idolatry] , and marries another, is committing adultery [Greek: moichao: to commit adultery] . His disciples say to Him, Since the matter is thus with reference to the man's aforementioned reason in the case of his wife, it is not expedient to marry. And He said to them, Not all receive with the understanding this word, but those to whom it has been given to receive it ..." (Matthew 19:3-11 ETGNT).

"Moreover, it was said, Whoever dismisses his wife [Greek: "gune": a woman, a wife], let him give her a bill of divorce. But, as for myself, I am saying to you, Everyone who dismisses his wife except in a case of unchastity [Ancient Greek: porneia: prostitution idolatry], causes her to committ adultery, and whoever marries her who has been dismissed, commits adultery [Greek: moichao: to commit adultery]." (Matthew 5:31-32

ETGNT).

"Moreover, I am saying to you, Whoever dismisses his wife [Greek: "gune": a woman, a wife] for any other cause than FORNICATION [Ancient Greek: "porneia" : prostitution idolatry] and marries another, is committing adultery [Greek: moichao: to commit adultery]." (Matthew 19:9 ETGNT.

One reason this passage presents the greatest challenge is the wide variety of English translations for the Greek word "porneia".

In Ancient Koine Greek, "porneia" meant "prostitution idolatry", referring to a widespread practice in Gentile pagan temples where both male and female priests were worshipped as gods and sexual intercourse was part of the "religious" experience.

Checking fifteen English translations of the Bible, "porneia" has been translated adultery (2), fornication (4), immorality (1), marital unfaithfulness (2), sexual immorality (2), terrible sexual sin (1), unchastity (1), unfaithful (1), and whoredom (1).

Another reason this passage presents the greatest challenge is our inclination to think about the "exception clause" out of context . Read and understand these four important confirmations and teachings of Jesus and one important clarification by the Apostle Paul, then read the "exception clause":

1- In the "exception clause passage", Jesus confirmed the permanent, once and for all "one-flesh union".

The Pharisee's asked Jesus, "Is it lawful for one to dismiss his wife for every cause?" Jesus answered: "Have you not read ... a man shall forsake his father and his mother and shall be joined to his wife, and they shall be, the two, one flesh, insomuch that no longer are they two, but one flesh? Therefore, that which God once and for all yoked together, let man not be separating" (Matt. 19:5-6 ETGNT).

""Have you not read" undoubtedly refers to this Old Scripture passage: **"The Man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called woman for she was taken out of man". For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."** (Gen. 2:23-24 NIV)

It was common practice in those days for husbands to divorce their wives "for every cause" (i.e. if she no longer pleased him for any reason whatsoever). The answer Jesus gave simply focused on the "one-flesh union" .

Take a close look at the "one-flesh union" that the LORD God creates and you find that man has no power to separate what God has joined or, as the Greek puts it, glued or adhered together. An advocate of remarriage after divorce or marriage to a divorced person can only add or condone counterfeit unions to the one genuine union God created, thus creating a condition called "adultery". Even a divorce decree issued by a court of law cannot break the one-flesh union although it can legally and physically separate the couple and provide support for the spouse and children. The "one-flesh union" that God creates remains intact until the death of one of the partners :

"A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord." 1 Corinthians 7:39 NIV).

2- In the "exception clause passage", Jesus confirmed the dissolubility of marriage.

Then they asked him, "Why then did Moses command to give her a bill of divorce and dismiss her? JESUS ANSWERED: Moses, on account of the hardness of your heart [Greek: sklerokardia - destitution of perception] permitted you to dismiss your wives. But from the beginning it (namely the right of divorce) has never been thus, right down to the present moment, and as a result it continues to be at variance with the original enactment. (Matt. 19:8 ETGNT).

Notice how Jesus corrects the Pharisee's use of the word COMMAND and changes it to PERMIT , reminding them it was because of the HARDNESS OF THEIR HEART that Moses did that. Faced with their stubborn, stiff-necked rebellion, what else was Moses to do? But now, Jesus is faced with the Pharisee's hardness of heart but he just tells it like it is and holds the standard high. It's no wonder the religious people of his day wanted to silence him!

3- In the "exception clause passage", Jesus taught that Divorce + Marriage or Remarriage = Adultery.

JESUS CONTINUED: Moreover, I am saying to you, Whoever dismisses his wife [Greek: "gune": a woman, a wife] for any other cause than fornication [Ancient Greek: "porneia" : prostitution idolatry] and marries another, is committing adultery [Greek: moichao: to commit adultery] . (Matthew 19:9 ETGNT. See also Matthew 5:31-32).

Another reason this passage presents the greatest challenge is the translation of the word "gune" as wife , thus making it appear at variance with what Jesus had just confirmed about the "one-flesh union" and the dissolubility of marriage ... but only if you assume he's talking about MARRIED PEOPLE .

Let's take a look at the Jewish betrothal customs. They were far different from today's engagement customs. In the Jewish culture, the mutual promise to marry (betrothal) was as binding as marriage. Moreover, the ONLY REASON a man could break his promise to marry was if he found his fiancé HAD BEEN UNFAITHFUL to him (i.e. by committing "prostitution idolatry" or "fornication") during the separation time when he was away preparing a home for her.

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband , being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily ... Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife : and knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS." (Matthew 1:18-24 KJV) .

"This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly ... When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus." (Matthew 1:18-24 NLT).

Now read the exception clause again!

"Moreover, I am saying to you, Whoever dismisses his wife [Greek: "gune": a woman, a wife] for any other cause than fornication [Ancient Greek: "porneia" : prostitution idolatry] and marries another, is committing adultery."

Who Does the 'Exception Clause' Refer To?

If Jesus was talking about betrothed or engaged people, then the "exception clause" is consistent with the Jewish betrothal and wedding customs and is not in conflict with his stand on the "one-flesh union" and the "dissolubility of marriage".

If Jesus was talking about married people, then the "exception clause" presents a challenge because it conflicts with his clear stand on the "one-flesh union" and the "dissolubility of marriage".

Conclusion: we must keep the "exception clause" in context and consistent with the confirmation of Jesus on the "one-flesh union" and the "dissolubility of marriage". Therefore, the "exception clause" must refer to betrothed or engaged persons who are still unmarried. The question is one of faithfulness during the separation period.

4- In the "exception clause passage", Jesus confirmed not all can accept these teachings without God's grace.

JESUS CONTINUED: "Not all receive with the understanding this word, but to those to whom it has been given to receive it." (Matt 19:11 ETGNT).

Now consider the disciples reaction!

"Then it's better not to marry!" (Matt 19.10 NLT) or "Since the matter is thus with reference to the man's aforementioned reason in the case of his wife, it is not expedient to marry." (Matt 19.10 ETGNT).

The Disciples Understood Clearly!

If there's no way you can break the "one-flesh union" or dissolve marriage by "divorce", then it's better not to marry in the first place!

Jesus didn't correct them but only stated: **"Not all receive with the understanding this word, but to those to whom it has been given to receive it, for there are those of such a nature as to be eunuchs who were born thus from the mother's womb. And there are those of such a nature as to have been made eunuchs by men. And there are those of such a nature as to have constituted themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom. He who is able to receive with understanding, let him be receiving it."**

(See Luke 18:28-30 ETGNT: Then Peter said, Look, As for us, having abandoned all our own private possessions, we became your followers, traveling the same road with you that you are taking. And He said to them, Assuredly, I am saying to you, There is no one who has abandoned house or wife or brethren or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive much more at this time, and, in the age to come life eternal.)

5- The Apostle Paul, under inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, wrote that if separated or divorced, you have only TWO OPTIONS: remain single or reconcile.

"Now, for those who are married I have a direct command from the Lord . A wife must not leave her husband. But if she does leave him, let her remain single or else go back to him. And the husband must not leave his wife. Paul apparently didn't think it necessary to repeat himself but if he had, he undoubtedly would have written , But if he does leave her, let him remain single or else go back to her." (1 Corinthians 7:10-11 NLT)

Regretfully, many believers today (both saints and preachers alike) are just like the self-righteous Pharisees ... despite the Bible's clear teaching on the "one-flesh union, the dissolubility of marriage and the need to remain single or else reconcile if separated or divorced, they still divorce and remarry, not willing to receive and accept the Truth. Some have even suggested that Jesus permitted divorce and remarriage for the "innocent party" while the "guilty party" was sentenced to remaining single else committing adultery if they remarried .

First, this interpretation conflicts with the "one-flesh union" and "dissolubility of marriage" that Jesus so plainly confirmed and his disciples understood and accepted.

Second, it assumes the existence of an "innocent party". I have yet to meet an "innocent party"! After all, "It takes two to tango ... and two to tangle".

Chapter 7 Steps to Reconciliation

Contrary to popular opinion, the end goal of separation and divorce is RECONCILIATION NOT REMARRIAGE

In the Apostle Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth, he wrote:

"To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife." (7:10-11 NIV)

Apparently Paul didn't think it was necessary to repeat himself, but if he had, he would have added: "But if he does divorce her, he must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to his wife."

The Bible is quite clear isn't it! If you've left your spouse, you are to remain single or else be reconciled. You might not think you could possibly do that ... and on your own, you probably can't. It's part of the human condition to want to develop new relationships in an effort to repair the damage to your wounded ego but DON'T because that's just a temporary fix. You may gain a little happiness but is it worth losing your peace and possibly your soul and having to deal with even more guilt than you may already have? But, with God's help, what seems impossible becomes possible and the end result is far more happiness and peace than you could ever have by taking your own way!

Summarizing

Take a close look at the "One-Flesh Union" that God creates and you find that man cannot separate what God has joined or, as the Greek puts it, glued together. An advocate of remarriage after divorce or marriage to a divorced person can only add counterfeit unions to the one genuine union God created, thus creating a condition called "adultery".

Take a close look at that "great mystery" Paul refers to in Ephesians and you find that whatever changes you make to the natural side of the equation (marriage), you also must make to the spiritual side as well (salvation)! An advocate of remarriage after divorce or marriage to a divorced person must modify the Gospel to allow another "lord of our life" to coexist with the Lord Jesus Christ, thus creating a condition called "spiritual adultery"!

To think or do otherwise doesn't come from the rational part of the brain ... it comes from the heart ... and Paul admonishes us to "Be angry and sin not (don't take our own way with our anger)". It should be obvious that anger is at the root of marital conflict (just as it is in any conflict) ... and anyone who leaves or puts away their spouse AND marries again while their spouse is still living is taking their own way with their anger ... and anyone who encourages or condones that is also taking their own way with their anger. Now that's the WHY of what we believe when what we believe is contrary to the Bible's clear teaching.

So, use your separation time wisely to learn these valuable lessons:

1) Every human being does the best they can with the awareness they have and if they had more awareness, they would do better . Now, repeat that over and over until you believe it! While on the cross of Calvary, Jesus said,

"Father forgive them for they do not know what they're doing." (Luke 23:34 NLT).

2) For the Christian, the Bible offers some wise advice! In the Apostle Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus, he wrote:

"And don't sin by letting anger gain control over you. Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a mighty foothold to the Devil." (4:26 NLT)

3) Recognize your anger and assume responsibility for it, not blaming your spouse for how you feel or what you do. After all, you own your feelings and only you are in control of them! Avoid the common accusation, " You make me so mad!" or " You give me a headache (or pain in the neck, etc.)"!

4) If you have trouble recognizing your anger, take a look at your "stress symptoms" which are always related to unresolved anger. Check out the list of what human beings do when they take their own way with their anger and

go to bed angry night after night, week after week, month after month, year after year. The list is found in Ephesians 4:26 to 5:32: stealing; foul or abusive language; grieving the Holy Spirit by the way you live; bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander; all types of malicious behavior; sexual immorality (including marital infidelity and sexual irresponsibility in all its many forms); impurity, greed or covetousness; allowing yourself to be fooled by those who excuse such sins; participation in the things these people do; obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes; drunkenness. I don't think the Apostle Paul left anything out, did he?

5) We need to keep "short accounts"... no more than a day long ... certainly before sunset! Don't put it off - it'll just prolong the agony.

6) Understand that what your spouse says or does that bothers you would probably bother anyone; your task is to learn why it bothers you so much! (Hint: Ask yourself who your spouse reminds you of emotionally: father, mother, brother, sister, close relative, close friend during your growing up years, etc. Something they said or did made you feel a certain way back then, and now, when your spouse says or does something that emotionally reminds you of those feelings, it acts like a trigger and off you go into however you handle your anger. The secret is to go make peace with that person, if at all possible, and go make peace with your spouse. You make peace by apologizing for your part in the conflict and unconditionally forgiving them for what you perceive their part to be.)

7) Understand that any negative reaction on the part of the one you are apologizing to or forgiving must not keep you from doing the right thing. If you can't feel good about their reaction (i.e. rejection of your attempt to reconcile), at least feel good about your own (i.e. acceptance of their feelings and forgiveness)!

8) Stop talking to other people about your "challenged spouse" as if you didn't have any challenges of your own. It does no good to talk about anyone else unless they (or someone) is there to keep you honest! Also, what guarantee do you have that others can counsel you wisely? It would be better to spend your time in Bible study and prayer and seek your counsel from the God of Heaven who knows all about your situation and can lead you in the path of righteousness ... if you're willing.

9) Finally, whatever you do, remember that the LORD God joined you and your spouse together in a bond no man can break (but only add to ... definitely something you don't want to do!). Thus, if you take your own way and enter into a counterfeit or non-genuine "one-flesh union", you are committing "adultery" and there's a price to be paid for that, not to mention the negative example and confusion it brings to your children. Statistically, first marriages have much less than a 50% success rate (remember, you have to count the failure rate of "living together" relationships as well). Second marriages have much less chance of success than first, and third marriages much less chance of success than second, and so on. Also, the effect of divorce and remarriage on children is, generally speaking, negative with serious consequences.

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