

Marriage and the Marriage Bond

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Far too many people see marriage as a mere physical relationship and legal contract that can be completely dissolved by legal action. Even some religious people believe that civil divorce constitutes the absolute dissolution of the marriage contract and the cessation of all marital obligations. This purely secular and legalistic view of marriage has led to rampant divorce rates, devastated families and the formation of millions of adulterous marriages throughout the world.

Many things have contributed to this problem. Some are personal and some are institutional.

- There is a growing decline in belief in God and in respect for His word.
- People care more about the things of the world than they do about the things of God (spiritual things).
- Nations continue to transition from a biblical worldview to a secular one.
- Many, even among religious people, no longer believe in the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures.
- Religious people are plagued by various errors relating to marriage and divorce. These errors loosen the restraints of God's law and allow people to divorce and remarry for frivolous, unscriptural reasons.
- People have allowed human governments to define and regulate marriage. Millions of people throughout the world and throughout the centuries have assumed that marriage is a *human, civil* institution. They cannot think of "marriage" without thinking of government. Marriage is a *divine institution*, not a civil one (Genesis 2:24 + Matthew 19:4-6). No Scripture teaches that marriage is a product of human courts or legislatures. As I addressed in my opening paragraph, no good has come from government efforts to define, legislate, litigate and regulate marriage. Governments have for years authorized "no-cause, no-fault" divorces that allow people to "legally" divorce, then marry others with relative ease. People feel perfectly comfortable divorcing their mates for just any cause and marrying others as they please. They do this because they have been *trained* by their cultures and governments to believe that marriage is a mere social and civil contract and that no aspect or

element of it extends beyond that civil contract. Untold damage has resulted from this misconception. Souls have been lost, families have been destroyed and lives have been ruined. The recent SCOTUS ruling legitimizing and authorizing gay marriage and requiring all US States to recognize it as genuine *marriage* is absolute proof that civil institutions are completely unqualified to define and regulate marriage. In the same way that people have been trained by their governments to believe that marriage is merely a breakable civil contract, they are now being trained to believe that homosexual marriages are no different than heterosexual marriages.

In order to understand the true nature and purpose of marriage one must look beyond societal norms, human opinion and civil legislatures and courts and look to God's infallible word.

“Married” And “Bound”

The Bible uses the word “married” (Greek *gameo*) to describe the physical, sexual and social aspects of marriage. Though it may surprise some people, the Bible does this without regard to the lawfulness or legitimacy of that relationship. The Bible speaks of some people being “married” to those to whom they were not bound (Matt. 19:9; Mk. 6:17,18; 10:11,12; Lk. 16:18; Rom. 7:2,3), and it speaks of other people being bound to those to whom they are not married (1 Cor. 7:11; Rom. 7:2,3). I will address these passages later in the article. Due in large part to the misconceptions referenced above, unauthorized marriages and divorces are a huge problem throughout the world today. Unauthorized divorces result in:

◆ **One being bound to a person to whom he is not married.** Such a person is failing to fulfill his God-given marital responsibilities to his bound mate. These include:

- Exercising a self-less and sacrificial love towards one's mate (Ephesians 5:25; Titus 2:4)
- Being a helper to one's mate (Genesis 2:18, 20)
- Being a friend to one's mate (Song of Solomon 5:16)
- Being a companion to one's mate (Malachi 2:14)
- Being a provider for one's mate (1 Timothy 5:8)

- Fulfilling the sexual desires of one's mate (1 Corinthians 7:5; *this is the "one-flesh" aspect of marriage*, Genesis 2:24 + Matthew 19:5)
 - Husbands are to nourish and cherish their wives (Ephesians 5:29)
 - Wives are to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22)
- ◆ **One being married to a person to whom he is not bound.** In which case, he is committing the sin of adultery (Matthew 19:9). "Adultery" is sexual sin committed by a *married* person. Like the *fornication* that is mentioned in the Bible, it is *illicit sexual relations* with another. However, unlike fornication, adultery involves the violation of the marriage covenant. One commits adultery for as long as he is married to one to whom he is not bound. Since repentance is a condition of forgiveness, the adulterer must stop the practice of adultery if he wishes to be right with God. The adulterer must end the unapproved marriage and stop having sexual relations with the person to whom he is not bound. Contrary to the thinking and wishes of far too many, including many religious people and even some brethren, the adulterer cannot continue in the adulterous relationship with God's approval. Repentance also demands *reconciliation* with the bound mate in instances where such is possible. Sadly, it is often the case that the original mate has remarried someone else. In such cases, the penitent adulterer must remain unmarried.

The ideal and divinely approved arrangement is for people to be *married* to those to whom they are *bound* and *bound* to those to whom they are *married*. One is failing to fulfill his marriage vows if he is unmarried from one to whom he is bound, and one is an adulterer if he is married to one to whom he is not bound.

The Marriage Bond

The word "bound" is a term of Scripture. It is from the Greek word *deo* and means *obligated by law and duty*. When used of marriage, it involves the obligations placed upon married people by God's law. We sometimes speak of the "marriage bond." The word "bond" is not used of marriage in its noun form in the Scriptures. However, from its use as a verb we infer its scriptural use as a noun. The term "marriage bond" is a scriptural term.

The Bible also uses the word *covenant* to describe this bond. Married people enter into a lifelong *covenant* that is established and regulated by

the law of God. When the woman of Proverbs 2:17 forsook her husband, she forgot *“the covenant of her God.”* This refers to her obligation before God to fulfill her marriage vows to her husband. Malachi 2:14 says, *“...the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.”* This “covenant” or “bond” is the spiritual component of marriage, which is controlled by God.

Speaking of a married couple, Jesus said, *“So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate”* (Matthew 19:6). The term “joined” is from a Greek word meaning *yoked*. This term is synonymous with the marriage *bond*. Notice that though married people have the *ability* to physically “separate” from one another and thus break the physical aspect of the marriage relationship, they cannot release themselves from God’s *yoke (bond)*. As I explain further in the article, only God can do this, and He will do so only under certain conditions.

Paul wrote to the saints at Rome,

“For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress” (Romans 7:2-3).

1 Corinthians 7:27 & 39 also use the word *bound* in reference to the marriage bond. According to Romans 7, God’s law *binds* or obligates married people to fulfill their marriage vows and commitments to each other. When a woman marries another man while her husband yet lives, or leaves her husband not for fornication and marries another man, she becomes an adulteress. This is because she remains bound to her husband — she was not released from the law of marriage. She would be bound to one man, but married to another. Of course, the law applies equally to the man. He also commits adultery if he repudiates his wife not for fornication and marries another woman (Matt. 19:9).

Romans 7:2-3 also teaches that death dissolves the marriage bond; both for the survivor and for the deceased. No adultery or act of unfaithfulness is committed by one who remarries after his spouse has died. Matthew 22:30

makes it clear that the marriage relationship does not continue into the afterlife. Jesus said, *“For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven.”*

“Lawful” Marriages Versus Unlawful Marriages

The Pharisees asked Jesus, *“Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?”* (Matthew 19:3). Notice that Jesus was asked about what was “lawful” regarding divorce. Jesus answered their question, and in His answer He also addressed the consequences of unlawful divorces. Unlawful divorces result in unlawful remarriages. Jesus replied to the Pharisees’ question,

“...Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery” (some manuscripts add, “and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.”) (Matthew 19:9). Mark 10:12 teaches the same consequence for a woman who divorces her husband [not for fornication].

Jesus taught that divorces *not for fornication* and the subsequent remarriages are *unlawful*. The opposite of “lawful” is “unlawful.” By answering the Pharisees’ question, Jesus gave tacit approval of the use of the word “lawful” (hence also, “unlawful”) when describing approved and unapproved divorces and marriages. This is the language of Scripture. As we will see later, an unlawful divorce is still a “divorce,” and an unlawful marriage is still a “marriage.” The problem is that they are *not approved by God!*

Jesus taught that it *is not lawful* for one to divorce his mate for just any cause. It *is lawful* for one to divorce (repudiate or reject) his mate for the cause of fornication (sexual immorality). In cases of *unlawful* divorce, the marriage partners remain *bound* to each other by God. Though they may be physically separated from each other, civilly divorced, and even remarried to other people, they remain bound by God. He does not release them from the marital duties and obligations that they vowed to perform when they were originally married and bound by God.

A “lawful” marriage is a marriage that is authorized by God. In His initial response to the Pharisees, in Matthew 19:4-6, Jesus said:

“Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall

leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

Jesus defined a lawful marriage as being an agreement or contract:

- Between a man and a woman (male and female)
- Who leave father and mother (make an open declaration of marital intent)
- Cleave to one another (an expression of mutual agreement and commitment to one another, typically expressed by the exchange of vows)
- And become one flesh (enter into a sexual relationship)

As a separate matter of *civil compliance*, civil requirements must be met where applicable (Romans 13:1-4) and when allowable (Acts 5:29). As noted above, civil law does not establish, define or ratify marriage. God does that. Civil procedures widely vary from culture to culture and from time to time, and are nowhere stipulated in Scripture. They are obviously not a constituent element of God-ordained marriage. Again, civil procedures should be observed, not for the purpose of somehow enabling or granting permission to God to bind eligible people in marriage; but for the purposes of submission and conscience and to avoid civil punishment (Romans 13:5).

Upon meeting the divinely stated conditions, God then joins the man and the woman in the bond of marriage and they are not to separate what God has joined or bound (Matthew 19:6).

There are only two approved ways that one may be released from the marriage bond:

- One is released from the marriage bond upon the death of his mate (Romans 7:2,3)
- The innocent spouse who repudiates his mate for fornication is released from the marriage bond (Matthew 19:9; 5:32)

By combining various Bible passages on the subject of marriage, we conclude that there are three classes of people who are eligible to marry:

- Those who have never before been bound in marriage (Matthew 19:4-5). Such people have never been bound to anyone in marriage and are therefore authorized to marry (another eligible person).
- Innocent spouses who have repudiated (divorced) their mates for the sin of fornication (Matthew 19:9). In the first part of this verse, Jesus authorizes the innocent spouse to put away his mate for sexual immorality and marry someone else. By “innocent” spouse, I mean one who has remained faithful to the marriage covenant. Jesus contrasted this person with the fornicator of the exception clause. According to the similar passage of Matthew 5:32, the one who divorces his mate *not for fornication* “causes” that mate to commit adultery (upon remarriage). In such cases, neither the divorcer nor the divorcee have the right to marry another person. The fornicator is not authorized to marry another because he is not released from the marriage bond. A person is not permitted to divorce and remarry for just any cause. Remarriage is authorized only for the innocent spouse who repudiates his mate for the cause of sexual immorality.
- Those whose spouses have died (Romans 7:2-3). Romans 7:2-3 teaches that death dissolves the marriage bond, both for the survivor and for the deceased person. Earthly marriages do not continue into heaven (Matthew 22:30). The survivor is therefore authorized to marry another.

Confusing Terminology

Much confusion and controversy could be avoided if people would simply use the language of Scripture when addressing the subjects of marriage and divorce. People often use terms differently. In one discussion that I had on marriage and divorce I learned that some Bible students even use the word “scriptural” differently than do others. Some people define “scriptural” as meaning, “of, or related to the Scriptures.” To them, a “scriptural” marriage is not necessarily an *approved* marriage. Others use the term “scriptural” to mean “approved” and “unscriptural” to mean “unapproved.” It is important that terms be properly defined and understood.

Some people do not believe that unlawful marriages and divorces are *real* “marriages” and *real* “divorces.” The word “recognize” is often central to such discussions. They say that “God does not *recognize* unlawful divorces and marriages.” I understand what people mean by this, but we must be

careful with our language. God **sees** all marriages and divorces, for He sees “all things” (Prov. 15:3; Heb. 4:13). However, He does not approve of the unlawful marriages and divorces. There is a difference between seeing a thing and *authorizing* that thing.

In an attempt to distinguish approved marriages from unapproved ones, some people say that Jesus was merely using “accommodative” language when He spoke of unlawful “marriages” and “divorces.” I understand their reasoning. They assume that since these unlawful marriages and divorces are not *approved* by God, then they must not be *real*. This is not correct. An unlawful divorce is still a real and actual divorce, and an unlawful marriage is still a real and actual marriage. Jesus meant what He said in Matthew 19:9 when He spoke of a man *divorcing* his mate not for fornication, and he meant what he said when he spoke of that unlawful divorcer “*marrying*” another woman. Jesus further explained that the unlawful remarriage resulted in *adultery*. The unlawful divorce and remarriage are just as real as the subsequent *adultery* that is committed by the unlawful divorcer. Using the language of Scripture, a “marriage” is a “marriage” whether it is approved or unapproved, and a “divorce” is a “divorce” whether it approved or unapproved.

Bible Examples Distinguishing *Marriage* From The *Marriage Bond*

1. Mark 10:11 says, “*And he said to them, ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her’.*” Even after the man had “divorced” his wife and “married” another woman, the adultery that he committed was still “against” his “wife.” This is because of the marriage *bond*. The man remained bound by God to “his wife” even after breaking the physical marriage relationship with her. Since his wife had not been sexually immoral (Matt. 19:9), he had no scriptural cause to divorce her, which resulted in his subsequent adultery.
2. Romans 7:2-3 says that a woman becomes an adulteress if she “marries” another man while her husband lives. She would be “married” to one man while remaining “bound” to another. One is bound to his mate “as long as” that mate “lives,” and one is loosed from that mate at the point of death. Married people remain bound by God to their mates even if they have dissolved the physical marriage relationship. As noted above, the only exception is when an innocent spouse repudiates his mate for fornication.

3. Paul wrote, *“To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife”* (1 Corinthians 7:11). The woman of this passage remained bound to her “husband,” even though she was “unmarried” (physically separated) from him. There is no Greek word for “husband” in the New Testament, only the possessive of “man” (or possessive of “woman” in the case of a “wife”). The man of 1 Corinthians 7:11 was the estranged woman’s “husband” because he remained *bound* to her even after she had “departed” from him.
4. Mark recorded, *“For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, because he had married her. For John had been saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife”* (Mark 6:17, 18). Herod was “married” to Herodias, but she remained bound (by God) in marriage to Philip. Herodias was still “Philip’s wife” by God’s standard (Mark 6:18). Herodias was civilly “married” to one man, but bound by God to another. Sadly, our modern world is filled with cases just like this.
5. Matthew 19:9 says, *“And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.”* If a person repudiates his mate *not for fornication* and “marries another,” he commits adultery. He is guilty of adultery because he remains bound by God to the mate that he unlawfully divorced (Matthew 19:9a). Not all Bible translations follow the Textus Receptus, and thus do not contain the second part of Matthew 19:9. The NKJV does contain it, which is what I have quoted here. The second part of the verse introduces another scenario. If a person marries one who has no right to remarry, he also commits adultery (Matthew 19:9b). He is guilty of adultery because the woman that he married was still bound to another man. It is the status of the marriage *bond* that determines the lawfulness of remarriage.

According to the above passages and examples, a marriage is still a marriage even if it is an *adulterous, unscriptural and unapproved* marriage,

and a divorced person is “unmarried” even though he remains bound by God to his mate. This is the language of Scripture.

Conclusion

As I stated earlier, the only *approved* marriage arrangement is for one to be married to the person to whom he is bound. Unscriptural marriages occur when a person marries one person while remaining bound by God to another. The marriage bond continues to exist regardless of the status of the physical marriage relationship. This bond remains intact whether the couple is physically together or separated. It remains whether the couple lives in one house or in separate houses. It remains until the death of a mate. Only death or the innocent spouse repudiating for fornication can dissolve the marriage bond. In divorces for mere *irreconcilable differences*, the bond remains. In divorces over *personality differences*, the bond remains. In divorces over *financial differences*, the bond remains. Even in divorces over *physical abuse*, the bond remains. In all divorces *not for fornication*, the bond remains.

Marriage is a lifelong contract. It is this permanent nature of the marriage bond that makes marital choices so very important. Those who are considering marriage must take great care to choose a mate who shares their convictions about the nature of marriage and the marriage bond.

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