

Marriage & Divorce

Understanding the Marital Covenant

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All scriptural passages are from
The Holy Bible In Its Original Order—A Faithful Version
by Fred R. Coulter, unless otherwise noted.

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covenant according to the conditions set forth and imposed by Almighty God as revealed in His Holy Word.

Do you, **His First Name**, enter into covenant before God, in the presence of these witnesses, to take **Her First Name** to be your lawful wedded wife until death, and as the Scriptures command, for better or for worse, in sickness or in health, in want or in wealth, to cleave unto her, to love her as Christ loves the Church, to honor her, cherish her, and provide for her? ***IDo!***

Now then do you, **Her First Name**, enter into covenant before God, in the presence of these witnesses, to take **His First Name** to be your lawful wedded husband, until death, and as the Scriptures command, for better or for worse, in sickness or in health, in want or in wealth; and to submit yourself to him as unto the Lord, in everything in the marriage estate, as the Church does to Christ; and to honor and reverence him? ***IDo!***

Since we are asking God to join you as husband and wife, and praying for His binding and blessing of this covenant marriage, it is appropriate to follow the biblical example of the laying on of hands to set you apart for this sacred covenant. So then, you will now join your right hands together and with the laying on of my hands we will ask God to join you as husband and wife.

Let us pray!

Special Prayer Blessing the Marriage

Presentation of the Rings

You may kiss the bride!

By the authority vested in me as a minister of Jesus Christ—in the name of Jesus Christ—I now pronounce you husband and wife.

MARRIAGE & DIVORCE

Understanding the Marital Covenant

“But from *the* beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. So then, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate.”

—Mark 10:6-9

PREFACE

Both marriage and divorce stir up deep emotions. Marriage is a time of immense joy and excitement, both for those entering into it as well as for families and friends. Sadly, divorce produces the opposite extremes—even God said, “I hate divorce.”¹

Marriage is a special relationship between a man and woman that should be a lifelong sharing of thoughts, ideas, joy, sadness, intimacy, and all other aspects of our humanity. It is also something that is blessed by God because He intended marriage to be a covenant between the husband and wife established upon vows of love, faithfulness, and trust.

The marital covenant is central to marriage because a husband and wife vow to commit their lives to the relationship until death befalls one of them. This lifelong pledge produces the deepest love, the closest relationship, the greatest commitment, and is a wonderfully nurturing environment for a relationship with God.

Divorce, on the other hand, consumes people with grief, feelings of loss, and anger. The impact is usually widespread and the terrible cost includes broken families, child custody disputes,

¹Malachi 2:16.

confused children, loss of friends, disparate alimony and/or child support, loss of possessions, and so forth.

Covenant vows are the most binding of all commitments between men and women and they are the very foundation of marriage. All vows are witnessed and attested by God and failure to fulfill a vow is a sin² against Him. When a vow is broken, it is an act of *betrayal*, a word that, in and of itself, evokes some of the most repulsive thoughts and feelings.

Marriage and divorce cannot be fully understood aside from an understanding of covenants and vows, but neither can they be considered without a familiarity in dealing with offenses, betrayals, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. To that end, the reader is highly encouraged to first read the CBCG booklet titled, “*OFFENSES—Ordinances of God*,” an understanding of which is assumed herein.

bodies. The man who is loving his wife in this manner loves himself, because no one truly hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, exactly as the Lord does the Church:

“For we are members of His very own Body, of His very own flesh, [through His crucifixion, and all that it means], and of his bones.

[That is, the Church is a special spiritual creation. For in the same manner as Adam’s wife was created from his own rib, so also, as a counterpart for Christ, the Church is created from His innermost being.]

“For this reason shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined to his wife; and the two shall be one flesh.

“This mystery is great, immense and supreme: For I am speaking concerning the relationship between Christ and the Church [the bride of Jesus Christ and their eternal destiny].

“However, let every one of you, also, be loving his own wife as himself, and the wife should see that she reverence her husband” (Ephesians 5:22-33).

The apostle Peter continues God’s instructions, “In the same way, you wives be submissive to your own husbands ... from your heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God....

“Thus, did Sarah obey Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her daughters if you do what is right....

“Likewise, you husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, and grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:1-7).

Your Sacred Marriage Covenant

We are here today in the presence of God, coming before His very throne in heaven above, and we are asking God to join you as husband and wife. Therefore, in accordance with God’s Word, each of you should solemnly vow before God and in the presence of these witnesses to enter into the sacred marriage

² Numbers 30:2; especially Deuteronomy 23:21.

Jesus upheld this honor by teaching, “He who created them in the beginning, made them male and female, and said, ‘For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. Consequently, they are no more two, but one flesh.’ Therefore, what God has joined together, let no man separate” (Mark 10:6-9).

Also, He said, “Whosoever divorces his wife, except for the cause of sexual infidelity, and marries another, commits adultery. And if a woman divorces her husband, and is married to another, she commits adultery” (Matthew 5:32).

So we see that it is God who joins a husband and wife together as one flesh. What God has bound, man is commanded by that authority not to separate. What God has bound, only God can loose as revealed in His Holy Word.

A marriage so bound and blessed by God is binding for life, for better or for worse, in sickness or in health, in want or in wealth, unto death do they part.

Now, let us understand the New Testament instructions concerning the marriage estate:

“Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as unto the Lord: because the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church, which is His body: and He is the Savior, Deliverer, and Provider of the body. In exactly the same manner as the Church is subject to Christ, even so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything in the marriage estate.

“Husbands, LOVE your wives, in exactly the same manner as Christ also loved the Church, and gave up Himself for her; in order that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of the water through the Word of God;

“That He might place her beside Himself as the glorious, untarnished Church, not having a single spot or stain, wrinkle or blemish, or any such thing; but that she might be consecrated, holy and completely blameless.

“In exactly the same manner, the husbands are duty-bound and under obligation to God to love their wives as their own

CHAPTER 1

Marital Covenant

God created mankind with the genetic identities of male and female. His stated purpose was that they would fill the earth with their offspring—“And God blessed [Adam and Eve]. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth...’ ” (Genesis 1:28). Rather than following the random mating common to animals, God wanted children to be conceived and raised in an environment of love, faithfulness, and trust between their father and mother. As such, He intended the union of a man and woman to be a singular commitment to the exclusion of all others that endures until death annuls the covenant.³

“But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined to his wife; and the **two shall become one flesh**. So then, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mark 10:6-9).

While the Bible does not explicitly mention that marriage is a *covenant*, it is quite clear that this is the case in the parallel of the first covenant with ancient Israel of which God said, “I am your husband” (Jeremiah 3:8). It also follows the pattern of the new covenant for true Christians who will be the bride of Christ.⁴ Regardless of the type, the definition of a covenant remains the same:

DEFINITION: A *Covenant* is a BINDING AGREEMENT wherein the two parties involved vow to fulfill certain obligations. A covenant requires a bond of trust to exist between the participants.

³ Romans 7:2

⁴ Revelation 19:7-9; Matthew 26:28; et al.

God's covenant with ancient Israel was based upon a lifetime⁵ commitment of love, faithfulness, and trust. The Israelites were chosen by God as His special people⁶ and God promised them long and healthy physical lives filled with abundance. For their part, the Israelites were to love⁷ God and obey His Law as outlined in the Bible and summarized in the Ten Commandments.

To emphasize their covenant role to God, the first and second commandments demanded loyalty to their Husband and, together, these two forbid what can be generally described as "spiritual immorality." Sadly, it was ancient Israel's adultery with pagan gods that was the deciding factor when God divorced Israel.⁸ Adultery is so offensive to God that these two commandments formed the basis of the seventh commandment that forbids adultery in a marriage between a husband and wife.

DEFINITION: **Adultery** is intentional SEXUAL BETRAYAL of a spouse by a person under a marital covenant and a person outside of that covenant.

Because of their unfaithfulness, the old covenant with ancient Israel was replaced with the new covenant after the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Like the old covenant, it is also a marital covenant. While God's Law is still obligatory, the terms are now raised to a new level of spiritual obedience and God's promises are eternal life and spiritual blessings rather than physical ones.

It is plain that the constitutions of both the old and new covenants are archetypes of the marital covenant for marriages between men and women, even though marriage was originally instituted by God in the beginning with Adam and Eve.⁹

DEFINITION: A **marital covenant** is a BINDING AGREEMENT established upon vows before God of love,

⁵ Deuteronomy 5:29.

⁶ Deuteronomy 4:10.

⁷ Deuteronomy 6:5.

⁸ Jeremiah 3:8; book of Hosea.

⁹ Genesis 2:20-24.

APPENDIX E

The Sacred Wedding Ceremony

By Fred R. Coulter

This is a happy and joyous occasion. Marriage is a natural union, but a divine institution, ordained at creation by Almighty God. This intimate love relationship was created by God Himself, because GOD IS LOVE. Physically and spiritually, the marriage estate portrays mankind's supreme destiny of ONENESS with God in His family, in His eternal Kingdom forever.

Almighty God is the Supreme Sovereign Ruler, and He is our Creator; therefore, it is only fitting and right that we use the laws and principles of God's Word as the fundamental authority by which to govern this sacred marriage covenant into which you are both now entering.

In the Beginning, after the Lord God had created Adam, He said, "It is not good for man to be alone, I will make a helper, suitable and compatible for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then God took one of the man's ribs ... and from it God fashioned a woman, and God brought her to the man.

"And the man said, 'This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man.' 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh'" (Genesis 2:18, 21-24).

Then the Lord God blessed them saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth."

Today, in the presence of these witnesses, we are asking the Lord God Almighty, in the name and authority of Jesus Christ, to bless this marriage, with love, understanding, faithfulness and dedication to each other, knowing that marriage is honorable in everything.

of the most pagan nations on earth. They had worshipped a plethora of Egyptian gods and had been heavily influenced by the pagan customs. Because of this, many of the biblical commandments, laws, statutes, and precepts (including these two scriptures) were given to promote the worship of the one true God. The implication in Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20 was that **when** one swore an oath it was *only* to invoke God's name AND NO OTHER.

faithfulness, and trust between one man and one woman until death.

This commitment and binding is fundamentally important to a marital covenant because they mirror the new covenant between Jesus Christ and the children of God. Nothing less than eternal love, faithfulness, and trust are acceptable and, similarly, God expects nothing less between Christian husbands and wives.

“For I [Paul] am jealous over you with *the* jealousy of God because I have espoused you to one husband, so that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:2).

While the marital covenant is not explicitly called such in Scripture, it is clear that God established it as the basis for marriage between a man and woman. Every marital covenant is a union before God; therefore, the husband and wife are accountable to Him when they fail to keep it.

DEFINITION: **Marriage** is the BINDING of a husband and wife under the vows of a marital covenant before God.

Because of the foundational importance of the marital covenant, no marriage can be considered established by God without vows of a lifetime commitment to love, faithfulness, and trust. A marital covenant is between the husband and wife where God is the Witness and Judge of their vows. Therefore, entering into such a covenant is a serious commitment, but the decision belongs exclusively to the man and woman because they are responsible for the vows they pledge before God.

Covenant Vows

A covenant stands upon the vows of the parties. A vow is one of the most binding of all oaths because it is a commitment made by a person before God, which means a vow is subject to the witness and judgment of God.

DEFINITION: A *vow* is a SOLEMN OATH or *asseveration* made by a person as part of a covenant agreement. All vows are witnessed by God and fall under the jurisdiction of God by statute.¹⁰ Broken vows are, therefore, subject to penalties or sanctions according to the judgment of God. Breaking a vow is termed a *betrayal*—a serious major offense that is a sin against God.

DEFINITION: An *oath* is the formal pledging of a VOW or PROMISE.

A promise differs from a vow in that a person commits to something *outside* of a covenant. In other words, a promise does not require any commitment by the recipient. Breaking a promise—called lying—is still a sin.

DEFINITION: A *promise* is a SOLEMN OATH in which a person makes a commitment to another, but the recipient of the promise is not under any obligation to reciprocate—so no covenant is involved. Breaking a promise is *lying*, which is a sin against God.

While a covenant stands upon the vows of participants, there is an exception when it comes to God. The Bible never mentions God making vows—only promises. God is above all¹¹ so, when He makes an oath, there is no higher authority¹² who can attest to it. When people proclaim an oath, it is a vow attested by GOD; but when He proclaims an oath, it is a PROMISE because He is the highest authority—and God’s promises are certain.¹³

Love

Marriage vows of love, faithfulness, and trust sound simple enough; but what does each of these commitments mean?

¹⁰ Leviticus 5:4; Numbers 30:2; especially Deuteronomy 23:21-23.

¹¹ Ephesians 4:6.

¹² Genesis 22:16; Hebrews 6:13.

¹³ Titus 1:2

than swear to it. Legally, an affirmation invokes SECULAR PENALTIES FOR PERJURY instead of invoking God’s judgment.

Swearing an oath in the name of God is a very serious commitment and failing to keep the oath is a sin:

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain” (Ex. 20:7).

“And you shall not swear by My name falsely; nor shall you profane the name of your God. I *am* the LORD” (Lev. 19:12).

In the Old Testament, oaths were sworn “by the LORD”⁴² or, in the case of the pagan peoples, to other gods, including Baal⁴³. While the Bible records several instances when God swore an oath⁴⁴, He swore by HIMSELF—since there is no higher authority who can attest to it:

“For God, after promising Abraham, swore by Himself, since He could swear by none greater” (Heb. 6:13).

Finally, notice these biblical statutes that appear to *require* the swearing of oaths:

“You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him, and **shall swear by His name**” (Deut. 6:13).

“You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve Him, and you shall hold fast to Him, and **swear by His name**” (Deut. 10:20).

These statutes need to be understood within the context that the ancient Israelites had just been rescued from Egypt, one

⁴² Genesis 21:23; 24:3; Joshua 2:12; Judges 21:7; 1 Samuel 20:42; 30:15; et al.

⁴³ Joshua 23:7; Jeremiah 5:7; 12:16; et al.

⁴⁴ Genesis 22:16; Jeremiah 22:5; 44:26; 49:13; 51:14; Amos 4:2; 6:8; et al.

In Matthew 5:34-36, Jesus said NOT to swear by heaven (which includes God's name), the earth, Jerusalem, or by one's head. He specifically mentioned these because, in the time of Christ, the scribes and Pharisees had corrupted the keeping of sworn oaths by assigning priorities based upon who or what was invoked as a witness to, or evidence of, the oath. Notice:

“Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘**Whoever shall swear by the temple, it is not binding; but whoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is obligated to fulfill his oath.**’ *You* fools and blind! For **which is greater**, the gold, or the temple which sanctifies the gold? And *you say*, ‘Whoever shall swear by the altar, it is not binding; but whoever shall swear by the gift that *is* upon it, he is obligated to *fulfill* his oath’ ” (Matt. 23:16-18).

Sworn oaths, in reality, could not be trusted because of the loopholes introduced by the scribes and Pharisees to circumvent their fulfillment. According to them, some sworn oaths were “greater” than others, meaning some were not as binding. That is not how God views it—all oaths are binding and He is both Witness and Judge of their fulfillment. Jesus condemned the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees—calling them transgressions of the commandments of God⁴¹—including their twisted reasoning regarding sworn oaths.

This is why James told Christians “do not swear, neither by heaven, nor by the earth ... but let your yes be yes, and let your no be no” (James 5:12). Trustworthiness, instead, is established by keeping one's word. Christians are to establish trust, honesty, and integrity by words and actions, not by invoking the name of God or something else.

SIDEBAR: It is common in a court of law to require a person who testifies to swear an oath that ends with “so help me God.” These days, one may *affirm* the oath rather

In English, “love” covers so many different thoughts, desires, and feelings that it can hamper our ability to express or understand it. However, this is not true in the Greek language, which uses four different words to express different aspects of love: *agape*, *eros*, *storge*, and *phileo*.

DEFINITION: *Agape* is GODLY LOVE. It is an unconditional, wholehearted desire to serve and obey God the Father and Jesus Christ. This is the highest and purest form of love.

DEFINITION: *Eros* is ROMANTIC LOVE between a man and woman. This involves deep feelings of respect, tenderness, and longing exclusive to a husband and wife. Note: *Eros* was originally much more than sexual desire, but it became perverted even in ancient times. Sexual desire without love is called *lust* in the Bible.

DEFINITION: *Storge* is FAMILIAL LOVE, which is the close bond that exists between parents and children as well as brothers and sisters.

DEFINITION: *Phileo* is LOVE OF OTHERS. It is a discipline of thoughts and emotions to do good for others without expecting anything in return. Interestingly, love between close friends is called *philotorgos* in Romans 12:10.

As intended by God, marriage is a relationship that can produce and nurture *all* types of love; so its place in the marital vows is of utmost importance. Without love, there can be no marriage relationship—whether between a man and woman or people and God.

Faithfulness & Trust

While faithfulness and trust are very similar, both are required in the marital vows because there are critical differences between them:

⁴¹ Matthew 15:3.

DEFINITION: **Trust** is the BELIEF or expectation that someone can or will do something.

DEFINITION: **Faith** is TRUST that we have demonstrated and proven through acts of submission or obedience.

A classic example of the difference in faith and trust is the story of a tightrope walker named Charles Blondin. His greatest stunt was walking a tightrope across the Niagara Falls while pushing a wheelbarrow full of rocks. After successfully making the trip several times, he asked the crowd if they believed he could transport a person in the wheelbarrow and the crowd roared in agreement. However, when he pointed to one loudly cheering man and asked him to get in the wheelbarrow, the man refused. The man trusted that Blondin could safely transport someone across the falls, but he was unwilling to prove that trust by riding in the wheelbarrow himself. In other words, he had no faith.

Faith and trust are also exemplified in the story of Abraham:

“By faith Abraham, when he was being tried, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises offered up *his* only begotten *son* of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac shall your Seed be called’; *because he reckoned* [that is, he trusted] that God was able to raise him even from among the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative way” (Heb. 11:17-19).

Abraham trusted that God could raise Isaac from the dead, but he PROVED it by actually attempting to sacrifice his son. He proved his trust in God and so established his faith. Verse 17 says that “by **faith**...when he was being **tried**” because a personal commitment is not required to have trust but it is the very basis of faith. This is why God said afterwards, “now I **know** that you fear God” (Genesis 22:12). Faith is trust that has been proven. This is why James says:

APPENDIX D

Sworn Oaths

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus discussed the swearing of an oath:

“Again, you have heard that it was said to those *in* ancient times, ‘You shall not forswear [perjure] yourself, but you shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ But I say to you, **do not swear at all**, neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet; nor by Jerusalem, because it is *the* city of the great King. Neither shall you swear by your head, because you do not have the power to make one hair white or black. But let your word be *good*, *your* ‘Yes’ *be* yes *and your* ‘No’ *be* no; for anything that *is* added to these is from the evil one” (Matt. 5:33-37).

Jesus is expounding upon the third of the Ten Commandments that says, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain” (Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11). So, what is a sworn oath and how does it differ from a vow? A vow is a solemn oath made *before God* as part of a covenant agreement. A *sworn oath* is rather like a promise in that it is an oath made by one person and not part of a covenant. However, unlike a promise or vow, a *sworn* oath INVOKES THE NAME OF someone or something that attests (gives witness, evidence, or proof) to the validity of the oath.

DEFINITION: **Swearing** is a SOLEMN OATH THAT INVOKES THE NAME OF someone or something as an *attestation* to the commitment made by one person to another. The recipient of the sworn oath is not under any obligation to reciprocate, so no covenant is involved.

true repentance³⁹. Even so, God absolutely will forgive anyone who truly repents of betraying their vow to a previous marriage, thus allowing for a subsequent marriage. Furthermore, the offender needs to be completely open and honest about the betrayal with the potential spouse; otherwise, his or her vow could be fraudulent and invalid.

Regarding the victim of betrayal, it is just as important to ensure that the victim has forgiven the offending spouse. If the offender is unwilling to offer true repentance, the victim, at a minimum, must be *willing* to forgive the offender. Sometimes, the victim is altogether unwilling to forgive the offender. Reconciliation is always required by God to the extent possible; otherwise an unforgiving victim will carry a heavy burden into any new marriage. Like an offender, an innocent victim should be open and honest with a potential spouse about the prior betrayal that led to the divorce before entering into a subsequent marriage. Some sins of betrayal—including abuse, sexual immorality, drug addition, alcoholism, criminal behavior, fraud, or treachery—are mentally and emotionally traumatic, thus the victim must sincerely seek God’s healing from the suffering, pain, and grief.

Thoughts and intents of the heart, when it comes to serious matters, are usually very difficult to discern and only God can truly know them⁴⁰. It is important for any man or woman who has been through a divorce to understand that God takes vows very seriously, so truthfully communicating about a prior betrayal is vital. Reconciliation, a responsibility of both the offender and victim, is essential especially for any subsequent marriage. For the minister who mediates the marital covenant vows before God, it is just as important to examine the heart of those entering into marriage, especially after divorce, as it is with baptism.

³⁹ Matthew 3:8.

⁴⁰ Hebrews 4:12.

“In the same way also, faith, if it does not have works, is dead, by itself. But someone is going to say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ *My answer is*: You prove your faith to me through your works, and I will prove my faith to you through my works” (James 2:17-18).

In a marriage, a husband or wife implicitly trusts that their spouse will keep their vows; but the husband or wife is faithful when he or she remains true when faced with any temptation to dishonor or break them.

PRINCIPLE: **Trust** is something spouses RECEIVE from each other, whereas faith is the proof of their trust that they GIVE to each other.

Love, faithfulness, and trust are required for any lasting marriage. Love leads to trust and trust leads to faith. These are the commitments of a lifelong marital covenant AND our covenant relationship with God.

CHAPTER 2

Marriage by a Minister

Traditionally, ministers are mediators of a marital covenant by leading and performing the ceremony of vows. They can also be instrumental in helping the couple understand the serious commitment they are making to each other before God.

A minister is a witness of the marital covenant when he is part of the ceremony. As Paul said, “In the mouth of two or three witnesses **every fall, without exception** matter shall be established” (2 Corinthians 13:1). While God and Jesus Christ are certainly witnesses in heaven, human witnesses endorse the covenant on earth.

Finally, a marital covenant does not technically require a minister to be legitimate; but, in addition to being witnesses, ministers also have legal authorization to record or register the marriage according to secular statutes. In this regard, a wedding by a minister would include both the marital covenant vows and the secular legal licensing or registration.

Justice of the Peace

In at least today’s world, there are secular frameworks for marriage—one such is a justice of the peace, which is recognized throughout all states as legally binding. In all regards, a justice of the peace is a legally recognized magistrate of the city, county, or state.

In such a ceremony, the couple is granted a certificate or license that legally recognizes the marriage; however, no vows are required. Generally, the justice of the peace simply authenticates and attests to the identity and current non-married status of the individuals and then is a notary for their signature on the license.

While covenant vows are not required of the couple, some choose to include vows prior to the signing of the license.

APPENDIX C

Dealing With Divorce—A Minister’s Role

Divorce is one of the saddest and most complicated situations a minister will encounter. Because it involves betrayal of the marital covenant, it can invoke a range of unimaginable emotions from vehement anger to utter grief and despair.

For these reasons, a minister should approach a divorce with impartiality, especially if there is a friendship with one or both of the spouses. As much as possible, the involvement of a minister should focus on a role as teacher of Scripture and a minister to the brethren. The main reason for this is that the couple is solely responsible for their marriage—they own any decision to divorce. Even the perception of siding with one of the spouses not only can lead to divisions in the congregation but also can place the minister in a position of having some responsibility for the outcome.

Remaining impartial makes it possible for the minister to help the husband and wife to reconcile (even if it ends in divorce) as well as, and just as important at times, guide the brethren (either as a congregation or individually) during this difficult time. Understanding how to deal with offenses in general, and betrayals in particular, is essential in helping others to address them.³⁸

Finally, when counseling a couple for marriage that involves a prior divorce, it is important to understand the betrayal behind it. In the case of the offender, betrayal absolutely requires repentance both to God and the victim. Even if the victim refuses to forgive, the offender must be at least *willing* to repent to the ex-spouse. Discerning these situations can be difficult because they are a matter of the heart. Still, a minister must look for fruits of

³⁸ Refer to the booklet at www.cbcbg.org titled “*OFFENSES—Ordinances of God*” for dealing with offenses.

WISDOM: The *curse* that has been upon marriage from the beginning is a woman's HARMFUL DESIRE for her husband and a husband's CONTROLLING DOMINANCE of a wife.

To end the curse, a husband must VOLUNTARILY CHOOSE to be the loving head and a wife must VOLUNTARILY CHOOSE to submit to him. Understanding that God's roles for husband and wife are *choices* is essential.

WISDOM: A husband and wife who voluntarily choose to live by God's intended roles in marriage are the least vulnerable to the temptations of Satan and have a deep relationship with each other and God.

In these roles, a husband is to love his wife in the same manner that Jesus loves us and gave His life for us and a wife is to submit to her husband as a helper in the same manner that we all submit to Jesus Christ. BOTH spouses serve the other in roles of AGAPE LOVE according to the roles of Christ and the Church. *This is a perfect union.* It does not matter who is more intelligent, stronger, the highest earner, etc.—those are talents and gifts. What truly matters is the *relationship* between a husband and wife.

Finally, God's intended roles in a marriage do *not* constrict either the husband or wife because *a role does not limit or define capabilities*. A marriage should never be a competition with, or a domination of, the other spouse.

WISDOM: Biblical marital roles do not *limit* or *define* the capabilities of men or women; instead, they provide the best *relationship* between husbands and wives to become one with each other and with God and Christ.

Exchanging vows prior to the ceremony is an important consideration because not only is the couple married in the eyes of the secular government by the justice of the peace, but he is also a witness to any marital covenant vows, which are required to establish a valid marriage before God.

Common Law Marriage

Another secular arrangement is *common law*. It differs in a couple of respects from those bound by a marital covenant. By definition:

DEFINITION: *Common law marriage* is a SECULAR LEGAL FRAMEWORK devoid of a marital covenant wherein a couple is considered married according to local statutes. “Common law” does not exist in all states.

This type of union has valid legal status under secular statutes in some states but it does not require a covenant of vows between the couple.

In modern times, “common law” is often the term used informally for relationships that have neither a legal nor a covenantal basis. Without vows for a lifetime of love, faithfulness, and trust, the couple is, in no uncertain terms, not under any form of a marital covenant. Worst of all, “common law” marriage typically *requires* the couple to cohabitate for a minimum period of time before it can be applied to their relationship. This “shacking up” is nothing less than fornication.

DEFINITION: *Fornication* is SEXUAL INTERCOURSE between people who are not under a marital covenant.

While some couples spend a lifetime together with unspoken tenets of love, faithfulness, and trust, does that constitute a covenantal marriage? Only God knows. In days gone by, societal mores and relationships between a man and woman were unquestionably more biblically based and people had high regard for vows and commitments. Today, however, it is a rare

instance of a “common law” situation that is anything other than fornication.

Another problem that arises with “common law” marriage unions is that the legal framework is *not common* in the USA—it is completely unrecognized or absent from a number of states. The lack of consistency makes it impossible to hold “common law” as a standard for marriage from a secular legal perspective, much less a biblical one. In fact, a couple under “common law” marriage in one state may find themselves suddenly UNmarried if they change their legal residence to another state.

Importantly, any relationship that lacks a marital covenant based upon vows of a lifelong relationship of love, faithfulness, and trust, such as “common law” marriage, cannot be adjudicated by any biblical statute as a valid marriage. Nonetheless, it is a simple enough matter to rectify through a minister who can mediate a proper marital covenant if the couple so chooses.

And a wife is told:

“Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord; for the husband is *the head of the wife*, even as Christ is the Head of the church; and He is *the Savior* of the body. For even as the church is subject to Christ, in the same way also *let wives be subject to their own husbands in everything*” (Eph. 5:22-24).

God established the roles of a husband and wife in the beginning with Adam and Eve. What was Adam’s role? That of head gardener tending (caring for) and keeping (protecting) GOD’s garden; as such, he worked for God. In his role as husband, God made Adam responsible for teaching Eve His commandments (tending to her needs) and protecting her so she can grow in her relationship with God. What was Eve’s role? To be a helper to Adam in tending and keeping God’s garden. In her role as wife, she was responsible for helping Adam with his shortcomings so that he, too, could grow in his relationship with God.

After they sinned, God told Eve, “your **desire** shall be toward your husband, and he shall rule over you.”³⁷ God used very similar wording when He told Cain (after he killed his brother Abel), “[Sin’s] **desire** is for you, but you must rule over it” (Genesis 4:7). This kind of desire is *harmful*. In this verse, sin is personified as *desiring* Cain for the purpose of destroying him. Examples of the curse of this harmful desire include a wife who returns again and again to an abusive husband or when a woman gives in to fornication after encountering a lustful man. This is why God told Cain to RULE OVER his sin—literally to *dominate* it (through repentance)—so that he is not destroyed by it.

However, a marriage wherein the husband *dominates* his wife is also an unhealthy one. God *never* intended a husband to DOMINATE and RULE OVER his wife nor a wife to have an UNHEALTHY DESIRE for her husband. ***These harmful behaviors are the curse upon marriages.***

³⁷ Genesis 3:16.

APPENDIX B

*Roles of Husbands & Wives*³⁴

Many balk at the biblical roles of husbands and wives, but they do so because they fail to understand Scripture or the curse that is upon mankind after the sin of the first man and woman. When Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they both sinned and, consequently, God laid a curse on both³⁵. Even though Eve ate first, it was Adam who was held responsible for bringing sin into the world³⁶. God gave Adam the responsibility as a husband to Eve to care for, and protect, her in the same manner that he was told to tend (care for) and keep (protect) God's garden in Eden.

On the other hand, Eve failed as a helper to Adam in their moment of temptation. Instead, she allowed herself to be used by Satan to entice her husband to sin.

For failing to serve each other in the intended roles of husband and wife, marriage has been under a terrible curse from God. Understanding how to end the curse begins with recognizing that the roles of husbands and wives—as *originally* intended by GOD—are to mirror the relationships between God, Jesus Christ, and the Church.

Two core scriptures define these roles. A husband is told:

“Husbands, love your own wives, in the same way that Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; so that He might sanctify it [both the Church and a marriage], having cleansed it with the washing of water by the Word; that He might present it to Himself as the glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it might be holy and without blame” (Eph. 5:25).

³⁴ Refer to the sermon at www.cbeg.org titled “*Roles of Husbands & Wives—Remove the Curse.*”

³⁵ Genesis 3:16-19.

³⁶ Romans 5:12.

CHAPTER 3

Marital Covenant Betrayal

The heart of *every* covenant is the vows. Once made, breaking a vow becomes a very serious sin against God¹⁴:

“When you shall vow a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not be slack to pay it, for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and **it would be sin in you**” (Deut. 23:21).

Betrayal is so hated by God that Paul said “covenant-breakers ... are worthy of death, not only [those who] practice these things themselves, but also [those who] approve of those who commit them” (Romans 1:31-32). Even those who *condone* someone who breaks a covenant are “worthy of death.”

By definition, breaking a vow is betrayal. So, what constitutes a betrayal of a marital covenant vow? Because the vows are lifetime commitments of love, faithfulness, and trust between a husband and wife, a betrayal is any serious major offense that violates the specifics and intents of the vows.

DEFINITION: A *betrayal* is a SERIOUS MAJOR OFFENSE against someone with whom there is a covenant relationship, meaning the vows and bond of trust between them are violated and broken. A betrayal is always a sin.

All will agree that adultery certainly betrays a marital covenant, and this is obvious in the Scriptures¹⁵. But why is adultery a betrayal? While it might seem a ludicrous question, understanding it is an avenue to recognizing other serious major offenses. Betrayal of a marital covenant violates vows of love, faithfulness, and trust because a marriage has the requirements and expectations that the husband and wife are one with each other AND NO OTHER. This means that they do not share the love

¹⁴ Also Numbers 30:2; Ecclesiastes 5:4-6.

¹⁵ Matthew 19:9; Romans 7:2-3.

that is unique between a husband and wife with anyone else—they do not share their bodies with others; they do not share their intimacy with others; they do not share their private thoughts with others, etc.

Betrays—More Than Adultery

What else betrays a marital covenant vow? What about physical or emotional abuse, homosexuality, pornography, alcoholism, or drug addiction? Most of them are crimes against civil law and all of them are considered morally wrong even in today's world. Above all, they are serious major offenses against vows of love, faithfulness, and trust. No one would seriously argue that these do not betray a marital covenant.

Another type of betrayal is fraudulent behavior. Marrying for wealth or power, living a secret life, or engaging in criminal activities or behaviors are all fraud. In addition, failure to divulge major psychological issues or hiding serious emotional problems can be fraudulent circumstances if they were not disclosed and resolved before a marriage. Fraud after a marriage unquestionably violates the marital covenant vows, but it is especially unscrupulous when they are committed before the vows are made.

DEFINITION: **Fraud** is INTENTIONAL DECEPTION for the purpose of selfish gain. A fraudulent vow is never valid.

Treachery, on the other hand, is a very insidious form of fraud because it betrays not only the marital covenant vows but also the bond of trust.

DEFINITION: **Treachery** is INTENTIONAL DECEPTION that betrays a bond of trust for the purpose of selfish gain.

One example of treachery is a husband or wife who has an affair with a sibling or friend of their spouse. There is an implicit bond of trust between the spouse and the sibling or friend that they will respect and honor the marriage. Another case of treachery would be a husband or wife, whose spouse is an invalid

Considering that the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ was the Husband of the old covenant with ancient Israel, was His answer focused upon a marriage between and man and woman or was He considering the old covenant that had been betrayed over and over again? The former would leave the reader to believe that *sexual immorality* was specific to physical sexual sins. The latter was used as a metaphoric warning to the ancient Israelites and obviously covers any wickedness against their covenant with God. It really is a moot question because the marriage covenant between people was founded from the beginning upon the same vows of love, faithfulness, and trust required by God of EVERY COVENANT with Him and those to which He attests—including a covenant of marriage between people. Therefore, with very few exceptions, sexual immorality is a metaphor for any wickedness that occurs against any covenant established by God.

Jezebel was never accused of committing any explicitly sexual sins. She was condemned for instituting worship of Baal³².

“Neither be idolaters, as *were* some of them; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.’ Neither should we **commit sexual immorality, as some of them committed, and twenty-three thousand were destroyed in one day**” (1 Cor. 10:7-8).

The problem here was not that the ancient Israelite men married some of the daughters of Moab, it was that they committed idolatry and worshipped the pagan god Baal Peor³³.

There are very few cases where *porneia* is definitely referring to sexual sins. These include John 8:41; 1 Corinthians 5:1; and 7:2, but these are quite rare compared to the majority of the 50 places where a form of *porneia* is used to mean any wickedness by those in covenant with God.

Summary

Sexual immorality is used in the Bible as a metaphor for all unrighteousness and wickedness because it violates and breaks a covenant. Knowing that every covenant with or before God is a marital covenant explains why sexual immorality covers much more than physical sexual acts. Understanding this, take another look at Matthew 19:9:

“And I say to you, whoever shall divorce his wife, except *it be* for **sexual immorality [*porneia*]**, and shall marry another, is committing adultery; and the one who marries her who has been divorced is committing adultery” (Matt. 19:9).

³² 1 Kings 18.

³³ Numbers 25:2-3.

or incapacitated, who persuades the disadvantaged spouse to sign over rights and ownership of all the assets and then divorces him or her. Without a bond of trust, the spouse could not have manipulated the situation. Finally, a husband or wife who criticizes, complains about, or falsely accuses their spouse to others, hoping to gain support for his or her side of a story, is not only lying to others but is betraying the bond of trust of the marital covenant vows.

There are also spiritual offenses that betray a marital covenant, such as idolatry, sorcery, necromancy, witchcraft, etc. Because all vows are before God, these sins not only show utter disdain for the marital covenant vows but also show contempt for God.

There are many ways a covenant vow is betrayed. Notice the following scripture¹⁶—committing any of these “works of the flesh” certainly violates a vow of love, faithfulness, and trust.

“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, strifes, jealousies, indignations, contentions, divisions, sects, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such things as these; concerning which I am telling you beforehand, even as I have also said in the past, that those who do such things shall not inherit *the* kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:19-21).

These are such major offenses that they will cause someone to lose out on salvation (verse 21) unless there is true repentance—because each one betrays a covenant with God. It is evident that there are many forms of covenant betrayal and all are serious major offenses that violate any covenant based upon love, faithfulness, and trust. Importantly, these are not just physical sins—they are also spiritual sins¹⁷. Betrayals such as these would

¹⁶ For additional forms of covenant betrayal, refer to Romans 1:28-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 2 Corinthians 12:20; Ephesians 5:3-6; Colossians 3:5-6; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; Revelation 21:8; and Revelation 22:15.

¹⁷ Romans 7:14; 8:4.

also violate a marital covenant between a husband and a wife because it is a mirror of the covenant between a true Christian and God and Jesus Christ.

Divorce

A marital covenant is formally terminated by a divorce:

DEFINITION: *Divorce* is the intentional DISSOLUTION of a marital covenant.

While it is somewhat counterintuitive, divorce is clearly JUSTIFIED for serious major offenses¹⁸ and at times even prudent, especially when there is physical, emotional, or spiritual spousal abuse, sexual immorality, drug addition, alcoholism, fraud, treachery, etc.

DEFINITION: Divorce is *justified* for any serious major offense that is a BETRAYAL of the marital covenant vows.

It is important to understand that a divorce itself is not the betrayal—it is always the *result* of betrayal. For this reason, divorce can be justified and, at times, prudent. Also, betrayal does not, of necessity, end in divorce if it can be sufficiently reconciled. A divorce simply legally dissolves the marital covenant.

DEFINITION: *Divorce* always involves a BETRAYAL of the marital covenant, but it is not a betrayal in and of itself.

Even though betrayal is always involved in a divorce, the spouse who commits a serious major offense is the guilty one while the other spouse is innocent (although there can be instances where both spouses are guilty of betrayal). Therefore, *it is not a sin if the innocent spouse divorces the husband or wife who was guilty of the betrayal.*

¹⁸ Matthew 19:7-8.

have *within* you from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought with a price. Therefore, **glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's**" (1 Cor. 6:13, 15-20).

Again, it is impossible to limit this to just physical sexual behaviors. It is plainly obvious that sexual immorality is not being used here in the strict meaning of sexual sins, but rather all that is unrighteousness and wickedness pertaining to a relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ and any other covenant that is established by God. This is because the framework for all covenants with or between God's people is founded upon the same critical vows of love, faithfulness, and trust. Sins against these vows are always betrayals of the heart well before they are manifested as physical acts.

When Sexual Immorality is Not Sex

To highlight the use of sexual immorality as a metaphor for non-sexual sins, notice the following scriptures.

"Lest there be any **fornicator [pornos]** or godless person, as **Esau, who for one meal sold his birthright**" (Heb. 12:16).

Obviously, Esau was not committing a sexual sin when he sold his birthright. Still, he is call a fornicator.

"But I have a few things against you, because you allow the woman **Jezebel**, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and to **seduce My servants into committing fornication** and eating things sacrificed to idols... Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and **those who commit adultery with her** into great tribulation, unless they repent of their works" (Rev. 2:20, 22).

even though the covenant is still yet to be fulfilled as a full marriage to Christ.

Marital Covenant Between People

Unlike general wickedness that is extant in nations that have no covenant with God, sexual immorality is particularly egregious and encompasses any and all wickedness by anyone in covenant with God. Physical sexual sins have never been the limitation of covenant betrayal because any covenant with God is spiritual, not physical.

Sexual immorality, as it applies to any covenant that either includes God or where He attests to it (as Witness and Judge), such as a marriage covenant between people, covers all wicked behavior as defined by God's Law. This is because God establishes the foundation of covenants with Himself and those among His people. In the biblical metaphors of God as Husband and His people being a wife, sexual immorality covers all wickedness. Other evidence is the scripture that warns against sexual immorality by the **Body**—the Church—which belongs to Christ:

“Foods *are* for the belly, and the belly *is* for foods; but God will destroy both it and those. Now **the body is not for sexual immorality [porneia], but for the Lord**, and the Lord for the body.... Don't you know that **your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make *them* members of a harlot? MAY IT NEVER BE! WHAT! Don't you know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body? For He says, ‘The two **shall be one flesh**.’** But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit. Flee **sexual immorality [porneia]**. Every sin that a man may commit is outside the body, but the one who commits sexual immorality is sinning against his own body. WHAT! Don't you know that **your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit**, which you

PRINCIPLE: ***Guilt*** or ***innocence*** is determined by the perpetrator of the BETRAYAL, ***not*** who files for DIVORCE.

If a husband forces his wife to accept a divorce so he can marry another woman, he is solely responsible for the betrayal—the wife is innocent. Likewise, a wife who files for divorce because she is being abused is innocent—the husband is guilty of betraying the vows to his wife.

It is also important to recognize that a marital covenant between spouses is established before, and attested by, God. Therefore, the ultimate decision to divorce belongs exclusively to the parties of the covenant—the husband and wife—and no one else.

On a final note, reconciliation of a betrayal is a serious matter to God, as is true for all major offenses. Reconciliation requires repentance by the offender and forgiveness by the victim. However, some offenses cannot be reconciled because either the offender or victim refuses to properly deal with the offense. In those cases, the offender must be *willing* to repent to an unforgiving victim or the victim must be *willing* to forgive when the offender repents. It is also vital to understand that a betrayal, because of the serious nature of such an offense, generally prevents *full* reconciliation of the relationship as it existed prior to the betrayal because the bond of trust was destroyed. In many cases—including abuse, sexual immorality, drug addition, alcoholism, criminal behavior, fraud, or treachery—it is not necessarily prudent to seek *full* reconciliation. (For more information about offenses and reconciliation, refer to the CBCG booklet titled “*OFFENSES—Ordinances of God*.”)

Chapter 4

Matthew 19:9 Adultery & Sexual Immorality

There has been confusion about one particular scripture that some mistakenly believe limits divorce to adultery¹⁹:

“And I [Jesus Christ] say to you, whoever shall divorce his wife, except it be for sexual immorality [including adultery], and shall marry another, is committing adultery; and the one who marries her who has been divorced is committing adultery” (Matt. 19:9).

There are two terms critical to the exegesis of this verse: adultery and sexual immorality. While adultery was mentioned previously, it is included here:

DEFINITION: *Adultery* is intentional SEXUAL BETRAYAL of a spouse by a person under a marital covenant and a person outside of that covenant.

DEFINITION: *Sexual immorality* (Greek *porneia*) includes adultery, homosexuality, prostitution, pornography, incest, lust, idolatry, etc. These are sins whether they are committed *physically* or *spiritually*.

After a careful reading of this scripture, notice that there are two parts (separated by a semicolon). The first part states that a husband who divorces his wife when she is NOT GUILTY of sexual immorality (sexual immorality is the *exception*) and marries another woman is committing adultery. The stated exception grammatically implies that the man is divorcing his wife *without a cause* because he wants to marry another woman. In other words, the MOTIVE for divorce is his lust for another woman. His subsequent marriage to the other woman would be,

¹⁹ Compare with Matthew 5:27-32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18.

“And to **Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant**; and to sprinkling of *the* blood of *ratification*, proclaiming superior things than *that of* Abel” (Heb. 12:24).

“And *may* the **God** of peace, Who raised our Lord Jesus from among *the* dead—that great Shepherd of the sheep—**through *the* blood of *the* everlasting covenant, perfect you** in every good work in order that you may do His will; accomplishing in you that which *is* well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to Whom *be the* glory **into *the* ages of eternity**. Amen” (Heb. 13:20-21).

Understanding that the covenant of salvation unto eternal life with God is a marital covenant is absolutely crucial. This new covenant requires a personal vow of love, faithfulness, trust, and obedience to God. Because of this, it is obvious that sexual immorality is, just as with the old (marriage) covenant, a metaphor for all wicked behavior that violates, betrays, and breaks (without repentance) the new marital covenant with God. Obviously, that involves much more than physical sexual sins.

There is, however, one subtle difference between the old and new covenants. The old covenant was a full marriage covenant. In simple terms, the ancient Israelites were fully wedded to God. However, those of the new covenant are not yet married to God³¹; instead, they are betrothed:

“For I am jealous over you with *the* jealousy of God because **I have espoused you to one husband, so that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ**” (2 Cor. 11:2).

This is also why the new covenant is a MARITAL covenant and not a full MARRIAGE covenant. The difference being that a marital (“pertaining” to marriage) covenant is not yet finalized with a wedding. Regardless, the terms of the covenant are fixed

³¹ Also Matthew 22:3-13; 25:1-13; Ephesians 5:23-27; Revelation 19:7-9.

LORD has **called you as a woman** forsaken and grieved in spirit, and **a wife of youth**, when you were rejected,' says your God. 'For a little moment I forsook you; but with great compassions I will gather you. In a little wrath I hid My face from you *for* a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,' says the LORD your Redeemer, 'For this *is* as the waters of Noah to Me; *for as* I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so I have sworn from being angry with you and from rebuking you; for the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from you, **nor shall the covenant of My peace be removed**,' says the LORD who has mercy on you" (Isa. 54:5-10).

Clearly the covenant with ancient Israel was a MARITAL COVENANT founded upon their vows of obedience²⁷ and love²⁸ in return for physical blessings²⁹. Under this context, their unfaithfulness was described as that of an idolatrous whore. For this very reason, sexual immorality can only mean general wickedness because physical sexual acts were definitely not the primary accusation as covered previously. Sexual acts outside of a marriage covenant are not the real problem because their sins were motivated by a heart that has turned aside from their vow of love, faithfulness, and trust.

In all regards, God's relationship with the ancient Israelites was that of a Husband and wife under a marriage covenant. This is also true of the new covenant of salvation unto eternal life³⁰:

²⁷ Exodus 19:8; Deuteronomy 27:10.

²⁸ Deuteronomy 11:13, 22.

²⁹ Deuteronomy 11:26-27.

³⁰ Also Hebrews 8:6-13; 10:16, 29.

most certainly, an adulterous marriage because the husband divorced his wife *without a cause*. That is certainly a betrayal of the marital covenant vow of love, faithfulness, and trust until death.

The fact that it was *without a cause* answers the original question posed by the Pharisees to Jesus Christ. Notice:

"Then the Pharisees came to Him and tempted Him, saying to Him, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife **for any cause?**'" (Matt. 19:3).

The Pharisees asked if a husband can divorce "for **any** cause." The answer is *no*, as Jesus confirmed by stating that a subsequent marriage is adultery unless there is a justifiable cause for divorce, such as sexual immorality. Interestingly, their original question was specifically about divorce; however, Jesus must have known their thoughts because He responded by addressing the legitimacy of a subsequent marriage. Lust for other women was apparently the real motive of the Pharisees.

Now examine the second part of verse 9:

"...and the one who marries her who has been divorced is committing adultery" (Matt. 19:9).

One might conclude that a man who marries ANY divorced woman is also committing adultery; however, that would be an absurd conclusion and is not supported in the scripture.

The only situation that makes sense, and the one that is grammatically supported, is if the wife truly was guilty of a betrayal, which was the situation here. In the first part, Jesus mentioned the exception—"except *it be* for sexual immorality." The second half of verse 9 addresses the exception by stating that a man who marries a divorced woman who was GUILTY of sexual immorality commits adultery. Here, Jesus addressed the *exception* from the first half. In the first half of verse 9, the wife had NOT committed sexual immorality.

In summary, Matthew 19:9 addresses two divorce cases: 1) a husband who divorces his wife *without a cause* in order to

marry another woman and, 2) a man who marries a divorced woman who committed *sexual immorality*. It does not limit justifiable divorce to adultery because Jesus Christ did *not* state that either divorce even *involved* adultery—the first had no legitimate cause and the second was due to sexual immorality. He only stated that the *subsequent marriages* are ADULTERY.

PRINCIPLE: A *subsequent marriage* to someone who divorced *without a cause* or someone who *betrayed* their marital vows is ADULTERY.

Sexual immorality (*porneia*) refers to a range of physical and spiritual sins. It includes, but is not limited to, adultery, homosexuality, prostitution, pornography, incest, lust, idolatry, etc. The fact that the subsequent marriages were adultery in no way infers that either betrayal was adultery. The first divorce was “without a cause” and the second was not specified other than it involved “sexual immorality.” Therefore, Matthew 19:9 does *not* in any way limit divorce to adultery.

This all leads to a question. Does the phrase “except it be” imply exclusivity? In other words, does *except* (“it be” was added) mean that there are no other allowable conditions for divorce aside from the broad range of sins that fall under the category of sexual immorality?

The word *except* comes from two Greek words: *ei me*. Literally, they translate to “if not” and are variously rendered as *except*, *but*, *unless*, *otherwise*, *only*, etc. as determined by the context. Many times *ei me* is used in the sense that the condition is exclusive to all else. An example of exclusivity would be Galatians 1:19 where Paul said, “I did not see any of the other apostles, except James.” In this case, Paul only saw the apostle James and no others.

But there are other scriptures where it is obvious *ei me* cannot be exclusive. For example:

“But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we wrote to them after deciding *that* they do not have to observe any

of fathers and slayers of mothers, for murderers, for fornicators [*porneis*], for homosexuals, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and for any other thing *that* is opposed to sound doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:9-10).

“But *the* cowardly, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators [*porneis*], and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone; which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8).

“But excluded [from the Kingdom] *are* dogs, and sorcerers, and fornicators [*porneis*], and murderers, and idolaters, and everyone who loves and devises a lie” (Rev. 22:15).

There is no question that sexual immorality is a metaphor for all wicked behavior that violates, betrays, and breaks (without repentance) a covenant with God.

God’s People are in a Marital Covenant

The covenant between God and the ancient Israelites was not one that solely obligated their obedience to the Law in return for physical blessings. It was a MARITAL relationship covenant.²⁶ Here are couple of scriptural examples:

“‘Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which covenant of Mine they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ says the LORD” (Jer. 31:32).

“‘For your Maker is your husband; the LORD of hosts is His name; and your Redeemer *is* the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall He be called, for the

²⁶ Also Jeremiah 2:2; 3:6-8, 14; Ezekiel 16:8-21, 28-32; Hosea 2:2-7.

jealousies, indignations, contentions, evil speakings, whisperings, puffings up, commotions; *and* that when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall grieve over many of **those who have already sinned**, and have not repented of the uncleanness and **sexual immorality [porneia]** and licentiousness [sexually promiscuity] that they have practiced” (2 Cor. 12:20-21).

“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*: adultery, **fornication [porneia]**, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, strifes, jealousies, indignations, contentions, divisions, sects, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such things as these; concerning which I am telling you beforehand, even as I have also said in the past, that those who do such things **shall not inherit the kingdom of God**” (Gal. 5:19-21).

“But **fornication [porneia]** and all uncleanness or covetousness, do not permit it even to be named among you, as is fitting for saints; nor filthiness, nor foolish talking or jesting, which are not becoming; but instead, thanksgiving. For this you know, that no fornicator, or unclean person, or covetous *person*, who is an idolater, **has any inheritance in the kingdom** of Christ and of God. Do not let anyone deceive you with vain words; for because of these things the **wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience**” Eph. 5:3-6).

“Therefore, put to death your members which *are* on earth—**sexual immorality [porneia]**, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil desires, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things, **the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience**” (Col. 3:5-6).

“Understanding this: that law is not enacted for a righteous man, but for *the* lawless and disobedient, for *the* ungodly and sinful, for *the* unholy and profane, for slayers

such thing [physical circumcision], **except** to keep themselves from things that are offered to idols, and *from* blood, and *from* what is strangled, and *from* sexual immorality” (Acts 21:25).

If this was an exclusive condition, then the believing Gentiles only had to refrain from eating meat sacrificed to animals, eating improperly slaughtered animal meat, and sexual immorality to be righteous. If the Gentiles only had to avoid these particular sins, the logical conclusion would be that they could then worship other gods, take God’s name in vain, ignore the Sabbath, murder, steal, lie, and covet. However, no one would seriously assert that this is what was intended in the Greek. Making a claim that Gentiles were not obligated to obey the same laws of God as the Jews (except for physical circumcision) is no less ridiculous than suggesting that Matthew 19:9 only allows for divorce when there is adultery. This is clear when considering the numerous major offenses that God says BETRAY a covenant vow including the broad term of sexual immorality. **Any** covenant is broken when the vows are BETRAYED.

For example, if a husband intentionally shoots his wife and she survives, would anyone seriously claim that the husband is not guilty of murder in his heart just because the result was technically only attempted murder? Would anyone argue that such an act of hate does not betray a marital vow of love, faithfulness, and trust? Above all, would anyone maintain that the husband and wife are still bound by a marital covenant? A husband who harbors that much hatred toward his wife absolutely BETRAYS his marital covenant vow of love, faithfulness, and trust.

Moreover, no one enters into a marital covenant by vowing, “I am allowed to commit every sin *except* for adultery (or sexual immorality).” That would be completely absurd—a vow that would be rejected by God; however, this is essentially what someone is saying when they construe Matthew 19:9 to mean that a marriage can only be betrayed by adultery.

Love is the FULFILLMENT of God's Law²⁰. While no marriage is free from occasional offenses, divorce can be certainly justified for any major offense that betrays the vows and bond of trust in a marriage—it is not limited to adultery or sexual immorality.

1 Corinthians 7— God's Ordinances & Paul's Judgments

There are several scriptures in 1 Corinthians 7 pertaining to marriage and divorce that need some explanation. This chapter was Paul's response to a letter from the Corinthians about abstaining from marriage in order to more fully dedicate themselves to God (verse 1). It was also influenced by the case of sexual immorality between a man and his stepmother (chapter 5) and the failure of the local church to judge such matters; instead, they were addressing them in civil court (chapter 6). In chapter 7, he clarifies the ordinances of Christ pertaining to common marital situations as well as adding his own personal judgment in certain cases.

Paul begins by emphasizing that marriage is the only acceptable union for physical sexual relations:

“Now concerning the things that you wrote to me, *saying, ‘It is good for a man not to touch a woman,’ I say this: Rather, to avoid sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband*. Let the husband render *his* conjugal dues to *his* wife, and in the same way also the wife to *her* husband. The wife does not have power over her own body, but the husband; and in the same way also, the husband does not have power over his own body, but the wife. **Do not deprive one another of conjugal dues, except it be by consent for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to fasting and prayer; and then come together again as**

²⁰ Romans 13:8, 10.

Our covenant relationship with God is unique, special, and holy. This is emphasized by an Old Testament word that is difficult to understand in the English language: *checed* or *hesed*. It is typically translated as *mercy*, but the full meaning cannot be captured in a single word. While it is beyond the scope here, the intention of *hesed* can be somewhat described as COVENANT LOYALTY. God keeps *hesed* and expects the same with those in covenant with Him. We can only begin to understand how God feels when betrayed by someone in a covenant with Him. This is why *sexual immorality* comes before *wickedness*—it is wickedness that occurs WITHIN A COVENANT. For this reason, sexual immorality is used as an overarching metaphor for all unrighteous behavior by someone in a covenant with God.

Interestingly, verse 31 includes another reference to covenants—*implacable*. It literally means “without libation,” which was something used in a ceremony to dedicate a treaty. So, clearly, anything that violates a covenant is abhorrent to God. Again and again, the Bible views all sin, evil, and unrighteousness from the perspective of a covenant relationship with God and a betrayal is an abomination to Him.

In addition to Romans 1:29-30, other scriptures list many more abominations that betray a covenant. Read the following scriptures and notice in particular the one common denominator in all of them—sexual immorality (*porneia*)—and practicing such things ends in the second death:

“Don't you know that **the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?** Do not be deceived; neither **fornicators** [*porneia*], nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor abusers of themselves as women, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit *the* kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

“But I fear that when I come, perhaps I may find you *in a state* such as I do not wish, and I may be found by you such as you do not wish; that *there may be* strifes,

evil dispositions; whisperers, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things *and practices*; disobedient to parents ..." (Rom 1:29-30).

Notice in particular that each of these sins is a state of mind that is "ALL unrighteousness"; that is, the perpetrator is wicked and practicing evil. God will absolutely not establish a covenant with anyone who commits such sins. Not only that, the sins listed above are so egregious to God that every one of them violates or betrays a covenant. This is made plain in the next verse:

"Void of understanding, **covenant-breakers**, without natural affection, implacable *and* unmerciful" (Rom. 1:31).

Anyone practicing any of these sins is not only lacking in godly understanding and a covenant-breaker, but does not even possess the most basic of human emotions—natural affection for others. Without repentance and overcoming using God's Holy Spirit, the end result will be eternal death:

"Who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that **those who commit such things are worthy of death**, not only practice these things themselves, but also approve of those who commit *them*" (Rom. 1:32).

It is interesting that the list of sins in verses 29-30 begins with SEXUAL IMMORALITY (*porneia*), which is followed by WICKEDNESS (*poneria*). One might imagine that the order is reversed; however, the reason for the given order comes back to having a covenant relationship with God. Any covenant with God is similar to a marriage founded upon love, faithfulness, and trust. With that consideration, sexual immorality describes an utter disregard for His covenant whereas wickedness does not necessarily involve a covenant. In other words, the greater abomination is sexual immorality (wickedness) in a covenant than wickedness that is done without a covenant.

one, so that Satan will not tempt you through your lack of self-control. Now I say this by permission, and not by command. For **I wish that all men might be even as myself. But each one has his own gift from God**; one *is* this way, and another *is* that way. Now I say to the unmarried and to the widows *that* it is good for them if they can remain even as I *am*. **But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; because it is better to marry than to burn with sexual desire**" (1 Cor. 7:1-9).

Paul emphasizes the importance of the marriage estate in avoiding the temptations of sexual immorality (*porneia*) and, to that end, reminds them of the conjugal duties that are part of any marriage. (Note that both the husband and wife are believers as indicated by the fact that they devote themselves from time to time to fasting and prayer—verse 5.) While he wished everyone was able to control their natural sexual desires, he portrays marriage as a natural and acceptable union established by God.

Next, Paul turns his attention to a marriage between believers where they are considering separating:

"And to those who are married I *give this charge, yet not I*, but the Lord: Do not let *the* wife be separated from *her* husband. (But if she does separate, let her **remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband**.) And *the* husband is **not to divorce his wife**" (1 Cor. 7:10-11).

While we are not told the reason behind the separation, one possibility is that the motive of the men was to better serve God. If true, it showed disregard for their vows to their wives because they were, at the very least, withholding their conjugal dues. Regardless of the reasons, it was a cause of strife, temptations, or offense.

What is known is that they had *not* divorced, so no covenant betrayal is involved. Instead, they were allowed to separate but not to divorce. This is a "charge [from] the Lord" (verse 10) so it is an ordinance commanded by Christ and, even though these verses mention the wife separating, it applies

equally to a husband who wants to separate from his wife.

The reason Christ laid this charge is because it is a marriage between believers. Married believers are in covenant with each other, having pronounced vows of love, faithfulness, and trust to each other before God. This includes their conjugal dues that show love and prevent the temptations of Satan.

Believers are also in covenant with God and have a much greater responsibility to reconcile offenses. God only allows divorce because people can be hardhearted²¹ and refuse to reconcile with each other or by committing serious betrayals. Believers are expected to first avoid offenses and then, when they arise, reconcile with each other in humility and love.

It is important to understand that this is not a case for divorce, which is allowed when the marital covenant is betrayed. Instead, the focus is on the marital commitments between a husband and wife. Honoring the vows of the marriage covenant requires reconciling offenses between each other. In the absence of a betrayal, a husband and wife can separate from each other until they reconcile, but they are **not** to DIVORCE.

PRINCIPLE: Divorce is not a legitimate recourse for every problem or offense that occurs in marriage, even if the issue is highly emotional and distressful.

Separation, however, is only permitted with one condition: “let her [and him] remain **unmarried**” (verse 11). This phrase in no way suggests the separation is the result of a betrayal because they are commanded “**not** to divorce.” Instead, a husband and wife who are separated must either reconcile or remain as if they were unmarried. In other words, while separated they are not to dishonor their marital covenant, which is binding for life. This also means they are not to divorce even if the separation is long-term. Barring a covenant betrayal, married believers must endeavor to reconcile and end the separation (reconcile). Divorce is absolutely out of the question.

²¹ Matthew 19:8.

An important aspect of the metaphor includes drinking from the whore’s cup containing the wine of her sexual immorality (fornication). Drinking from a cup of wine seals a covenant as is the case with Passover:

“In like manner, *He* also *took* the cup after *He* had supped, saying, ‘**This is the [wine] cup of the New Covenant** in My blood ...’ ” (1 Cor. 11:25).

Using a cup of wine (which represents a blood sacrifice) to seal a covenant is not limited to the Passover ceremony. In fact, Paul also makes the observation that being joined in whoredom is a marriage covenant relationship:

“**WHAT! Don’t you know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body? For He says, ‘The two shall be one flesh’**” (1 Cor. 6:16).

The phrase “the two shall be one flesh” is referring to a marriage covenant. When “all nations” drink the wine cup in Revelation 17 and 18, they are sealing their covenant with the great whore.

Covenant Breakers

Worship of the beast and fornication with the great whore mirror the idolatry and harlotry of the Old Testament. Called *abominations*, idolatry and harlotry are declarations of all that is wickedness, evil, and sin against God. Similarly, the New Testament portrays abominations as SEXUAL IMMORALITY (with the various forms of the Greek *porneia*). Understanding this provides a perspective of the broad meaning, but the New Testament also clearly specifically calls out their abominations just as it was done in the Old Testament:

“Being filled with **all unrighteousness**, [including] **sexual immorality [porneia], wickedness [poneria]**, covetousness, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, guile,

drunk with the wine of her fornication [porneias].’ Then he carried me away in *the* spirit to a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet beast that had seven heads and ten horns, full of names of blasphemy. And the woman *was* clothed in purple and scarlet, and *was* adorned with gold and pearls and precious stones; *and* she had a **golden cup** in her hand, **filled with abominations and the filthiness of her fornication [porneias]**; And across her forehead a name *was* written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE **HARLOTS** AND OF THE **ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH**. And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And after seeing her, I wondered with great amazement’ ” (Rev. 17:1-6).

Not only are the leaders of nations described as having immoral sexual relations with the great whore, but the entire world as well (verse 2). There is a fanatical dedication to the great whore and they are said to be “**drunk** with the wine of her fornication.” In other words, they not only commit their lives to the whore, but they are zealous in their lustful pursuit of her evil ways. Being “drunk” indicates that they fully indulge in the sins of the whore.

Sexual immorality is clearly mirrored in the New Testament and upheld as an abomination to God with the same revulsion found in the Old Testament. However, it is much more than just the world willfully and zealously following the whore. They are also IN COVENANT with her! Take note of the mention that she has a golden cup that holds the “wine of her fornication.” This is again mentioned in chapter 18:

“Because **all nations have drunk of the wine** of the fury of her **fornication [porneias]**, and the kings of the earth have **committed fornication [eporneusan]** with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the power of her luxury” (Rev. 18:3).

Even though Paul discourages separation (by his parenthetical comment in verse 11), in allowing it he recognizes that giving each other time and space is sometimes necessary to help people reconcile. It allows time to think, to meditate, and for an opportunity to draw closer to God so that their decisions are guided with godly wisdom, humility, and love.

Up to this point, the discussions have been about two married believers. Now, Paul himself makes a judgment (not Christ, i.e., “not the Lord”) in marriage between a believer and an unbeliever.²²

“Now to the rest, I, not the Lord, say *this*: If any **brother has an unbelieving wife, and she consents to dwell with him, let him not divorce her**. And if a **woman has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to dwell with her, let her not divorce him**. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the husband; otherwise, your children would be unclean, but now they are holy” (1 Cor. 7:12-14).

The word *consent* means to *think well* of each other. So, Paul describes a peaceful cohabitation between the husband and wife wherein one is a believer and the other is not. The fact that one is an unbeliever is not a circumstance in itself that requires or justifies divorce.

PRINCIPLE: The Bible clearly advocates for continuing a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever that is a peaceful cohabitation.

So why is this a judgment of Paul and not an ordinance of Christ? Because it involves an unbeliever who is not under covenant to obey God. It would be difficult to establish a biblical ordinance for people who are ignorant of, or refuse to obey,

²² The terms *believer* and *unbeliever* are used in keeping with Scripture (Luke 12:46; Acts 5:14; 1 Corinthians 6:6; 14:23; 2 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Timothy 4:12) to distinguish between those who are baptized members of the Body of Christ and those who are not.

God's Law. Such matters must be judged on a case-by-case basis according to godly wisdom and guided the Holy Spirit.

Paul continues the discussion of a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever by addressing one that is *not* peaceful:

“But if the unbelieving husband or wife separates, let him or her separate. The believing brother or sister is not bound in such cases; for God has called us to peace. But how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?” (1 Cor. 7:15-16).

In the instance where the unbelieving mate separates, Paul says the believing spouse is “not bound” (Gk. *ou dedoulotai*). What does he mean by this? The word literally means *not bound* or *loosed* in the strongest sense of a slave being freed from a master. Because the topic is an unbeliever who separates from his or her spouse, it means that the believing husband or wife is not *bound*, or obligated, to live together if the relationship is not peaceful. This is particularly the case where the unbeliever is hostile toward God, demands complete subservience of the believing spouse, or requires the believer to put the unbelieving spouse before God.

Even though Paul is not specifically addressing a divorce situation caused by a covenant betrayal, it is one in which there is great strife and conflict. Because the unbeliever does not accept the way of life to which the believing spouse has been called, separation is allowed and, perhaps, even recommended. Still, the hope is for reconciliation (“God has called us to [make] peace”) and, ultimately, that the unbeliever will become a converted child of God (verse 16). As in the case of married believers, a period of separation can be helpful for the purpose of reconciliation between a married believer and an unbeliever.

However, if the unbeliever refuses to reconcile after a reasonable period of separation and sincere attempts to resolve the issues, it could be that the situation deteriorates to one that is no longer peaceable. This might be the case if the unbeliever

or of the stranger who lives in Israel, **who separates himself from Me and sets up his idols in his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face,** and comes to a prophet to ask of him concerning Me; I the LORD will answer him Myself” ’ ” (Ezekiel 14:3-7).

Idolatry and harlotry are abominations to God and He uses these metaphors as warnings to repent and obey His Law. As Ezekiel 44:7 says, “they have **broken My covenant because of all your abominations.**”

Even though sin, evil, and wickedness are specific terms for all that is against God, idolatry and harlotry are metaphors for the same. They are abominations to God and the worst of all accusations because they violate a covenant with Him as is clear with the ancient Israelites.

NT: Porneia—Sexual Immorality

In transitioning to the New Testament, we find the same metaphoric warnings. However, instead of idolatry and harlotry the Bible uses SEXUAL IMMORALITY (Greek, *porneia*). Notice:

“And they worshiped the dragon, who gave his authority to the beast. And they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast? Who has the power to make war against him?’ ” (Rev. 13:4).

Instead of idols made of wood, metal, or stone in the Old Testament, the New Testament prophesies worship of the dragon (Satan) and the beast. It continues to describe the relationship of the world with these two evil beings as one with a prostitute:

“And one of the seven angels who had the seven vials came and spoke with me, saying to me, ‘Come here; I will show you the judgment of the great whore who sits upon many waters; With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication [eporneusan, a verb form of porneia], and those who dwell on the earth were made

God. (Interestingly enough, the Hebrew word for *abomination* also allows for the additional meaning of idolatry even though it is never translated as such.)

DEFINITION: *Sin* is a VIOLATION of God's Law.

DEFINITION: *Evil* is the RESULT of sin.

DEFINITION: Anyone who *practices doing evil* is WICKED.

Why is all this important? It boils down to covenants with God. IDOLATRY denotes a dedication to a way of life against God whereas HARLOTRY typifies the strongest of human desires and motives. In other words, idolatry indicates the priority of one's life where harlotry describes the lustful pursuit of it.

DEFINITION: *Idolatry* is a metaphor for anything that is ABOVE GOD in importance or focus.

DEFINITION: *Harlotry* is a metaphor for zealously PRACTICING WICKEDNESS.

In a large sense, idolatry and harlotry are matters of the mind and heart. Notice the accusation by God in Ezekiel:

“Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I at all be inquired of by them? Therefore speak to them, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Every man of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and comes to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him according to the multitude of his idols: So that I may take the house of Israel in their own heart because they have deserted Me for their idols—all of them.”’ Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Repent and turn yourselves from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations. For every one of the house of Israel,

interferes with keeping God's holy days, disallows teaching the children of God's truth, withholds conjugal duties, creates a financial hardship, prevents access to the children, etc. Circumstances such as these can become betrayals of the marriage covenant. This is certainly the case if the unbelieving spouse inhibits or prevents the believing spouse from obeying God's commandments. The covenant of baptism with God takes precedence over anyone else in a believer's life.

When these things occur, the believer is not condemned by God if they sincerely tried to reconcile or had no part in the betrayal of the marriage covenant. In other words, the believer is not responsible or under God's judgment for keeping His commandments when there is a conflict with a spouse, even if it results in dissolution of the marriage.

The last scripture that bears some discussion concerns the binding and loosing of a man and woman:

“Now concerning virgins, I do not have a command from *the Lord*; but I give *my* judgment, as one who has received mercy from *the Lord* to be faithful. Therefore, I think this *judgment* is good because of the present distress: that *it is* good for a man to remain [unmarried] as he is. Have you been **bound** to a wife? Do not seek to be **loosed**. Have you been **loosed** from a wife? Do not seek a wife. However, if you have married, you have not sinned; and if a virgin has married, she has not sinned. Yet those *who marry* shall have distress in the flesh, but I *wish* to spare you” (1 Cor. 7:25-28).

The word *bound* (Gk. *dedesai*) in verse 27 is different from the one used in verse 15. Here (and Romans 7:2), the discussion is about a relationship between a man and woman who desired to be joined in marriage. In other words, they are bound not against their will but, rather, they were in agreement with each other.

In fact, this Greek word for *bound* can also mean *betrothed* or *pledged* to a marriage. So, Paul is not speaking of a

marriage established upon covenant vows because dissolution of a marital covenant requires a divorce, which is not the same as being *loosed* (released). This is clear because he does not condemn either being *bound* or being *loosed*.

Verse 28 firmly establishes that this is about betrothal: “**if** you have married, you have not sinned.” In other words, Paul was reassuring them that they are not sinning if they get married even though an unmarried person can more fully dedicate themselves to God (“I wish *that* all men might be even as myself”—verse 7). However, he reminds them that remaining celibate is also not an ability God gives to everyone (“each one has his own gift from God”—verse 7). Continuing, Paul said:

“There is also a difference in attitude between a wife and a virgin. An unmarried woman [the virgin] is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married has concerns about the things of this world—how she may please *her* husband. Now I am telling you this for your own benefit; not to place a snare in your way, but to *show you what is suitable, so that you may be devoted to the Lord without distraction*. But if anyone thinks that *his* behavior toward his virgin [to whom the man is betrothed] is not right, and if she is in *the prime of life*, and so *thinks* he ought to *marry*, let him do as he desires; he is not sinning. Let them marry. ... So then, the one who marries does well, but the one who does not marry does better” (1 Cor. 7:34-36, 38).

Paul differentiates a wife and a virgin in verse 34. A virgin refers to a woman who has never been married—she is not a “full” wife yet, not having committed vows or consummated the marriage. Thus, the phrase “**his** virgin” refers to the woman to whom a man is betrothed (verse 36); that is, they are not yet married.

Paul is discussing is a BETROTHAL between a man and a woman. In simple terms, a betrothal is an agreement between a

mountains, and under every green tree, and under every thick oak, the places where they offered sweet incense to all **their idols**’ ” (Ezekiel 6:3-13).

In addition to idolatry, verse 9 paints a picture of the Israelites having a “whoring heart” and “whoring eyes” as they actively pursue their idolatry. God expressly identifies this as “evils which they have committed in all their **abominations**”—which is nothing less than intentional and unrestrained wicked behavior. Clearly, idolatry and harlotry (a form of sexual immorality) refer to a broad range of wicked behaviors that are abominable to God. The accusations of spiritual immorality in Ezekiel 6:3-13 is the concluding condemnation of a list of the sins of ancient Israel:

“ ‘And she [Israel] has **rebelled against My ordinances in doing wickedness** more than the nations, and **against My statutes** more than the countries that *are* all around her; for they have **rejected My judgments and My laws**; they have not walked in them.’ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Because you have **multiplied disobedience** more than the nations that *are* all around you, and have **not walked in My laws, neither have kept My judgments**, nor have done according to the judgments of the nations all around you;’ therefore thus says the Lord GOD; ‘Behold, I, even I, *am* against you, and will carry out judgments in the sight of the nations. And I will do in you that which I have not done, and the like of which I will never do again **because of all your abominations**’ ” (Ezek. 5:6-9).

God denounces Israel for not keeping His laws, statutes, and judgments and called them abominations. Obviously, this covers every sin, which is portrayed as idolatry and framed by harlotry (immoral sexual behavior). This is the case even if the sin has nothing to do with sexual acts. Translated *abominations*, the Hebrew word means anything that is abhorrent and vile to

hills, to the rivers and to the valleys, “Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your **high places [where you worship idols]**. And your **altars [of sacrifice to idols]** shall be desolate, and your **incense altars [place of prayers to an idol]** shall be broken. And I will make your slain fall before **your idols**. And I will put the dead bodies of the children of Israel before **their idols**; and I will scatter your bones around **your altars**. In all the places where you live, the cities shall be laid waste, and the **high places** shall be desolate; so that **your altars** may be laid waste and become desolate, and **your idols** may be broken and cease, and your **incense altars** may be cut down, and your works may be abolished. And the slain shall fall in the midst of you, and you shall know that I *am* the LORD. Yet I will leave a remnant that may be *left* to you—*some* who escape the sword among the nations, when you are scattered throughout the countries. And those of you who escape shall remember Me among the nations where they shall be exiled, how I have been grieved by **their whoring heart [desiring after idols]** which has departed from Me, and with their **whoring eyes [seeking after idols]** which go after **their idols**. And they shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their **abominations [ALL that is evil to God]**. And they shall know that I *am* the LORD, *and that* I have not said in vain that I would bring this evil upon them.” Thus says the Lord GOD, “Strike with your hand and stamp with your foot, and say, ‘Alas, for all the **evil abominations** of the house of Israel! For they shall fall by the sword, and by the famine, and by the plague. He who is afar off shall die of the plague; and he who is near shall fall by the sword; and he who remains and is under siege shall die by the famine. Thus I will fulfill My fury upon them. Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD, when their dead shall be among **their idols** all around **their altars**, on every high hill, in all the tops of the

man and woman to marry, but covenant vows have not been established. For this reason, a man and woman can jointly annul a betrothal without the consequences of a broken marital covenant.

Evidently (verse 1), some of the Corinthians wanted to be loosed from their betrothal so they could better serve God; however, they were concerned that it would be wrong not to marry the women to whom they were betrothed. (Betrothal was, in times past, a serious commitment although it was not established with covenant vows.) Paul recognized that an unmarried man or woman is better able to serve God; but, he advised the Corinthian men that if they believed that annulment of their betrothal “is not right,” then they should marry (verse 36). This is in keeping with James 4:17 that states, “Therefore, if anyone knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.” Failure to do something that one would consider to be good is the same as a sin.

The bottom line is that verse 27 is not concerned with divorce; instead, it addresses the binding and loosing of a premarital betrothal agreement in which no covenant vows have been exchanged.

Marrying Outside the Body of Christ

One subject that has produced entrenched opinions is a believer marrying an unbeliever. Those who are absolutely against it will, at times, condemn believers who marry outside the Body of Christ. The subject of such judgments often become defensive, and even apologetic, of their decision and their spouse. Beyond the fact that entering into any marriage covenant is a choice that belongs solely to the husband and wife (discussed in Chapter 1), it is important to know what the Bible says about the matter.

In general, those who are opposed to a believer marrying an unbeliever use two main arguments. The first, from the OT, can be encapsulated in these scriptures:

“When the LORD your God shall bring you into the land where you go to possess it and has cast out many nations before you—the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you—and the LORD your God shall deliver them up to you, you shall crush them, and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. **Nor shall you make marriages with them.** You shall not give your daughter to his son, nor shall you take his daughter to your son, For they will turn away your sons from following Me so that they may serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and will destroy you suddenly” (Deut. 7:1-4).

God specifically warns against the ancient Israelites marrying any of the inhabitants of Canaan because they would turn their hearts away from God to serving idols. There are many such warnings throughout the OT. In fact, it was such a problem that the LORD eventually divorced the ancient Israelites because of idolatry.

There are, however, several problems with using this to claim that God forbids marriage to an unbeliever. The first is that this did not apply to all pagan peoples. God was concerned with those nations specifically listed in verse 1 because they were acutely wicked and He planned to destroy them for that reason, not just so that the ancient Israelites could have their land. In other words, God singled them out from other nations for destruction and did not want ancient Israel to have any dealings with them. Other nations were treated quite differently:

“When you come near a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace to it. And it shall be, if it makes the answer of peace and opens to you, then all the people found in it shall be forced laborers to you, and they shall serve you. But if it will make no peace with you, but will

APPENDIX A

Porneia Means More Than Physical Sexual Immorality

Physical *sexual immorality* encompasses sins such as fornication, adultery, homosexuality, prostitution, pornography, incest, lust, etc. However, in both the Hebrew and Greek, it also figuratively means *idolatry* even though they are never translated as such. Not only is this captured in the dictionary meanings, it is clearly established in the allegorical usage of sexual immorality in both the Old Testament and New Testament. Throughout the Bible, sexual immorality refers to ALL WICKEDNESS even though most often no actual sexual acts are involved.

Fundamentally, God’s relationship with mankind is founded upon covenants. God’s involvement with mankind, beyond the imparting of physical life, always requires a covenant. It is such an essential component that even covenants between people, including marriage, that are established with God as Witness and Judge are upheld to the same standards. It is important to understand the broad scope of sins behind sexual immorality because it is a serious matter indeed when anyone violates, betrays, and breaks a covenant with Him.

OT: Idolatry & Harlotry

A major theme in the Old Testament is God pronouncing the terrible sins of ancient Israel. Emphasis becomes increasingly harsh in the later writings of the major and minor prophets. Notice one of many such warnings wherein their sins against the covenant are described as idolatry and harlotry²⁵:

“And say, ‘Mountains of Israel, hear the Word of the Lord God. Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains, and to the

²⁵ Also Ezekiel 14:3-6; 16:15-36; 20:27-30; 23:2-21.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

“Let marriage be held honorable by all,” said Paul (Hebrews 13:4). God intended marriage to be a lifetime commitment between a husband and wife and He holds vows to the highest standards of love, faithfulness, and trust. The marital covenant reflects the eternal marriage of Jesus Christ and the Church. True Christians who desire to enter into an eternal covenant with God are warned to “count the cost” (Luke 14:28)—and so, too, should all who enter into a marital covenant.

The reality, though, is that the human “heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9), and marriage all too often ends in divorce. Breaking one’s vows is a serious major offense (betrayal) and reconciliation is an obligation for all offenses to the extent possible or prudent. Regardless of who committed the betrayal, there is a responsibility on the part of both the offender and victim²³.

Those who go through a divorce have a heavy burden. While the sin of a betrayal is serious, both the offender and victim have a responsibility. God requires them to be *willing* to reconcile even though it is not always possible or prudent to fully restore the previous relationship²⁴. Repentance to the victim is required of the offender and the victim is obligated to forgive when the offender repents, at least to the extent that they are no longer enemies.

Whether offender or victim, reconciliation is also necessary prior to a subsequent marriage because an unreconciled betrayal is a sin that will indeed weigh heavily upon any new relationship.

²³ Matthew 6:14-15; 18:23-35.

²⁴ Refer to the booklet at www.cbcbg.org titled “OFFENSES—Ordnances of God” for dealing with offenses.

make war against you, then you shall besiege it. And when the LORD your God has delivered it into your hands, you shall strike every male of it with the edge of the sword. But the women, and the little ones, and the animals, and all that is in the city, all the spoil of it, you shall take to yourself. And you shall eat the spoil of your enemies, which the LORD your God has given you. So you shall do to all the cities which are very far off from you, which are not of the cities of these nations. But of the cities of these people, which the LORD your God gives you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes. But you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites; as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done to their gods. So you would sin against the LORD your God” (Deut. 20:10-18).

Those nations listed in Deuteronomy 7:1 were singled out for destruction; however, God differentiated those nations that were “very far off” and allowed the ancient Israelites to either make peace with them or to destroy the men and keep the women for servants or wives.

Sadly, one of the main reasons for marrying outside the Body of Christ is of the difficulty finding a truly converted and suitable mate. There are many obstacles these days, including the scattered locations of brethren and significant doctrinal differences among believers. It is interesting that those who are opposed to anyone marrying an unbeliever fail to consider that Joseph, the youngest son of Jacob, married an Egyptian or that David and Jesus Christ were descended from Ruth, a Moabitess.

The second argument used against marrying an unbeliever is usually along the lines of:

“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. **For what do righteousness and lawlessness have in common?** And what fellowship *does* light *have* with darkness? And **what union does Christ have with Belial?** Or what part *does* a believer *have* with an unbeliever? And what agreement *is there between* a temple of God and idols? For you are a temple of *the* living God, exactly as God said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from the midst of them and be separate,’ says *the* Lord, ‘and touch not *the* unclean, and I will receive you; And I shall be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,’ says *the* Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

Specifically, Paul is talking about those who live righteously (God’s “sons and daughters”—verse 18) engaging with those who are utterly lawless. He makes the point by comparing Christ and Satan (Belial). So, to claim that Paul’s statement, “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers” applies to marriage is not only out of context, but is completely contrary to ANY marriage covenant with vows of love, faithfulness, and trust—even believers should not be unequally yoked.

The reality is that the Bible never forbids a believer marrying an unbeliever except the obvious unions such as to an atheist (God-hater), Satanist, lawless criminal, etc. To the contrary, Christ and Paul were seemingly more concerned about the temptations of sexual immorality for those who found it difficult to remain chaste (see the discussion on 1 Corinthians 7) as evidenced by the fact that they never forbid marrying an unbeliever. Which is better? To risk sinning because of our natural, God-given sexual desires (which also rules out children) or find a suitable mate that is an unbeliever? While marrying outside the Body of Christ requires the believer to consider the possible negative impact the unbeliever could have on their salvation, marrying another believer has its share of issues as well.

Ultimately, the decision to marry an unbeliever is the sole responsibility of the believer. As with any marriage, there should be a solid understanding by both the man and woman of the vows, commitments, beliefs, roles, expectations, plans, goals, etc., prior to marriage. These are vitally important for the marriage covenant.

However, even though the marital covenant is patterned after our covenant with God and Jesus Christ, it is not a covenant **with** God or Jesus Christ. A marriage covenant is between the husband and wife so it does not require either, or both, to be **in** the Body of Christ for God to honor it.

With that said, the things that concern a minister who is asked to perform a marriage remain unchanged whether either or both are believers. Counseling a man and woman for marriage is basically the same in all cases, including the importance of recognizing that their covenant vows are BEFORE God. (Recall that a true marriage is established **by** God because the covenant vows of love, faithfulness, and trust are witnessed and attested by Him.)