

What Constitutes Marriage?

The Bible teaches that remarriage while the previous spouse is still living is always adultery, with no exceptions. But what exactly is marriage? If there is a disagreement on what constitutes marriage, then there will necessarily be a disagreement on what constitutes the type of remarriage that is always adultery, for Jesus said that *“the one who marries her [who was] put away commits adultery”* (Matthew 19:9b). Even though two people may say they agree with the Biblical teaching that remarriage after divorce while the previous spouse is still living is always adultery, they will have opposing views if they disagree over what constitutes marriage. If one does not know what marriage is, then he will not know what adultery is.

The Bible clearly states that all who live in adultery, whose lifestyles are characterized by adultery, are unregenerate: *“Or do you not know that unjust ones will not inherit [the] kingdom of God? Do not be led astray, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous ones, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor plunderers shall inherit [the] kingdom of God”* (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). *“Now the works of the flesh are clearly revealed, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lustfulness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, fightings, jealousies, angers, rivalries, divisions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and things like these; of which I tell you beforehand, as I also said before, that the ones practicing such things will not inherit [the] kingdom of God”* (Galatians 5:19-21) *“Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled; but God will judge fornicators and adulterers”* (Hebrews 13:4). These verses show us how vitally important an accurate definition of marriage is. It is one of the most important things in Scripture, because a biblical view of marriage will automatically affect how one defines divorce, remarriage, and adultery. All of these are inseparably linked together, and thus they stand or fall together. If marriage is not defined with clear-cut exactness, then how can one give a clear and unambiguous answer to how one defines adultery? Furthermore, how can any laws pertaining to marriage even be obeyed if no one knows exactly what marriage is? And since this is such an important topic, so much so that any who live in violation of it are unregenerate, would God leave the definition of marriage ambiguous, or would He clearly spell it out in His Word?

What constitutes marriage? What creates, forms, establishes, makes, begins, commences a marriage? If one looks to the world and society for its answers, one would come up with a list that includes but may not be limited to the following: an oral or written commitment or vow (some say it can be private, some say it must be public), a marriage ceremony (some say it can be private, some say it must be public; some say it must be officiated by a “church” minister, some say it must at least be officiated by someone recognized by the government), and/or a marriage certificate or license or some other paperwork in which the government recognizes and sanctions the union. Sexual intercourse is usually, but not always, seen as a completion or consummation of marriage. Some religionists say that a man and woman are not married in God’s eyes if that marriage has not been recognized by the laws of the land in which the couple lives. Thus, they would say that in the United States, a legal marriage is only binding with the necessary paperwork, and God supposedly honors those laws as well. (Obviously, there are huge problems with this view, as the “powers that be” here in the United States say that remarriage after divorce is not adultery, while Jesus says that it is.)

But should marriage be defined by societal or cultural conventions? What happens if a couple is married according to one culture and moves to another culture but has not met the required conditions of the other culture? Does that annul the marriage? Should marriage be defined by men's definitions of what an oral or written "commitment" or "vow" or "covenant" should include? What happens if the wording is not adequate to someone? Does that annul the marriage? What happens if the statement is not made in public with the requisite amount of witnesses according to man-made rules? Does that annul the marriage? What if there is no ceremony or if the ceremony does not include all the components that someone requires? Does that annul the marriage? And if the marriage is annulled by any of these things, then is the man now free to enter into a "legitimate" marriage with another woman, or vice versa?

As with any other issue regarding life and godliness, Christians do not get their answers from men but from God. We will get our definition of marriage from God's Word, not from tradition or from what the world calls marriage. When we get our definition from the Bible, we will know that we have the right definition of marriage and, by extension, the right definition of adultery and adulterers.

Before we get into the Biblical definition of marriage, we need to say that everything that the non-Christian does is sin (Proverbs 21:4). So even if two married non-Christians are not living in adultery, their marriage union is not pleasing to God. God hates all workers of iniquity (Psalm 5:5-6). This article is in no way intended to say that if a non-Christian abides by any of God's marriage laws it is somehow pleasing to God. It is not.

There is another important concept to note as we read what the Bible says about marriage. The Hebrew and Greek words that are translated "husband" and "wife" are the same Hebrew and Greek words that are translated "man" and "woman" in other places. In other words, there is no difference between "husband" and "man" and between "wife" and "woman" in the Hebrew and Greek. Thus, when we encounter the English words "husband" or "wife," we will put its literal translation in these { } kinds of brackets.

Now let us look into what the Bible says regarding the definition of marriage. The first thing we need to look for are specific commands dealing with the components of marriage. As we look through the Bible, do we find even one command for an oral or written commitment or vow, whether public or private? Do we find even one command for a marriage ceremony, whether public or private, whether officiated by a minister or a member of the government? Do we find even one command for a marriage certificate or license or some other paperwork in which the government recognizes and sanctions the union? We find none of these, not even once. Now if there are no such commands, what does this tell us about how God defines marriage? It tells us that God's definition of marriage includes none of these things, and that to require these things is to be "*teaching [as] doctrines the commandments of men*" (Mark 7:7). Even those who claim to believe in the Regulative Principle of Worship (i.e., that in worship we are to do only what is commanded and are not to do what is not commanded) will add these non-commanded elements to a "marriage service."

But what does God say?

The first mention of marriage comes in the first book of the Bible. Let us take a look at the one-flesh union definition given to us in the book of Genesis:

“And the man said, This now at last is bone from my bones, and flesh from my flesh. For this shall be called Woman, because this has been taken out of man. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife {lit. woman} and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:23-24).

In this passage we see that because Eve was taken out of Adam – and thus she is bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh – a man is to therefore leave his father and mother and to cleave to his woman. The result of this “cleaving” is that they “*shall become one flesh.*” Being one flesh is an explanation of what cleaving is. What is this “cleaving” that makes a man and a woman one flesh? To cleave in a one-flesh union means to have sexual intercourse with. This is the passage in God’s Word that defines marriage. This is God’s Law - His explicit prescription for marriage. Its place as the definitive passage regarding the constitution of marriage is shown to be certain by the New Testament passages that refer to this passage (see Matthew 19:5; 1 Corinthians 6:16). Where, in this definition of marriage, is there a statement, a marriage ceremony, a minister, or a marriage license?

Let us now go into some Old Testament examples of marriage. Please note that historical examples do not equal prescription.

“And Sarai said to Abram, See, now, Jehovah has kept me from bearing; go in now to my slave-girl; perhaps I may be built up from her. And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. And Sarai, Abram’s wife {lit. woman}, took her slave-girl, Hagar, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband {lit. man} Abram to be his wife {lit. woman}, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan. And he went in to Hagar and she conceived” (Genesis 16:2-4).

Where were the public witnesses, the vows, the marriage certificate, the marriage ceremony, the minister, or anything else?

“And Rebekah lifted her eyes and she saw Isaac. And she dismounted from the camel. And she said to the slave, Who is this man walking in the field to meet us? And the slave said, It is my master. And she took the veil and covered herself. And the slave told Isaac all the things that he had done. And Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah. And he took Rebekah, and she became his wife {lit. woman}; and he loved her. And Isaac was comforted after his mother” (Genesis 24:64-67).

Were Rebekah and Isaac “shacking up” here? Were they merely engaging in what some have called “legalized mating”? Where was the equivalent of the justice of the peace or the minister in this passage? Where was the making public of their vows before witnesses? Where was the

wedding ceremony? Where was the marriage license? They are nowhere to be found. Isaac took Rebekah into his mother's tent, and, in his mother's tent, "*she became his woman.*" There is the marriage. How did Rebekah become Isaac's woman? Oral vows sanctioned by a minister and witnessed in a wedding ceremony? So obvious is it that Isaac and Rebekah were married just by having sexual intercourse with each other. Isaac took her into his mother's tent and had sexual intercourse with her. That was the marriage. There was no wedding ceremony, no minister, no priest, not even Isaac leaving his parents' home. And as for human witnesses, although the servant may have witnessed Isaac enter with Rebekah to be into the tent, he did not witness the actual initiation, commencement, constitution of the marriage. God had joined them together, and the two – Isaac and Rebekah – became one flesh. And in the forming of that one-flesh marriage union, they had made a commitment to each other for life.

The Malachi 2:14 concept of the "covenant wife" is seen here. God was the witness between Isaac and Rebekah. Rebekah became Isaac's covenant wife (*ishshah*, literally "woman").

Let us look closer at the Malachi passage: "*And this [is] a second thing you have done: covering the altar of Jehovah [with] tears, with weeping and groaning; yet not facing toward the grain offering, and taking it [with] delight from your hand. Yet you say, On what [cause]? Because Jehovah has been witness between you and the wife {lit. woman} of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously; and she [is] your companion and your covenant wife {lit. woman}. And has He not made [you] one? Yet the vestige of the Spirit [is in] him. And what of the one? He was seeking a seed of God. Then guard your spirit, and do not deal treacherously with the wife {lit. woman} of your youth. Jehovah, the God of Israel, says, He hates sending away, and to cover [with] violence on his garment, says Jehovah of Hosts. Then guard your spirit and do not act treacherously" (Malachi 2:13-16).*

There are multitudes of people who think that this passage denies that sexual intercourse equals marriage. They would say that Malachi 2:13-16 (specifically verse 14) teaches that it is not the act of sexual intercourse itself that constitutes marriage, but the covenant between husband and wife. But what is this covenant? The objectors would say it is a verbal agreement of some kind. This passage does mention "*the wife of your youth*" and "*your companion and your covenant wife.*" But where is the mention of a verbal agreement there? It is not there, of course. Who might this woman be, who has been dealt with so treacherously by being sent away (i.e., divorced)? The prophet Malachi asks: "*And has He not made you one?*" He further asks "*what of the one?*" and answers the question by saying that God was seeking a seed of God, or godly offspring. Malachi is speaking of God making a man and the wife of his youth one flesh through sexual intercourse. God is witnessing against the man breaking the covenant of marriage with the first woman with whom he had sexual intercourse – the woman of his youth.

The very act of sexual intercourse is the covenant of marriage between husband and wife. The very act of sexual intercourse says, "I will be your man, and you will be my woman." And the very act of sexual intercourse says, "As long as we both shall live" and "Exclusively." The very act of sexual intercourse in and of itself is the agreement that the two of them will remain

exclusively married for the rest of their lives. And if the husband goes out and has sexual intercourse with another woman (thus telling that other woman that they will remain exclusively married for the rest of their lives), not only is it the sin of adultery, but it is the sin of lying.

Will a Christian husband and wife verbally express their lifelong exclusive commitment to each other (if they can verbalize)? Yes, of course they will. Over and over. But that verbal expression of lifelong exclusive commitment is not what makes a marriage. Sexual intercourse is what says, “Lifelong Exclusive Commitment.”

“And Laban had two daughters, the name of the older, Leah, and the name of the younger, Rachel. And the eyes of Leah were weak, and Rachel was beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance. And Jacob loved Rachel, and said, I will serve you seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter. And Laban said, [It is] better for me to give her to you [than] to give her to another man; live with me. And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they were in his eyes like a few days, in his love for her. And Jacob said to Laban, Give my wife {lit. woman}, for my days are completed. And let me go in to her. And Laban gathered all the men of the place and made a feast. And it happened in the evening, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to him; and he went in to her. And Laban gave to her Zilpah, his slave-girl, to his daughter Leah as a slave. And it happened in the morning; behold! She was Leah. And he said to Laban, What have you done to me? [Did] I not serve with you for Rachel? And why have you tricked me? And Laban said, It is not done this way in our place, to give the younger before the first-born. Fulfill the week of this one and we will also give you this [other] one, for the service which you will serve with me, yet another seven years. And Jacob did so, and he fulfilled the week of this one, and he gave to him his daughter Rachel, to him for a wife {lit. woman}. And Laban gave his slave-girl Bilhah to his daughter Rachel, to her for a slave-girl. And he also went in to Rachel, and he also loved Rachel more than Leah. And he served with him yet another seven years” (Genesis 29:16-30).

Genesis 29:16-30 provides a very potent example of what constitutes a marriage. Many people speak of the matter of intent – that is, a person must intend, or be intent on, marrying a certain person in his/her own mind; otherwise, they are not married. But that view does not agree with Scripture. For it is painfully obvious that Jacob did not intend to marry Leah, and yet it was sexual intercourse alone that obligated him to take her as his wife.

Jacob was deceived, tricked, bamboozled into marrying a woman he did not desire to marry. And it was due to Laban’s shrewdness and unscrupulousness in getting Jacob to marry his daughter Leah, that Jacob was obligated to take her as wife. Various reasons could be given as to why Jacob did not recognize beforehand that he was having sexual intercourse with the wrong woman. The point is that he married Leah by means of sexual intercourse. And when the light of day loudly declared to him that he had been duped by Laban into forming a one-flesh marriage union, he cried out: “*What have you done to me?*” If sexual intercourse did not equal marriage, why would Jacob have reacted like this? Could he not have said that he did not exchange vows with Leah, did not agree to marry Leah, was not betrothed to Leah? Could he not have said that

there was no minister and no witnesses and no license? In short, Jacob was married to Leah because he had sexual intercourse with her. He was married to Leah for that reason alone. Jacob had no intention of marrying Leah at all, but sexual intercourse alone made them married.

“And she said, Behold my servant Bilhah! Go in to her and let her bear on my knees; yea, let me be built up from her, me also. And she gave her slave-girl Bilhah to him for a wife {lit. woman}. And Jacob went in to her” (Genesis 30:3-4).

Rachel, being barren, decided to give her slave-girl Bilhah to Jacob for a wife. Where is all the traditional Romish rigamarole here that says that “in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, only ordained ministers in good standing can perform a marriage”? Also, it is quite interesting to note that while Bilhah was called the wife (literally woman) of Jacob in the verse above, just a little later in Genesis 35:22, she is called Jacob’s concubine. Bilhah was a slave-girl, and therefore was called “concubine”; however, she was also a wife of Jacob and mother of his sons for life (see also Genesis 37:2).

“And Leah saw that she had ceased from bearing. And she took Zilpah, her slave-girl, and gave her to Jacob for a wife {lit. woman}. And Leah’s slave-girl Zilpah bore a son to Jacob” (Genesis 30:9-10).

Here Leah did the same thing as Rachel – namely, giving one of her slave-girls to Jacob for a wife. Again, no marriage vows, nothing like that, because sexual intercourse alone is the promise. This promise is the letting your “yes” be “yes” in the one-flesh union (Malachi 2:14). *“And it happened at that time that Judah went down, away from his brothers, and turned aside to a man of Adullam named Hirah. And Judah saw there a daughter of a Canaanite man named Shuah. And he took her, and went in to her. And she conceived and bore a son. And he called his name Er” (Genesis 38:1-3).*

Here again we see that there was no wedding ceremony or verbal contract or minister involved. Judah took the woman and “went in to her.” In taking her and going in to her, he showed personal commitment, a willingness to be joined to this woman for life. Sexual intercourse is the covenant of marriage (Malachi 2:14).

“And Judah said to Onan, Go in to your brother’s wife {lit. woman} and marry her, and raise up seed to your brother” (Genesis 38:8).

After God had killed Er, Judah’s first-born son, Judah told Onan that he was to go in to and marry his deceased brother’s wife. What was Judah telling Onan to do? What does the word “marry” mean? Please take note as to what this verse does not say. Judah did not tell Onan to go in to his brother’s wife and “fornicate” with her. For those who reject the view that sexual intercourse equals marriage, if they were consistent, would have to say that Judah commanded Onan to commit the sin of fornication here (“premarital sex”), and that as long as Onan continued to have sexual relations with her, he would be continuing in (i.e., practicing) sin. They

would say that in order for him to end the practice of sin, Onan would have to go and grab a minister or get a marriage license or something. But the Bible contradicts all of this nonsense. For what, pray tell, was unlawful in his marrying his deceased brother's wife? The brother's death had released her to marry Onan; thus, she was no adulteress by marrying and becoming another man's (see Romans 7:1-3). And not only that, but God killed Onan for not obeying His command to have sexual intercourse with (i.e., marry) his dead brother's wife in order to raise up seed to his brother.

Note that Judah did not tell Onan to go in to his brother's wife and have a marriage ceremony performed by a minister in good standing in order that they may solemnize and make public their covenant wedding vows. He did not say go in to his brother's wife and sign a marriage license with her. Judah was simply commanding Onan to go in to his brother's wife and have sexual intercourse with her. "Marry" and "have sexual intercourse with" are clearly interchangeable concepts here. And so we see that the Bible describes the "going in to" the woman as actually marrying her. This "going in to" her is the one-flesh cleaving/joining of Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:5-6. This is how God joins a man and a woman together in marriage. *"Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6).*

Then there is the case of Tamar who was raped by her half-brother Amnon. Following the wickedly shrewd advice of his friend Jonadab, Amnon feigned sickness so he could seek an opportunity to be alone with Tamar: *"And she brought near to him to eat. And he lay hold on her, and said to her, Come lie with me, my sister. And she said to him, No, my brother, do not humble me, for it is not done so in Israel. Do not do this foolishness. And I, where should I cause my disgrace to go? And you, you shall be as one of the fools in Israel. But now, please speak to the king; for he shall not withhold me from you. But he was not willing to listen to her voice. And he was stronger than she, and humbled her, and lay with her" (2 Samuel 13:11-14).*

Following this brutal act perpetrated by Amnon, he decided that he now hated Tamar and would put her away after having sexual intercourse with her. Tamar then replied: *"No, for this evil is greater than the other that you have done to me, to send me away. But he was not willing to listen to her. And he called his young man who attended him, and said, Now put this one out from me, and bolt the door after her. And a long tunic was on her, for so the virgin daughters of the king usually dressed. And his attendant brought her robes outside, and bolted the door after her. And Tamar put ashes on her head, and tore the long tunic on her, and put her hand on her head, and left; going on and crying out. And her brother Absalom said to her, Has your brother Amnon been with you? But now, my sister, keep silent. He is your brother. Do not set your heart on this thing. And Tamar lived in the house of her brother Absalom, but she was desolate" (2 Samuel 13:16-20).*

Notice that Tamar told Amnon that the act of putting her away was a greater evil than the evil of raping her. Contemplate that and allow it to sink in for a moment. She said that the evil of raping her is a lesser evil than the evil of sending her away. Now why would it be a greater evil for Amnon to put her away than that of raping her? It is because by raping her he had formed a one-

flesh union with her. He had forced a marriage union upon her. And by sending her away, he was dealing treacherously with her. He superficially seemed to “love” her and wanted to show it by lying with her. And once he had sexual intercourse with her, he was proclaiming that she was his covenant wife (Malachi 2:14). Tamar knew that what Amnon did was evil, but once he had done his dastardly deed, she insisted that he must stay with her since he had “humbled” her and had forced a marriage union upon her. Tamar appears to be well aware of Exodus 22:16-17 and Deuteronomy 22:28-29. These two passages teach us that since Amnon made her his wife, he must now take her as wife. Some would argue that a passage like Deuteronomy 22:28-29 disproves that sexual intercourse equals marriage since it says *“and she shall be his wife {lit. woman}.”* They reason, “How can this be if she was made his wife at the time of sexual intercourse? But this verse actually proves that sexual intercourse is the marriage. The man of Deuteronomy 22:28-29 has made the woman his wife. She is indeed his wife by virtue of the sex act alone. And because she is his wife (because of sexual intercourse), she shall be his wife. “*Shall be his wife*” is followed by the explanatory phrase that says, *“he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days”* (v. 29). Thus, Amnon was transgressing the command of Deuteronomy 22:28-29.

Now let us consider the situation in which Absalom, following the sinister advice of Ahithophel, went in to (i.e., had sexual intercourse with) his father David’s concubines (who were also David’s wives, as we will see). The story begins with David leaving his ten concubines to keep the house (2 Samuel 15:16). The advice given by Ahithophel was to serve a two-fold purpose: *“And Ahithophel said to Absalom, Go in to your father’s concubines, [those] he left to keep the house. And all Israel shall hear that you have become odious with your father. And the hands of all who are with you will be strong. And they spread out a tent for Absalom on the roof. And Absalom went in to his father’s concubines before the eyes of all Israel. And the counsel of Ahithophel which he counseled in those days was as one who had inquired at the Word of God. So was all the counsel of Ahithophel, both to David and to Absalom”* (2 Samuel 16:21-23).

Note the last verse which states that all of this was foreordained by God. Nathan had prophesied this very thing to David after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba: *“So says Jehovah, Behold, I shall raise up evil against you out of your house, and shall take your wives {lit. women} before your eyes and give [them] to your neighbor. And he shall lie with your wives {lit. women} in the sight of the sun. For you acted in secret, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun”* (2 Samuel 12:11-12).

It is important to note that God calls the concubines of David “wives” in the above passage. This is a prophecy that Absalom would lie with David’s wives – literally, David’s women. And how was this prophecy fulfilled? By Absalom’s lying with David’s concubines. Thus, we must conclude that David’s concubines were his wives. Strictly in terms of marriage, there was no difference between a person’s wives and his concubines. Concubines were wives who were given fewer privileges than other wives.

“And David came into his house at Jerusalem. And the king took the ten women, the concubines

whom he had left to guard the house, and fed them. But he did not go in to them, and they were shut up to the day of their death in widowhood” (2 Samuel 20:3).

The thing to note here as of primary importance is that while David remained alive, these ten women were nevertheless shut up in widowhood. Now why are these women called “widows,” seeing David was still alive? The answer is that Absalom adulterously married them. Also note that David never went into them again, even after the death of Absalom. It certainly looks like David was ever mindful of the truth that is put forth in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. A question that comes up often in this kind of discussion is the one of polygamy in the Old Testament. It was lawful for a man to have multiple wives in the Old Testament. For the marriages to be lawful, all the wives must have previously been virgins or widows. If a man had sexual intercourse with someone else’s wife (while that wife’s husband was still alive), then this was adultery. This was the case with David and Bathsheba. David’s first act of sex with Bathsheba was adultery because Bathsheba’s husband was still alive. However, once Bathsheba’s husband was dead, the relationship was not adultery. Although David committed adultery with Bathsheba, he did not live in adultery (by having multiple wives and by having Bathsheba as his wife after her husband died), and thus he was not an adulterer. The Bible says that no regenerate men live in sin, including living in adultery. Thus, David did not live in sin and did not live in adultery.

Let us now look at what the New Testament says about what constitutes marriage.

“And the Pharisees came near to Him, tempting Him, and saying to Him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife {lit. woman} for every reason? But answering, He said to them, Have you not read that He who created [them] from the beginning created them male and female? And He said, For this reason a man shall leave father and mother, and shall be joined to his wife {lit. woman}, and the two shall become one flesh. So that they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate. They said to Him, Why then did Moses command to give a bill of divorce, and to put her away? He said to them, In view of your hardheartedness, Moses allowed you to put away your wives {lit. women}. But from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, Whoever shall put away his wife {lit. woman}, if not for fornication, and shall marry another, [that one] commits adultery. And the one who marries her [who] was put away commits adultery” (Matthew 19:4-9).

The Pharisees asked Jesus if a man is allowed to put away his wife (literally, his woman) for every reason. Jesus then referred them to the definition of marriage in Genesis, prefaced by “*have you not read,*” which is a rhetorical question meaning that it was obvious from the Old Testament. He then used the Greek word that is translated “cleave” in Genesis 2:24, stating that this cleaving, this joining, makes them “*no longer two, but one flesh.*” He concluded that what God joined together in sexual intercourse (one flesh), a man is not to separate. After the question from the Pharisees about Moses’s command to give a bill of divorce, Jesus said that any divorced person who marries (joins to, becomes one flesh with, has sexual intercourse with) another commits adultery, and any who marry (join to, become one flesh with, have sexual intercourse with) the divorced person commits adultery.

Think about it: if marriage is constituted by more than sexual intercourse alone, then the one who engages in sex alone with her who was put away does not commit adultery.

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Then taking the members of Christ, shall I make [them] members of a harlot? Let it not be! Or do you not know that he being joined to a harlot is one body? For He says, The two [shall be] into one flesh” (1 Corinthians 6:15-16).

This is a powerful passage. Again we see the reference to Genesis 2:24, the definitive marriage passage, preceded by “*Or do you not know,*” meaning that this is something that is obvious from the Scripture’s definition of marriage. Now look at how the Genesis definition of marriage is used in this passage - it is used to talk about sexual intercourse with a harlot! Being joined to a harlot makes the person one flesh with the harlot! Here is Genesis 2:24 again: “*Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife {lit. woman} and they shall become one flesh.*” A person who has sexual intercourse with a harlot has cleaved to, has been joined to, his woman, and he and his woman (the harlot) have become one flesh! God used the Genesis 2:24 marriage passage to talk about fornication with a whore! Do you see what this is saying about what constitutes marriage? It is saying that sexual intercourse between any man and any woman is a joining to one another and a being made one flesh with one another! It is marriage! When a man becomes one flesh with a harlot, is there an oral or written commitment or vow, whether public or private? Is there a marriage ceremony, whether public or private? Is there a minister or other government official? Is there a marriage certificate or license or some other paperwork in which the government recognizes and sanctions the union? Obviously not. These do not make a marriage. It is the joining in one-flesh union that makes the marriage.

Note in 1 Corinthians 7 that the following are the only marital categories of people: virgins, married, and widows. There is no such thing as a non-widow who is both unmarried and a non-virgin at the same time. All non-virgins are either married or widows. Note the wording in 1 Corinthians 7:34: “*The wife {lit. woman} and the virgin [are] different. The unmarried one cares for the things of [the] Lord, that she be holy in both body and spirit. But the married one cares for the things of the world, how to please the husband” (1 Corinthians 7:34).* The “unmarried one” and the “virgin” are one and the same, just as the “married one” and the “wife” are one and the same. If one is not a widow, one is either married or is a virgin (has never had sexual intercourse).

Note also the wording in Hebrews 13:4: “*Marriage [is] honorable in all, and the bed undefiled; but God will judge fornicators and adulterers.*” This is a parallelism: Marriage/Bed, Honorable/Undefiled. Marriage is equated with the bed, and the bed here means sexual intercourse.

We ask once again: What constitutes marriage? What creates, forms, establishes, makes, begins, commences a marriage? We have seen that sexual intercourse alone makes people “one flesh” (1 Corinthians 6:16). We have seen that “one flesh” is the marriage union (Matthew 19:6; Genesis 2:24). Therefore, sexual intercourse alone is the marriage union. The woman (wife) of one’s

youth is the first one with whom one had sexual intercourse.

A marriage – whether it is a marriage that God hates or is pleased with – is formed when God joins/cleaves a man and a woman together, the inevitable result of which is that they shall become one flesh. To join or cleave to a woman is to have sexual intercourse with that woman. To have sexual intercourse with that woman is to marry that woman. The result of this joining, this cleaving, this sexual intercourse, is that the two shall become one flesh. One flesh is always spoken of as the marriage union.

We will next address some common objections to this view. One common objection is that the term “fornication” would be meaningless if all sexual intercourse is marriage. The Greek word for fornication is *porneia*, which is a very broad term that includes all unlawful sexual activity. An unlawful, ungodly marriage (which includes all adulterous marriages) is fornication; thus, most sexual intercourse is both marriage and fornication. Two non-Christians who were previously virgins, who come together as one flesh are not in an adulterous marriage – but they are in the sin of fornication. And even if they get a marriage license (or go through some sort of ceremony in a church with a minister), then it is still fornication – fornication that is sanctioned by the state, the “church,” or both. Fornication also includes any other unlawful non-intercourse sexual activity.

Another common objection is that the term “divorce” would be meaningless if all sexual intercourse is marriage. Since the “church,” state, tradition, desire, will, or intent of man have absolutely no say in what constitutes marriage, so all the aforementioned have no say in what constitutes divorce. What is divorce? It is simply a putting away and thus being separated from the person with whom one previously had sexual relations. If one marries a person who has been put away in the aforementioned manner – whether or not there have been divorce papers filed – that one has committed adultery.

Many object by saying that the person to whom they lost their virginity was not the person they intended to marry, and thus they are not married to this person. They have the gall to assert that their intention or desire annuls 1 Corinthians 6:16, Matthew 19:6, and Genesis 2:24. “*Or do you not know that he being joined to a harlot is one body? For He says, The two shall be into one flesh*” (1 Corinthians 6:16). The “he” who is being joined to a harlot is married to her whether he has the intention or desire to be so or not.

Another common objection is one that appeals to emotional and hysterical sensationalism rather than to the Word of God. The objection put forth is that if a young Christian virgin woman was engaged (betrothed), and during this betrothal period was brutally assaulted and raped, then she would have to break off the engagement with her “husband-to-be” and go ahead and marry and perform all the conjugal obligations of a submissive and obedient wife towards the man who brutally raped her. The betrothed woman has indeed been made one flesh with the man who so violently and brutally forced this one-flesh union upon her. Amnon, likewise, violently forced himself upon Tamar (2 Samuel 13:11-20). Scripture says that she remained desolate. Tamar, just

like the betrothed woman put forth in the objection, was the innocent victim of a vicious crime. The aforementioned women's cases are very grievous indeed. But the fact that they were brutally violated does not nullify the truth that sexual intercourse alone makes a man and a woman married, nor does rape give them a "free pass" to become adulteresses by marrying while the rapist is still living. For the one with whom she was forced to become "one flesh" is still living. This woman is under no obligation to perform marital duties to this vicious, perverted rapist. She is, however, out of loving obedience to God, obligated to remain celibate for the rest of her days or until the rapist dies (Romans 7:1-3). Those who make this and similar unbiblically emotional appeals would show hatred to this poor woman by adding damnable insult to injury by asserting that because of rape, she is free to become an adulteress by becoming another man's.

Another common objection is that Joseph and Mary were called "husband" and "wife" before they had sexual intercourse, and thus it is not sexual intercourse that makes a marriage but a betrothal that makes a marriage. Firstly, it must again be emphasized that in the original Greek, it is merely "man" and "woman." Joseph was Mary's man, and Mary was Joseph's woman before they were married. They were betrothed to be married, which is the same as being engaged. A betrothal is a commitment to marry at some time in the future. Two people who are betrothed to each other still belong to each other and thus are still called each other's "man" and "woman." But they are not married until they have sexual intercourse. One who would say that betrothal constitutes marriage would have to say that if a person is betrothed and cuts off the betrothal and then becomes betrothed to someone else, that person is an adulterer even before having sexual intercourse with anyone.

Let us now get into some specific passages of Scripture that are used as objections. We have already addressed the objection that is based on Malachi 2:14.

One objection comes directly from the first part of Genesis 2:24: *"Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother."* The objectors will say that if one is not physically living somewhere other than with his parents, then it is not a real marriage. The foolishness of this should be evident. Are these objectors going to say that, even if there is a marriage ceremony conducted by a minister in good standing that includes marriage vows before witnesses and a marriage license, it is not a true marriage if the husband and wife then go back to live in the same house as one of the spouse's parents? Are they going to say that if such a couple lives in such a way and then divorces, then they are free to remarry, since they were never really married in the first place because they weren't living somewhere other than with their parents? Are they going to say that when Isaac took Rebekah into his mother's tent and had sexual intercourse with her that this was "fornication" or "premarital sex"? Of course not. The leaving of father and mother is talking about the spiritual oneness that the man and woman have with each other in the one-flesh union.

"And when a man lures a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, paying he shall pay her dowry for a wife to himself. If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he shall weigh money according to the dowry of virgins" (Exodus 22:16-17).

The objection is this: Since the father can refuse to give her to the one who first had sexual intercourse with her, then this was not a marriage, and the non-virgin is free to become betrothed and married to a man other than the one with whom she first had sexual intercourse.

The following answers this objection: Whether the father gives her to him or refuses to give her to him is completely irrelevant as a proof that sexual intercourse equals marriage. Furthermore, the father's refusal shows that he is separating what God has joined together. The father's refusal does not dissolve the bond of marriage. The father's refusal does not make the man with whom she first had sexual intercourse to be "as if he were dead" per the Westminster Confession of Faith. The father's refusal does not change the truth of passages such as 1 Corinthians 6:16, Matthew 19:6, and Genesis 2:24. Thus, this father who refuses must not give her to another while her original husband is still alive, lest he cause his own daughter to commit adultery (cf. Matthew 5:32). His daughter must either remain celibate or be reconciled (contrary to the refusing father's wishes) to the one with whom she first had sexual intercourse: "*But I command the ones being married (not I, but the Lord), [that] a woman [is] not to be separated from her husband; but if indeed she is separated, remain unmarried, or be reconciled to the husband; and a husband not to leave [his] wife*" (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). If the father did not refuse, but the girl refused and would rather remain unreconciled than to be reconciled to a man she despises, then she must remain celibate.

A similar passage to the above is this: "*If a man finds a virgin girl, not being betrothed, and seizes her and lies with her, and they be found; then the man lying with her shall give to the girl's father fifty [pieces] of silver, and she shall be his wife, because he has humbled her. He may not put her away all his days*" (Deuteronomy 22: 28-29).

This passage says that the man is never permitted to divorce her. Yet in Exodus 22:16-17, the father by his refusal to give her to the man, constrains him to divorce her and so disobey this command that he is not permitted to put her away. The woman must either find a way to reconcile with this man (1 Corinthians 7:10-11) against her father's wishes, or if she is in agreement with her father, must remain unmarried until the man's death (Romans 7:1-3).

A very common objection from the New Testament is taken from Jesus' discussion with the woman at the well: "*The woman said to Him, Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw. Jesus said to her, Go, call your husband {lit. man} and come here. And the woman answered and said, I have no husband {lit. man}. Jesus said to her, Well did you say, I have no husband {lit. man}. For you have had five husbands {lit. men}, and now [he] whom you have is not your husband {lit. man}. You have spoken this truly*" (John 4:15-18).

The objection is this: This woman was married five times before, but the one she now sleeps with is not her husband. Thus, sexual intercourse alone does not make her married to the current man.

The following answers this objection: This woman's adultery is being exposed here. She has had

five men, and the one whom she now has is not her man. When Jesus says that “*now [he] whom you have is not your man,*” He is saying that her current man is not her lawful man, just as the four other men she had after her first man were not her lawful men. He is also saying that the one whom she now has is not her man but is another’s man. Jesus’ comments regarding the five and the one are saying the same thing in different ways. Christ exposes her adulterous past (five husbands), as well as her adulterous present (the man you have now is not your husband). Romans 7:2-3 applies here: “*For the married woman was bound by Law to the living husband {lit. man}; but if the husband {lit. man} dies, she is set free from the Law of the husband {lit. man}. So then, [if] the husband {lit. man} is living, she will be called an adulteress if she becomes another man’s. But if the husband {lit. man} dies, she is free from the Law, [so as for] her not to be an adulteress [by] becoming another man’s.*”

Some people think that this woman is a prostitute who is having sexual intercourse with a man who is not her husband. If so, what would Paul say to this man? He would say this: “*Do you not know that [by] being joined to a harlot [you are] one body? For He says, The two [shall be] into one flesh*” (1 Corinthians 6:16). Obviously, this harlot is not his legitimate wife, nor is he her legitimate husband, but nevertheless Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 to show that they just married each other and have just formed an adulterous union. Jesus implicitly calls this woman an adulteress by saying that the man she now has is not her man. Jesus says that, rather than merely having a casual, non-committed relationship with him, she is marrying a man who is not her man by means of sexual intercourse alone (Mark 10:12). While she thinks this is all just casual pleasure, God, in Romans 7:2-3, says that she is an adulteress by becoming another man’s.

The following passage helps to further explain the woman at the well: “*For having sent, Herod himself had seized John and bound him in the prison, because of Herodias the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her. John had said to Herod, It is not lawful for you to have the wife {lit. woman} of your brother. And Herodias held it against him, and desired to kill him, but was not able.*” (Mark 6:17-19). Remember how Jesus said in John 4:15-18 that the man was not her husband. Now from this passage in Mark we can see that it would be true to say that Herod was not Herodias’ husband. Just like Herodias, the woman at the well married one who was not her husband; she, just like Herodias, was an adulteress who had married another (Mark 10:12). And it is precisely because Herod and the man are not these women’s (lawful) husbands that this marriage is also called adultery.

The fact that sexual intercourse is what creates, forms, establishes, makes, begins, commences a marriage will certainly swing a Scriptural wrecking ball into many of the homes and “churches” of those who call themselves Christians. Multitudes will say to themselves: “This cannot be. For that would mean that the girl I slept with in high school was the wife of my youth with whom I have dealt treacherously. I put her away and later on in my life became a Christian and found myself a godly woman, and now you are telling me that this godly Christian woman with whom I have been for over ten years has been ten years of adultery. This would mean that I am an adulterer!” Thus, instead of bowing to God’s Word, they will dismiss it, not because it is unscriptural, but because it would have serious implications for their lives and spiritual state.

But what are the implications if it is not true that sexual intercourse equals marriage? It undermines all God's laws of sex, marriage, divorce, adultery, and remarriage. People who say they believe that remarriage after divorce while the original spouse is still living is adultery can "get around" God's law by having a "non-committed sexual relationship" (which they do not consider marriage), and then they can break up with this person (whom they do not consider to be their spouse), and they can marry another person and still say that their current marriage is not adultery, since they didn't count their previous relationship as a marriage! It is a convenient way to excuse their current wickedness (adultery) by renaming their original relationship as a non-marriage! A couple can be in a "non-committed sexual relationship" for 20 years, then split up, and they can marry other people without violating (in their own minds) the remarriage after divorce equals adultery law! If sexual intercourse does not equal marriage, then a person can have one or a hundred "non-committed sexual relationships" and yet still be able to marry someone else without committing adultery. How repulsive.

Consider the following scenario: John believes that there are the following five conditions for marriage: (1) An intention of the parties to enter into a binding marital union; (2) A verbal solemn oath to take each other to be husband/wife until death parts them; (3) Public accredited witnesses to that verbal solemn oath; (4) A properly ordained minister in good standing to preside over and bless and perform the marriage; and (5) the signing of a state marriage license. Now suppose John thinks he is "getting married" to Jane by these five conditions. They live together for 20 years and have children. Now suppose one day John finds out that one of the five conditions did not actually occur 20 years ago. (It could be anything - that one of the spouses did not really intend to enter into something binding, that the words of the oath were not proper or were made when they were not saved, that the witnesses were not accredited, that the minister turned out to not be properly ordained, etc., etc.) John then divorces his wife, saying that they were really never married to begin with, since one of the conditions of marriage was not met. He then marries Amy. He claims that his marriage to Amy is actually his first marriage, and thus he is not committing adultery, even though Jane is still alive. He could even say that he believes that remarriage while the original wife is still living is adultery, but Jane was not his original wife; they were just living together in fornication because they had not fulfilled all the conditions of marriage. John could even have multiple "marriages" that did not fulfill all the conditions and still say that it is lawful for him to "truly marry" for the first time. What a repugnant justification of wickedness.

"Then the scribes and Pharisees came to Jesus from Jerusalem, saying, Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread. But answering He said to them, Why do you also transgress the command of God on account of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honor your father and mother, The one speaking evil of father or mother, by death let him die. But you say, Whoever says to the father or the mother, A gift, whatever you would gain from me; and in no way he honors his father or his mother. And you annulled the command of God on account of your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you, saying: This people draws near to Me with their mouth, and with [their] lips honor Me; but their heart holds far off from Me. But in vain they worship Me,

teaching [as] doctrines [the] precepts of men'' (Matthew 15:1-9).

Just like the Pharisees of old, many professing Christians ask us: “Why do you transgress our marriage tradition? For by saying that sexual intercourse is what constitutes marriage you are advocating ‘shacking up’ and ‘fornication.’” We respond with: “Why do you also transgress the command of God on account of your marriage tradition? For God commanded, saying, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘the one who marries her who was put away commits adultery.’ But you say, ‘I am not committing adultery with my present wife, because all of that stuff in the past as a non-Christian was merely a bunch of non-committed sexual relationships’ or ‘I am not committing adultery with my present wife because my previous relationship didn’t fulfill all the conditions of marriage.’” And thus these people annul the command of God on account of their marriage tradition.

What does sexual intercourse really mean? The truth we should be telling our children is the seriousness of sexual intercourse - that once you have had sexual intercourse with one person, you have married that person, and if the two of you split up, you must never have sexual intercourse again with another person. The consequences of that first sex act last a lifetime. That is how serious sexual intercourse is.

If the person to whom you are currently married – whether or not this marriage is state or “church” sanctioned or you are “shacking up” or just having a “casual and uncommitted relationship” with someone – is not the first person with whom you have had sexual intercourse, then you are currently living in adultery and have been for however long you have been with this person while the first person to whom you lost your virginity is still living. Will you justify your wickedness?

“And He said to them, Whoever may dismiss his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman puts away her husband and marries another, she commits adultery” (Mark 10:11-12).

by Chris Duncan
www.outsidethecamp.org