

The Bible, Sex, and this Generation

How God's Word Applies Today

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Introduction

Does having sex still matter? Or is it something that can be done and then forgotten about? Do couples who have sex with each other have good reasons to stay together? What does God think of sex? And more importantly, what should we think of it?

Within the secular world, sex is often free and easy. Morality has sunken to the lowest of depths. Situations such as adultery, divorce and casual sexual relationships are not only rife; they are socially acceptable.

Christians may have escaped these ills to some degree. But still, they must face them as they seek to bring people to God. Situations that perhaps barely existed in the last generation are bombarding the church in its ministry. For example, a pastor recently told me the following story:

Not so long ago, a young woman named Sally started attending the church where I am pastor. She told me an amazing story of how she had 'found God,' and of some wonderful changes that had been happening in her life. She seemed a typical new Christian, full of zeal and love of the Lord. She and I both desired for her to be water baptized. However, I found out that she was living with a man to whom she was not married. I advised her to either marry or leave him before she was baptized. Unfortunately, the man would not agree to marry her. Sally would not leave him – they had been in stable relationship for five years and had one child. I would not baptise her while she was in this de facto relationship. So, she left the church.

Although saddened by the course of events, this pastor believed he was doing right; and perhaps he was. Many Christians would have agreed with and condoned his actions and attitudes. But is it what Jesus would have done?

In this book, we take a detailed look at how God sees sexual relationships. We look at situations such as the above in the light of Scripture in an effort to give you insight and understanding that will help you deal with them in a godly manner. The Bible does speak to this generation.

This book will not in any way advocate sexual permissiveness or sexual sin, but will in fact prove from the Bible that casual sex is against God's law – showing you exactly why this is.

Many other questions will be answered, including the following:

- Did Jesus really allow divorce in the situation when one of the partners had sex with another person? If so, then why is this only mentioned in one gospel?
- Can men still have more than one wife today without sinning, just as the Old Testament patriarchs did?
- Is homosexuality sinful? Should same-sex couples stay together?
- Should and can teenagers stay with one boyfriend/girlfriend/partner?
- Why should married couples stay together with each other?
- Can a person who is being abused by their marital partner end that relationship, leave it, and righteously remarry another person?
- If a relationship is found to be adulterous, then should the couple ‘split up,’ even if this relationship is well established with children?
- How does God join couples together in marriage?
- How should we deal with the situation when a couple fails to abstain from sex until after their wedding?
- If de facto relationships are acceptable, then what is ‘fornication’?

To answer these and other related questions, we examine both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible to find a consistent teaching.

This is not a book that teaches people how to improve communication, romance or love within their marriages. Although these subjects are touched upon, the primary focus of this book lies with what the sexual act means between the couple that participate in it. We teach why the sexual act is important, and when and why people should remain committed to their relationships. We look at sexual sin – what it is and how we are to deal with it. This is a book meant for anybody who wants to know or to teach the sacredness of sex. It's also meant to help those who are in de facto relationships, or those wondering how to treat others who are in them. It's for anyone thinking of divorce and/or remarriage, or those questioning other related issues such as homosexuality, adultery, masturbation, or pre-marital sex.

Many commonly held ideas about the Biblical views of marriage and sex will be challenged as they are examined in this book. We will cover much difficult ground. New ideas will be presented for your consideration. Therefore, for your own clarity of understanding, I urge you to read this book from the start to the finish without skipping chapters, and to keep an open mind, praying, thinking and looking up quoted Bible references as we look at the teachings from it.

May you find blessings in the teachings of this book, and a greater understanding of what I see as God's wonderful view of sex.

PART ONE: THE BIBLICAL TEACHING ABOUT SEX

1

In the Beginning

Although it was written thousands of years before His time as a man, when Jesus was asked about relations between married couples, He looked towards the first book of the Bible, Genesis. This book is sometimes called the 'foundational book,' and all the major doctrines of the Bible, from creation to salvation stem from it. Accordingly, we will also start to look at God's timeless teachings on the subject of sex there.

In the beginning, after God had made the first man, we read the following passage:

“So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame” (Gen 2:20-25).

This is just the first of many passages from the Bible on the subject of sex. Part of it is exactly what Jesus quoted when He was asked about marriage and divorce. In the passage, we read of Eve being created and brought to Adam to become his helper. There is talk of man leaving his parents (becoming the head of a new household) and being united to woman, becoming one flesh. Thereafter it is accepted that Adam and Eve are married, they are both naked and open before each other, without shame.¹

After God had created the man and the woman, *equally, male and female* in His image (Gen 1:26-27),

¹ It is overwhelmingly agreed that here, in Genesis 2:20-25, Adam and Eve did in fact have sex with one another. They were 'naked before each other'; this is the term used in many Old Testament passages to describe the sexual act - for example, in Leviticus 18, the sexual relationships that are prohibited are in fact saying "Do not uncover the nakedness of...."

“God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it...”” (Gen 1:28).

The Bible holds very high regard for procreation, which is seen as one of the major reasons for sex. However, having babies wasn't the only reason for humans to have sex. Sex took away man's loneliness and offered humans the ability to experience wonderfully close relationships with one another. Here though, in Genesis 1:28, sex for procreation was commanded. Of course people obeyed God in this matter; they married and were fruitful, and they subdued the earth.

Sex and marriage were an integral part of human life right from the very beginning, and were around even before the first sin. *Sex is neither sinful nor shameful*, in fact, God created us as sexual beings.

God designed people to be married. And sex and marriage, like all of creation was very good. But God didn't want us to have sex with more than one person. It was normal and right to have sex with only one. There are a number of places where we can see these things.

Firstly, in Genesis 4:25, we read “Adam lay with his wife again....” We know that this wife was Eve, because in the same verse she says, “God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.” Eve was still Adam's only wife even after 130 years!

Secondly, there is no distinction in the Hebrew language² between the words ‘woman’ and ‘wife.’ Where we read “...the man and his *wife* were both naked...” (Gen 2:25), the original text only says, “...the man and his *woman* were both naked...”³ Likewise, when we read “...Adam lay with his *wife* again...”, the original text only says, “...Adam lay with his *woman* again...” Men had *women*, and every woman that a man had sex with was *his woman*; rendered in English, ‘his wife.’

Today, if we heard that a certain man had one wife, we would not understand that to mean that he had only had sex with one woman. However, in Biblical times, a man having 'one wife' *was* a man who had only had sex with one woman. Adam is just one of hundreds of Biblical examples of men who only had one wife; who had only ever had sex with one woman.

A third reason why we can believe that people had sex with only one person for life is found in genealogy lists. The Bible includes a great many of these lists, right down to the time of Jesus. In this very first part of Genesis, chapter five includes the list of names of eleven generations of Adam's descendants. And as with all of the genealogy lists found in the Bible, this list is a list of *fathers* and *sons*. While wives/mothers/daughters are occasionally mentioned, the lists of names are all male. If the women living in Biblical times had more than one male sexual partner, then there

² The Old Testament of the Bible, including Genesis, was written mainly in Hebrew.

³ The Hebrew word translated as wife or woman is 'ishshah. The New Strongs Exhaustive Concordance (Thomas Nelson Publishers) defines this word as meaning a woman. The KJV translates it as: [adulter] ess, each, every, female, X many, + none, one, + together, wife, or woman.

would be disputes as to the fathers of sons. However, there seems to be no dispute – and the only reason for this would be that women had sex with only one partner.

After we read the creation accounts and then the story of the first sin, chapters four and five of Genesis relate to us the names of eleven generations of people who lived after Adam. It is interesting to note that besides Cain, only one of Adam's descendants in the first eleven generations was a murderer. This man's name was Lamech (and he was seventh in the line of descendents). And not only was this Lamech a murderer – the Bible tells us that he was the *only* direct descendent of Adam (via Cain) in the first eleven generations to have married more than one woman (Gen 4:19).

Among the eleventh generation after Adam (via his son Seth), were Noah's sons, and chapters six to nine of Genesis tell the story of Noah and the flood. As we read the first part of this story, we wonder what sins humans had committed for God to decide to flood the entire earth. The first part of Genesis chapter six strongly suggests that the sin had to do with too much sex: "...the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose..." (verse 2). A little later in Gen 6:11-12, we read that "...the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence."

The earth was corrupt and filled with violence. Yet Matt 24:38 and Luke 17:27, both describe the time saying "...people were eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage..." Both this, and the verse that says: "...they married any of them they chose..." suggest that among the many sins abounding in the time of Noah, people of the earth had forgotten that they were to be married to one partner only. Instead, they were 'marrying' many partners – any whom they chose.

It is also interesting here that we are told that Noah (the only man who found favour in the eyes of the Lord) and his sons had only one wife (one woman) each (Gen 6:8-9, 18).

Yet, after the flood, God tells Noah to "be fruitful and increase in number" three times (Gen 8:17, 9:1, 7), so sex in itself was obviously not an evil sin – only its abuse and misuse. When God wanted the people to "be fruitful and increase in number" – He meant with only one partner.

In the years after the flood, sexual monogamy was very much respected. This is most clearly seen in a passage in Genesis 12:10-20. Here we find Abram and his wife, Sarai who had travelled down to Egypt. Abram was scared to tell the Egyptians that Sarai was his wife because she was very beautiful, and he thought they would want to kill him so that they could have her (they would not have sex with her while her husband was alive). In his fear, Abram told the Egyptians that Sarai was his sister:

"But the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai. So Pharaoh summoned Abram. "What have you done to me?" he said. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!" Then Pharaoh gave

orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had” (Gen 12:17-20 NKJ).

Even among those of foreign cultures, such as this Egyptian Pharaoh, sex and marriage were recognised to be sacred. Pharaoh would not have sex with a married woman – and that is exactly what he wanted to do – he wanted to have sex with the beautiful Sarai. Yet the Bible says that he was to take her as his wife! Just having sex with her would have united Pharaoh and Sarai in marriage. This will be shown more clearly as the book progresses.

And again, in this next part of Genesis we see more genealogy lists. Genesis chapter ten is devoted to recording the names and clans of Noah’s *sons* who became fathers to four generations after Noah. And chapter eleven records the names of the line from Noah’s son Shem down to Abram: Ten generations, fathers and sons. The Bible teaches that in the time it was written, people knew exactly who their father was – long before such things as paternity tests had been invented.

The early chapters of Genesis, along with the rest of the Bible, clearly teach that couples who had sex with one another were to stay together as married for life. Sexual promiscuity was not acceptable to God, and that was one reason why God had already destroyed the world in a flood.

Then, in one part of the world, in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, it seemed that people became indifferent to this fact again. Because of this, God destroyed the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning sulfur. Where can we find out why they were destroyed? In Gen 13:13, we read that “the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.” Then Jude 1:7 in the New Testament explains what these sins were. We read that “...Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion.”

Lot was the only man saved out of Sodom because he had been the only righteous man who lived there. It is interesting to note that Lot had only one wife (one woman) (Gen 19:15-16). And Lot was the only man considered to be righteous – yet, he had offered his two virgin daughters to the Sodomites, so that they could do what they liked with them!

“Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom-- both young and old-- surrounded the house. They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.” Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him and said, “No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. Look, *I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them.* But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof”” (Gen 19:4-8 emphasis mine).

Women were allowed to have one sexual partner. In offering his virgin daughters to the men, Lot was not doing anything particularly wrong. A man could have had sex

with one of Lot's daughters, and if he then kept her as his wife, this would not have been wrong. The men however, obviously had other ideas. Thankfully for the girls then, the angels who had come to Lot's house struck the men of Sodom blind (Gen 19:11) and they left the house. In a later chapter we will get back to the story of the future of Lot and his daughters.

As we continue to follow Genesis, we come back to the story of Abram. His life illustrates to us many things, including the fact that not only are we to have one sexual partner for life – but that we should choose carefully who this partner will be.

Abram's wife, Sarai is the very first woman recorded in the Bible to be childless. We don't know why this is so, but perhaps it was as a punishment to Abram for marrying a woman who was his half-sister. Although Abram probably didn't know it, marrying a sister was something against the law of God (Lev 18:6, 9, 11), and often, these types of marriages were not blessed with children (cf. Lev 20:20-21). (Sure, the sons and grandsons of Adam and of Noah would have married their sisters or close relations, but they had no choice. By the time of Abram there would have been many women to choose a wife from without Abram having to choose a sister.)

Anyway, in Genesis chapter 15, we see Abram calling out to God in pain because of his childlessness. Yet even though his state of childlessness was painful to him, Abram knew it was wrong to take another woman to impregnate. Abram was actually tested to stay with only one woman!

However, Abram failed the test. In Genesis chapter 16 we read of his sin in taking a servant girl, Hagar, to give him a child. Not only does this pregnancy cause a major rift between Hagar and Sarai, but God also tells Abram that this child would not be the son from which Abram would receive a blessing.⁴ Eventually though, Abram was blessed through a son born to him by Sarai when he was one hundred years old (Gen 21:2-5).

When Abram failed the test and had sex with the servant girl, Hagar, so that he would bear a child, we see that Hagar becomes Abram's wife. From that point on, the Bible never talks about 'Abram's wife' again – because there would be confusion as to *which* wife was meant. Rather, to ease confusion, God continually specifies *which* wife He is talking about, saying "...your wife Sarah."⁵

It is interesting to note that so far in the book of Genesis, we have not seen any wedding ceremony.⁶ Neither are we taught anywhere that vows are necessary to begin a marriage. Rather, we see that people normally had only one sexual partner, and that their partner was to be their married mate – the person they stayed with for life. Sure, Abraham

⁴ The blessing I am talking about here is the blessing that God promised Abram in Genesis 12:2-3,7, 13:14-17. This blessing was to come through a child of Abram.

⁵ Abram and Sarai's names had respectively been changed to Abraham and Sarah. We see the words "...your wife Sarah..." in places such as the following: Gen 18:9, 10, 20:2, 23:19, 24:36.

⁶ Some say that the 'leaving of parents' mentioned in Gen 2:23 is the ancient equivalent to a wedding ceremony. However this 'leaving of parents' more likely refers to the fact that when married, couples are to start new households - new families - forsaking their lives dependent on their parents. In any case, in all of the marriages we have seen, there has neither been talk of 'leaving of parents', or of any sort of wedding or marriage contract.

(Abram) had two wives – yet this was seen neither as normal nor pleasant – he suffered much distress because of it (cf. Gen 21:11-12). Having more than one sexual partner was not good; the people who did this were either punished by death (as in the flood and in Sodom and Gomorrah), or they contended with other problems (as in the cases of Lamech the murderer and Abraham).

In Genesis chapter 24, we read about the making of a marriage – that between Isaac and Rebekah. We read that after Isaac's mother passed away, Abraham (his father) asked the chief servant in his household to find a wife for Isaac, a woman not from the land they were living in, but a woman from among Abraham's relatives living far away. The chief servant embarked on a long trip. We read that God was with him, and helped him to find Rebekah. Rebekah and her family agreed that she could travel with the servant back to marry Isaac.

“Now Isaac ... went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching. Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel and asked the servant, "Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?" "He is my master," the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself. Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death” (Gen 24:62-67).

As with the very first marriage, Rebekah and Isaac were married just by having sex with each other. Although they had both agreed to be married beforehand, there was no wedding, or any type of ceremony or banquet, no church, no priest, no ‘leaving of parents’ (on Isaac’s side), not even any human witnesses! Isaac and Rebekah married alone in a tent. Isaac’s father had not even seen the girl, nor had he given his blessing. However, once Isaac and Rebekah had sex, they were married.

In Genesis chapter 29, we see a similar occurrence. In this passage, we weigh up the contrasting values of sex as opposed to weddings. We read here that Jacob was in love with Rachel, the youngest daughter of his Uncle Laban. Jacob had agreed to work for Laban for seven years to get Rachel for his wife. After the seven years Jacob said to Laban,

“Give me my wife.⁷ My time is completed, and I want to lie with her.” So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast.⁸ But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and Jacob lay with her.... When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?” Laban replied, “It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. Finish

⁷ Remember that the original Hebrew word here is the same as ‘woman.’ The text could read “Give me my woman...”

⁸ This feast was Rachel and Jacob’s wedding.

this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work” (Gen 29:21-27).

In this story, Jacob had been betrothed to Rachel, and had even had a wedding with her – yet, we read that as Jacob had sex with Leah, she became his wife. Neither the betrothal nor the wedding had caused Rachel to be married to Jacob. However, a woman with whom Jacob had never been betrothed to, or had a wedding with, became his wife just because they had sexual relations.

Some say that Jacob’s wedding was in fact with Leah, and that she was veiled at the time so that Jacob did not realise that he was ‘marrying’ the wrong woman. However, if we read the Biblical text, it clearly says that the feast came first, *then, when evening came*, Laban gave Leah to Jacob. Leah was not given to Jacob until the evening, *after* the wedding feast that he had with Rachel.

Christian author Rudolph Brasch agrees that in Biblical times, people who had sex with each other were to remain married. He writes, “In Biblical times a specific marriage ritual was unknown. Sex itself was the ceremony. There was no additional vow, no formula, officiant or ‘documentation.’ The actual sexual union of the man and the woman, making them ‘one flesh,’ was all that was needed.”⁹

As we continue examining the Biblical teachings on sex, we will see the truth in this: sex is extremely important and sacred – much more important and sacred than what many of us seem to realise. The entire Bible does teach us that if a couple has sex, then they must stay with one another, be the other’s companion, caring for and loving one another for life – ie. be and remain married. What I mean to say by that is this: Couples who have had sex with one another should stay in *married relationship* for life. Sex is so special and important; it binds people together, not only in body, but in spirit also. I’m not thinking here about wedding ceremonies or marriage contracts, I’m thinking here of what is in the heart and mind. *It is acceptance of and compliance with the obligation of lifelong companionship that sex itself brings that makes a marriage righteous.*¹⁰

Many of you may find this teaching difficult to believe or understand at this point. As was said in the introduction to this book, many of your pre-conceived ideas about marriage and sex will be challenged. Many of the words we think we understand, such as ‘marries,’ ‘adultery,’ ‘fornication’ and ‘divorce’ will be shown to have a different Biblical meaning than what is commonly accepted.

For example, when we hear or read the word ‘marries,’ we assume that a wedding ceremony or contract has been affected between two parties. However, in the Bible, this word usually only means ‘to be joined.’ Marriage begins when a couple have sex with each other, and enter into a special, sacred and set-apart relationship. The Biblical meaning of the word ‘marries’ has no relation to any formal contract, agreement or wedding celebration. Righteous marriage is not a legal institution; it’s a spiritual joining (with the right person) and a personal commitment.

⁹ Dr R Brasch “How did sex begin? - The sense and nonsense of sexual customs and traditions” Collins Australia 1973

¹⁰ We will of course speak of unrighteous sexual relationships, such as rape or incest in later chapters.

To begin illustrating this fact, we can look at the language used in Genesis 38:2. In the NIV we read: “There Judah met the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. He married her and lay with her.” At the end of this verse, it sounds as if Judah and the woman took two separate steps – a wedding, and then sex. Their marriage sounds as if it began by a legal contract or vow, and was then consummated by sex.

If we compare the same verse from the King James Version (which is a much closer rendering to the original Hebrew), we read: “And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shuah; and he took her, and went in unto her.” Here we see that there was no wedding ceremony or legal component involved. Judah took the woman and had sex with her. In ‘taking’ her to be his woman, he shows personal commitment, a willingness to be spiritually and then physically joined with this woman for life. Their sex, along with their acceptance of the obligation of lifelong companionship it brought, made their marriage righteous.

We find many similar occurrences to this throughout the Bible. In Gen 38:8, the KJV reads: “And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother.” We notice here that it says to ‘go in unto’ and then ‘marry her.’ Today's Christian would most likely say ‘marry her’ first, and then ‘go in unto.’ The reason why we have this different view from the Bible is that the Bible sees ‘going into the woman’ as actually marrying her. The sex achieved the spiritual joining; the couple then had a righteous marriage by accepting this, and by remaining personally committed to each other. In the Bible, ‘marry her’ was not seen as a legal ceremony with vows or a contract; sex was the special and sacred act of joining one person to another. **It was the one special act that required lifelong commitment and companionship between two people.**

In history, weddings didn't always include a ceremony. They began as celebrations of new marriages – parties that celebrated an end to childhood, and the start of new married life. People welcomed new relatives, and rejoiced as a couple entered a new way of life, running their own household with prospective parenthood. The first time a couple had sex was a momentous occasion – certainly something to celebrate!

Back in ancient times when the wedding was like this, without the ceremony, it was not thought of as the beginning of marriage. People knew that *sex itself* was sacred – sex was the only physical ceremony *needed* to start this type of relationship.

People knew that a wedding was not what really joined or married a couple just as a funeral was not what killed a person. A wedding *marked* the marriage in the same way that a funeral marked death and didn't cause it.

2

How God Joins Couples in Marriage

Before continuing on in the book of Genesis, we turn to the New Testament to see that Jesus upheld the teaching just given in chapter 1.

When asked about acceptable behavior between a married couple, Jesus turns to the foundational book of the Bible, Genesis, quoting verses 1:27 and 2:24.

Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” “What did Moses command you?” he replied. They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.” “It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied. “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ *‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate*” (Mark 10:2-9 emphasis mine).

Jesus teaches that a man leaves his parents and becomes united in flesh to a woman, and the two of them become one. He says: “...what God has joined together, let man not separate.” When Jesus says that God joins couples, it is plain that marriage is no human contract. It is something done by God.

How does God join a couple in marriage? Are couples joined in marriage by God even when they do not have a church wedding ceremony?

There can be little doubt about what Jesus means when He says that two become one flesh. It is obvious that He means sex.¹¹ Sex is what joins two people together, making them one. Accordingly, in Genesis we saw that **when couples had sex, they did in fact live as married; they accepted the relationship that sex obligated them to keep.** No church ceremonies or vows are recorded as starting marriages in the Bible. We see no marriage contracts being signed, and neither do we see that a wedding is a necessary facet to marriage. Marriage was simply started when a couple had sex, and accepted their status as lifelong companions, caring for, providing for and loving one another for life.

¹¹ Many, many Christian authors agree here with this point including Jack & Carole Mayhall, in “Marriage Takes More Than Love” 1985 Navpress Great Britian p. 200, and B. Ward Powers in “Marriage and Divorce – the New Testament Teaching”, Family Life Movement of Australia 1987, p. 54

God joins couples together in marriage, not via a wedding, contract or vows. Couples do not even have to have anything to do with God to become married. To illustrate this point, we can see that many marriages in the Bible were between unbelievers. For example, King Ahab, one of the most evil people in the Bible, was married to Jezebel (1 Kings 16:30-31). The Bible shows clearly that both Ahab and Jezebel were people who rejected God in their lives, so we can assume that they had neither asked for God to join them together nor asked for God's blessing on their marriage; neither had this couple been married in a church. Yet these and many other ungodly couples in the Bible were married.

Regarding marriage, Jesus said: "...what *God* has joined together, let man not separate." Are some couples joined in marriage, yet *not* by God? Is it possible that some are joined together in another way?

Looking back towards the Scripture, we see that the Pharisees had tested Him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" A literal translation of this verse would have the Pharisees asking: "Is it right for a man to put away his woman?" In Jesus's answer, He describes the sexual act, "...the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

God joins couples together whether they ask Him to or not. This is because couples are joined in marriage to each other by the God-designed and God-created action of having sexual intercourse with each other. In *The Message Translation of the New Testament*, Eugene H. Peterson renders Matthew 19:4-6: "Haven't you read in your Bible that the Creator originally made man and woman for each other, male and female? And because of this, a man leaves father and mother and is firmly bonded to his wife, becoming one flesh – no longer two bodies but one. Because God created this organic union of the two sexes, no one should desecrate his art by cutting them apart."¹²

Believers and non-believers alike can enter into the divine relationship of marriage.¹³ And at its simplest understanding, this is because the genitals of all people were designed and created by God to join with each other. As Peterson presents, marriage is primarily an *organic* union. Therefore, it really is God who joins all couples – believers and non-believers – who have sex with each other. This is similar to the teaching that it really is God who gives us all life and sustains us all, no matter if we believe or not (cf. Prov 16:9, 20:24, Jer 10:23, Matt 5:45).

Unfortunately, this verse (Mark 10:9) has been terribly misused by people throughout the ages to allow divorce between couples who have not been 'married' in church or by a priest. However, when Jesus spoke these words, he was supporting the Old Testament pattern and law that states once a couple has sex together, they should not separate from each other. He had said that a man would be united to a woman, the two

¹² Peterson, Eugene H. "The Message" Navpress USA, 1993.

¹³ B. Ward Powers agrees, stating "...it should be noted that it is not necessary to be a Christian in order to be able to be part of a marriage that is joined together by God. To limit being joined together by God to marriages between Christians would be to ignore the fact that marriage was not an ordinance of Christ, but of Creation..." From "Marriage and Divorce – the New Testament Teaching" Family Life Movement of Australia, 1987 p. 35

becoming one flesh. Jesus said that they are no longer two, but one, and, most importantly, *that then, no one should separate them*. Once they have sex, they should stay together in a marriage relationship.

This is extremely important to understand in our world where even among couples that *are* legally married, only around half are ‘married’ in a church.¹⁴ If the church were to believe that only couples married in a church building had been joined by God, then they would have to condone the separation of a vast number of couples (even those legally married) if the couples in question so desired.

It is not only couples who have been married in church that are joined by God – nor is it only couples who are legally married that are joined by God. God has joined *every* couple that has had sex, as it was God Himself who gave them the ability to be joined.

There is a question though: has the joining been righteous or unrighteous? As the book progresses, we will go into further detail and speak about adulterous or other sinful relationships. It will be explained and shown where the Bible speaks of unrighteous marriages. At this point however, when consenting mature virgins have sex; no matter whether the people are believers or non-believers, the teaching from the Bible is that they should never ‘split up’ from one another. This is one reason why couples that become Christians are never asked to ‘re-marry’ their spouses – marriages before people became believers are still marriages!

Affirming this position on couples being joined together in marriage through the act of sexual intercourse, is this passage from the book of Malachi, at the very end of the Old Testament:

“...you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and crying; so He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands. Yet you say, “For what reason?” Because *the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth*, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. “For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence,” says the LORD of hosts. “Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously”” (Mal 2:13-16 NKJ emphasis mine).

In the King James Version of the Bible, verse 16 starts with: “For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away....”

¹⁴ In Australia in 1996, 46.8% of all wedding ceremonies were performed by non religious civil celebrants – From the Australian Bureau of Statistic’s “Tasmanian Year Book 1998” page 95.

The word ‘divorce’ means ‘putting away.’¹⁵ Divorce in the Bible is not a legal institution, nor does it dissolve marriage. Divorce in the Bible is plainly and simply ‘putting away from you your wife.’ Divorce happens when a man refuses to care for, provide for, and love the woman he has had sex with. It is sin, and Jesus tells us that Moses only permitted it “...because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning” (Matt 19:8). For “...the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth...” (Mal 2:14). God witnesses everything (cf. Ps 139:7-8, Prov 2:17). God knows everything a person does, and every time they have sex. God hates ‘divorce’ – He hates it when a couple who have had sex ‘split-up’ from each other – He hates it when a man refuses to accept the responsibility of his first marriage. There is no excuse for this behavior – *even youth, says the Bible.*

“Well, I don’t know whether it’s good or bad – worrying or glad – news I’ve got for ya today...” said my friend Shari. “Tahlia’s pregnant.” Tahlia was Shari’s fifteen-year-old daughter, and the baby was due in only four months. Shari herself had been a single parent for many years; she had married her first husband at a very young age and had been divorced by him when Tahlia was five. The last thing Shari wanted was for her daughter to go through the same thing that she had gone through, and she told Tahlia that she would not allow her to see the baby’s father, Timothy, again. Shari wanted to help Tahlia raise the baby herself at home.

The Malachi passage asks “...did He not make them one?” And answers that God *has* made them one, because God seeks godly offspring. Here it is made clear that one reason God wants couples to stay together, is for the sake of possible children. One thing that seems greatly forgotten in our age of contraception is that sex usually produces babies – in fact, the very first sexual union between two people can do this.¹⁶

God also wants people to have sex with only one partner because God wants people to be pure. *Impurity* means ‘mixed with foreign matter, or adulterated.’¹⁷ Impurity means having sex with more than one person. Once a person has had sex, they remain pure by not ‘mixing’ with another person, ie. by not having sex with anyone else.

Tahlia and Timothy were married in God’s eyes; they had become one flesh and, according to the word of God, weren’t to be separated. Furthermore, we will speak later on the fact that even secular researchers agree with the Bible that it is best for a child to have both its mother and father.

I asked Shari the following question: “Would you rather Tahlia be married to Timothy, or would you have the baby raised by a single mother? Would you rather encourage Tahlia and Timothy to stay together

¹⁵ Divorce – along with separation, remarriage and other related issues will be examined more fully in later chapters. The beginning of chapter 7 details the definitions of the Biblical words for divorce and how they clearly mean ‘sending forth’ or ‘putting away.’

¹⁶ Although, while the possibility of having children is always a reason for a marriage to hold together, *not* having any children is never an excuse for a marriage to break up. See such childless marriages as Abram and Sarai (Gen 16), Jacob and Rachel (Gen 30), Elkanah and Hannah (1 Sam 1).

¹⁷ Definition is from the Collins Australian Pocket English Dictionary, 1981 Sydney Australia.

in lifelong commitment, or have them split-up, only to find that Tahlia ends up having casual sex with other boyfriends?” Shari’s worry that Tahlia and Timothy’s relationship would eventually fail was overshadowing all her thoughts – however, I advised her that this fear could not be a foregone conclusion.

The situation that Shari found herself in would be devastating for many parents – even more so for parents who had similar experiences themselves with bad results. However, Shari’s opinion that Tahlia was just too young to handle the responsibilities of marriage and motherhood unfortunately reminded me of this harsh-sounding passage in 1 Timothy:

“...In later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. *They forbid people to marry* and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For *everything God created is good*, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving...” (1 Timothy 4:1-4 emphasis mine).

Perhaps if Tahlia and Timothy had realized the importance and sacredness of sex before they indulged, things would have turned out differently. However, the fact was now that Tahlia was pregnant. And it was only because Shari was fearful that their relationship would end in the future that she was telling her daughter to end the relationship *now*. However, God never said, “Make sure you have a good job before you marry.” Neither has God ever said, “Ensure that the man you marry has a fine education.” Again, God never declared, “Wait until you are over 21 before you act on the sexual desires I have given you.”

Rather, God said: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God...” (John 14:1) and “...do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear...” (Luke 12:22).

And in fact, getting married at an older age, or after gaining more education seems much more detrimental than beneficial to marriage. After conducting a sexual involvement survey back in the 1970’s, Tim and Beverly La Haye noticed “that the more education a person has, the more apt he is to get a divorce.” They add: “Evidently the humanistic philosophy of higher education, which often tries to destroy the permanency of marriage, makes inroads even in the thinking of Christians.”¹⁸ Christians should not believe such worldly philosophies such as the one that says a better education before one enters into marriage is desirable (cf. Col 2:8).

Secular research and statistics also show that getting married at an older age is not helpful to marriages. Between 1977 and 1997, while the median age of people entering their first registered marriage increased by 4 – 4.5 years, the number of divorces had risen

¹⁸ Tim and Beverly La Haye, “The Act of Marriage: Enjoying the Beauty of Sexual Love” 1976 Marshall Pickering, London, page 221.

– and this even while the number of registered marriages had fallen!¹⁹ Getting married older or after gaining more education seems only to be detrimental to marriages – and certainly doesn't seem to help their success.

After counseling, prayer and reading the Bible, Shari decided that she would not force her daughter and the father of her first grandchild to separate – rather, she decided to make it her aim to teach them as many Biblical truths about marriage as she could (cf. Titus 2:4-5). She was a Christian committed to God and His word, and realized that rather than acting out of fear (fear that the situation would end badly) she should have been trusting God and His word and following His directives. With God, nothing is impossible, and even a relationship between young teenagers can last the distance. Whatever happened in the end would be up to the young couple themselves, however, for her part, Shari had to teach and follow God's advice and trust Him.²⁰

Going back to the top of this chapter, we read that the Pharisees had come and *tested* Jesus, asking Him if it were lawful for a man to divorce his wife. What they were trying to do was to get Jesus to agree with Moses in allowing divorce. In effect, they wanted Jesus to say that it was right for them to reduce the demands of sex – to say that sex need not be a lifelong bond – and to make the laws of marriage more comfortable for themselves. If you think about it, it isn't much different from what many people are doing today (if only subconsciously)... In this generation, people devalue *sex*, not understanding its true meaning and consequences in an effort to make life more comfortable for themselves.

Although unknowingly, Shari was one who was following many who do this. She was devaluing the sexual relationship that Tahlia and Timothy had, believing it and even the creation of their baby to be sinful. She had believed that their relationship – their family – did not demand lifelong commitment and companionship, and could be ended. She was almost ignoring the fact that her daughter had had sex, was married in God's sight, and was to be a mother, and therefore, she was not encouraging her daughter to do what was right. Teaching people that sex does require a lifelong commitment is important. Even the couple who have had totally lustful, sinful sex, have become 'one flesh' with each other – and even though this sex may have been seen and thought of as just 'casual,' it has far-reaching, and even eternal consequences. It may not *always* be a good thing to encourage people who have had totally lustful, sinful sex to stay together as married (these situations will be discussed at a later point in the book). However, in situations such as that of Tahlia and Timothy, where the couple had previously been virgins, had a baby, and a desire to stay together, it was the right thing to do. The sex that they had, while probably not thought through properly, was in fact not really ever meant as 'casual' – of course, previously, they hadn't seriously considered marriage, but they did think of themselves as 'boyfriend/girlfriend,' and hadn't just had a 'one-night stand.'

Timothy, Tahlia and the baby were a family. The Bible says: "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith

¹⁹ From the ABS website <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/>

²⁰ There is a short appendix to this chapter at the end of the book in which we look briefly at some of the things that Shari – or a person in a similar situation – should do and teach to the young couple.

and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim 5:8). It was right for Timothy to provide for, care for, and love both Tahlia and the baby. And as I mentioned previously, even secular researchers agree that it is best for children to have both biological parents raise them together. A 1988 study by the National Center for Health Statistics (USA) found that children in single-parent families were more likely to drop out of high school, become pregnant as teenagers, abuse drugs and get into trouble with the law than those living with both parents.²¹

And in 1993, social scientist Nicholas Zill reported that children of divorced parents are, regardless of their economic circumstances, twice as likely as others to have poor relationships with their parents, drop out of high school and receive psychological help. Zill made the following statement: “Many people were saying single-parent families are just different, not necessarily worse or better, and the factors that link kids to problems have to do with poverty. But my research didn’t support that explanation.” Zill’s research showed that no matter what the financial status of the family – the fact that the child was raised by only one parent was what made the unfortunate difference.²²

The US News and World Report also says, “More than virtually any other factor, a biological²³ father’s presence in the family will determine a child’s success and happiness. The children of divorce and those born outside marriage struggle through life at a measurable disadvantage, according to a growing chorus of social thinkers. The revised thinking is that it’s the breakdown of families that feeds social ills. Fatherlessness is the most destructive trend of our generation. The absence of fathers is linked to most social nightmares – from boys with guns to girls with babies. No welfare reform plan can cut poverty as thoroughly as a two-parent family. Raising marriage rates will do far more to fight crime than building prisons or putting more cops on the streets. Divorce can increase an adult’s happiness, but it is devastating to a child. One third report moderate or severe depression five years after a divorce. The hurt may remain hidden for years. They often grow up wary of love, marriage and family, and over a third have little or no ambition 10 years after their parents part.”²⁴

It’s extremely scary to think of these things that researchers claim causes family breakdown. However, the point here is not to condemn people who live in these situations. Rather, the aim is to highlight the importance of preventing these things from happening in the first place. As the Bible has taught us for centuries, now even secular researchers agree that it is usually better for everyone if families stay together – and *families are made when couples have sex with one another.*

Perhaps you are in a situation now such as one of these: A father who has perhaps been forced out of his home and cannot look after his children as he would like; or a

²¹ Los Angeles Times, 27/5/96 page A16.

²² Los Angeles Times, 27/5/96 page A16.

²³ Many counsellors and people who have been affected by adoption will agree that a very high percentage (if not all) of adopted people suffer from rejection and problems stemming from being adopted out. While often used by God for good, I do not believe that adoption is in line with the Biblical ideal of children living with both biological parents.

²⁴ Quoted from “U.S News and World Report” in “Total Quality Marriage” <http://www.webedelic.com/church/tqm.htm>

mother, whose husband has left, and now has children without that all-important male role-model. Perhaps you are a child yourself, who has been left without one or both parents. If you have been, or are in, any situation similar to these, perhaps it seems that there is no human answer to the problem. Even if you have been the cause of this situation, you can take comfort from Ps 68:5-6 which says that God is “a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows... God sets the lonely in families...” With God there is always hope for the healing and repentance and protection of those whose lives have been hurt by the improper use and respect of sex. But of course, if we can halt the progress of these things happening in the future, we have done a very good thing.

Sex is such a big, important step in the life of every person. It should not ever be casual. We in this generation need to learn its importance and sacredness, and that it requires us to be in a marriage relationship where the highest level of personal commitment (from both sides, or even from just one side) exists.

In the next chapter, we will continue to look at the Malachi passage cited above; specifically focusing on the fact that sex is the start of a covenant relationship.

“...The phrase ‘two shall become one flesh’ ... found four times in Scripture, certainly has in it the aspects of emotional, spiritual, and mental oneness. But the ultimate meaning here is physical – a blending of two bodies into one flesh to promote mutual love.”²⁵

“‘Being united together’ and ‘becoming one flesh’ are terms that have definite sexual meaning. It is significant that in Genesis God does not say that husband and wife become one unit in society or one legal entity or one mind or heart or soul (though there may be truth in each of these), but one *flesh*. And Jesus endorsed this when he quoted Genesis, also using – and then repeating – the words ‘one flesh.’”²⁶

²⁵ Mayhall, Jack & Carole “Marriage Takes More Than Love” 1985 Navpress, Great Britain p. 200.

²⁶ B. Ward Powers, “Marriage and Divorce – the New Testament Teaching” Family Life Movement of Australia, 1987 p. 54.

3

Sex is Covenant

In the passage from Malachi that we looked at in the last chapter, we notice towards the end the word ‘covenant.’ “...She is your wife by covenant...” says Malachi (2:14). Many people assume that the word ‘covenant’ here has to do with a wedding ceremony or contract. However, if we look at covenants throughout the Bible, we see that they follow certain patterns:

- Covenants are solemn, confirmed, *verbal* agreements between a stronger party and a weaker party (usually God and His people);
- God always sets the terms of Godly covenants;
- *The only way a covenant is entered into is by blood sacrifice;*
- Covenants are pre-eminent, superseding all following claims;
- Covenants are permanent/everlasting;
- Violating a covenant is a very serious wrong.²⁷

The concept of covenant is central to many Biblical doctrines where we often see people being ‘bound’ to God. In fact, the word ‘covenant’ itself means ‘to bind.’²⁸

Besides these things, we find that most Biblical covenants are *marked* by outward signs. Water baptism is the sign of the new covenant, circumcision was the sign of the covenant God made with Abraham, and rainbows are the sign of the covenant God made with all life on earth after the flood (Genesis 9:17).

While the outward signs marked covenants, and were not entirely necessary for the covenant to begin, the blood sacrifice actually *started* the covenant, and for the covenant to begin, blood sacrifice was entirely necessary. Covenants are even said to be ‘cut’ rather than ‘made’ – and this refers to the ‘cut’ bringing the blood necessary for covenant to begin.

²⁷ The information here on covenants is from the book by Tom Marshall “Explaining Covenants”, 1992 Sovereign World Limited, England.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 8

With the covenant God made to all life on earth after the flood, the blood sacrifice was the deaths of many people under the waters of the flood. The blood of Jesus is the sacrifice of the New Covenant.²⁹

In a marriage covenant, sex is the blood sacrifice. But when I say this, I also wish to emphasize that it's not the blood that may come from the vagina as it is penetrated for the first time. The blood that is sacrificed when two people have sex is not just a little blood from the genital region! The blood sacrifice is made as the lives of two people experience an *ending* or *death* to their two single lives.³⁰

People enter into the marriage covenant as they join their bodies sexually to another person, becoming 'one flesh' with that other person. Their single lives have died and been sacrificed to form a new life – married life – an ending of two separate persons, and the birth of a new oneness. Paul called this a mystery (Eph 5:32), and it is difficult to believe! But when two bodies join in sex, they do become one (see Eph 5:28-32). Sex itself is self-sacrifice – blood sacrifice – death of the single person. And so marriage is constant self-sacrifice; it's a lifelong relationship, a 'living' with another for many days (cf. Hosea 3:3).

A wedding is the outward sign that marks this covenantal relationship that has begun. Neither a wedding nor vows nor a contract has initiated this bonding. Sex is the blood sacrifice, initiator, and beginning of marriage. A couple is not married in God's eyes until they have had sex with each other. Even in modern times, a marriage is not said to be 'consummated' or completed until the couple have had sex.

In the covenant that the Lord made with Abraham to bless him with many descendents and much land recorded in Genesis 15, a heifer, a goat and a ram were sacrificed.

“Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other... a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram...” (Gen 15:10, 17-18).

God Himself passed between the meat that had been sacrificed to make the covenant we see here. Hence, Strongs Concordance says that the Hebrew word 'beriyth'

²⁹ The blood of Jesus was also the sacrifice of the covenant God made with Abraham. God said, “I will establish my covenant as an *everlasting* covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you... I will be their God” (Gen 17:7-8). God did this through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, the *only* way ever to the Father. The death of Jesus transcended time – Jesus died for the sins of all humans – not only the ones who died after the time that He lived and died as a man on earth. Circumcision was not the blood sacrifice of this covenant, as then there would be a separate covenant with each person circumcised, and female people would then not be included. The cut of the circumcision, although bringing blood, was just a symbol of the real blood of the covenant (that of Jesus). See also the next footnote.

³⁰ Death and blood are two highly related terms in the Bible. For instance, when we look at the word 'blood' in the New Testament, in almost every case it refers to death. As two single people join together in the act of sex, they 'die' as single people and become one married person. This death of each single person is the blood sacrifice made in marriage.

(which we translate as ‘covenant’) actually means a ‘compact – *made by passing between pieces of flesh.*’

In the marriage covenant, man is described as the ‘stronger’ party, whom, like God in the example above, passes between the flesh of the other to ‘cut’ the covenant. By being called the ‘stronger’ party, I only mean that the male has a greater responsibility in marriage as God has a greater responsibility than we do in our relationship with him (cf. Eph 5:25, 1 Pet 3:7). Man is not ‘better’ than woman; he has a differing role. This is the same as God the Father is not ‘better’ than God the Son or the Holy Spirit, even though He is said to be ‘stronger.’ Man is *equal* to woman as the three persons of the trinity are equal to each other. When a woman submits to a man in marriage, she is no *less* than he is – in the same way as Jesus submitted to His Father, and was no less than Him. In marriage, man and woman have differing roles – just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit perform different roles. In marriage, man and woman are both bound to one another, both must remain with each other for life. Man is the ‘stronger’ party but is not the ‘better’ party.

Let’s look at the passage from Malachi again:

“...you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and crying; so He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands. Yet you say, “For what reason?” Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. “For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence,” says the LORD of hosts. “Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously”” (Mal 2:13-16 NKJ).

In this passage, people are weeping and crying out to God, wondering why He will not answer them. God finally speaks to them and says that He had seen the covenant they made with a woman in their youth. Furthermore, God has seen them deal treacherously with this woman – perhaps divorcing her.

God says that He hates divorce, and asks: “Did I not make you both one?” God says, “...let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth...” When a man has sex with a woman, he should never put her away and forget the fact that he has made a covenant with her – for this is dealing treacherously.

And just as God sees us whenever we have sex, God also knows our intentions, motivations and thoughts. He knows if we are committed to our sexual partner, just as He only knows if we are truly committed to Him. Only God can truly judge whether a person is righteously married, and why any marriage breaks down.

The people weeping and crying in the Malachi passage above had been at fault. They had forgotten that a woman they had sex with in their youth was supposed to be

theirs now. Perhaps this was because of what we may call a ‘one-night stand?’ Perhaps the couple had never intended on being married? Whatever the intention was – the couple had sex, and had not continued to fulfil the obligations that the action required.

People forgot they were supposed to be married – perhaps because a wedding ceremony or contract had never been affected? No one else may have known that the couple had sex, and so there was no pressure on them to stay together. Obviously, we are getting to one of the reasons why wedding ceremonies were instituted in the first place – to protect sexual relationships, and to hold them together.

The outward signs of the marriage covenant (a wedding and/or contract) were performed to remind and to teach the people of what they had done. The wedding ceremony is a reminder and a witness to the world that a marriage has taken place. Do we *really* need this? Not exactly. But being reminded of something as important as sex is never wrong! When Joshua and the people that he led made a covenant with the Lord to serve and obey Him, Joshua took a large stone and made it a marker, or witness, to what the people had done. Whenever the people saw the marking stone, they remembered that they had agreed to the covenant (Joshua 24:24-27).

The problem with the wedding is that in this day and age, among many people, the outward sign of the wedding has grown to be seen as the marriage itself, and sex has become meaningless. People respect weddings more than they respect sex (yet even weddings and marriage contracts are hardly respected). We have allowed the outward sign to take precedence in importance over the reality of what that outward sign shows.

And this sad reality has happened many times, with many covenants.

Let’s look at how this happened with another of the most important covenants that a person can enter into – the covenant of entering into a relationship with God.

Back in the times of Genesis, the Lord called out to Abraham and announced the exact same gospel to him as what we can also respond to today.

Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. *The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you”* (Gal 3:6-8 emphasis mine).

Abraham simply replied to God in faith and was saved just as Christians are today – through faith in the same gospel and the shed blood of Jesus.

Abraham never went to church. He had no official certificates or church membership status. He didn’t know that he was born-again, and he wasn’t water baptized. He didn’t even know what the blood sacrifice of the covenant was – that of Jesus dying for him. However, Abraham trusted God and was saved by Him.³¹ Abraham entered into

³¹ This is a highly debatable point, however I personally do not believe that the gospel message that Abraham received included the details of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Rather, I believe that Abraham responded to the message that God would save him, even though he was a sinner! Abraham didn’t

a relationship with God via the blood sacrifice of Jesus – and not by any of the usual outward signs of this covenant.

However, many of you will know that Abraham *did*, in fact, perform a ceremony – circumcision. God tells Abraham:

“You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the *sign* of the covenant between me and you” (Gen 17:11 emphasis mine).

The ceremony was only a *sign* of the covenant relationship between Abraham and God.

Abraham was not saved *because* he was circumcised. Abraham did not enter into relationship with God because he was circumcised or when he was circumcised.

However, many years after the time of Abraham, in the time of Jesus, this understanding had been changed by men. They had begun to rely on the fact that they were circumcised for their salvation, and they thought that everyone who was circumcised was automatically saved (see Acts 15). They believed that without circumcision, a person could not be saved.

But Jesus came and taught that this was wrong. He proclaimed that faith in Him³² (and in His work) was what saves a person, and not any external sign.

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Gal 5:6).

Can you see the similarities here between circumcision, water baptism and weddings?

Today, many Christians rely on the fact that they have been baptized in water for their salvation. And many have also believed that if a person was not water baptized, then they were not saved. However outward signs such as circumcision or water baptism have never saved a person or been the basis for their true faith. Abraham was saved without water baptism, so too can we be saved without it. It is only faith, faith in God and the blood sacrifice of Jesus, that allows a person to be saved and to enter into relationship with their creator. The signs of water baptism and circumcision were only there to remind

need to know *how* God would do this – only that God *would* be able to do this. Accordingly, the good news that we can respond to today is that *God can save us* if we turn to Him in faith and repentance for our sins! Jesus is the only way that God saves us, however, I do not personally believe that we need to have any intellectual knowledge of this atonement before we can receive it. The knowledge of the work of Jesus is a great blessing that we have over Abraham and others like him, they only knew that God *would* save, whereas we are so blessed to actually know *how*. (See also the next footnote).

³² Remember here that Jesus is actually God. When people in the OT had faith in God, they had a faith in Jesus even though they did not know his name or the details of his life on earth. So, they were putting their trust in God and His works just as we do. We however, are more blessed by knowing more about what these great works of God actually were (see also the last footnote).

people of the step they had taken and the relationship that they had entered into. People can most definitely be saved without having been water baptized.³³

In the same way as false thoughts around circumcision and baptism have arisen among people of God, many Christians today have false thoughts about the wedding ceremony. Many believe that if a couple have not had a wedding ceremony, then they are not married. In this way, marriage is being bound by its outward signs, and is not recognized unless it submits to them.

To explain this point a bit more: Just as many believe that a couple are not married without a wedding, many also seem to think that a person is not saved unless they have been water baptized. If these things were true, then God himself would be bound by the actions of humans. Salvation would be by human works, as would marriage!

The wedding is a human action which only symbolizes the fully divine work of a couple being joined together in marriage (cf. Matt 19:6), in just the same way as water baptism or circumcision are human actions symbolizing the fully divine work of salvation.

Just as circumcision or water baptism is not necessary for salvation, neither is a wedding necessary for God to join a couple together in marriage. These are just outward signs. I'm not saying these signs are either bad or to be dismissed. What I am saying is that we should know what the signs symbolize, and that they are signs rather than reality. God sees our actions and knows what is in our hearts; He does not need us to perform signs so that He will know what we really think and believe.

In Jer 9:25-26 we read: "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will punish all who are circumcised only in the flesh – Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab and all who live in the desert in distant places. For all these nations are really uncircumcised, and even the whole house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart."

Just being circumcised on the outside is not what God really wanted – He desired inner commitment. Having been water baptized means nothing if a person no longer loves and follows God. No wedding ceremony can make a marriage righteous or a couple truly committed to each other either. The sign means nothing if it is not reflected by the inner condition of the heart and mind. True commitment to God or to our partner can exist even where there has been no water baptism or wedding. Just as people have no right to feel saved just because they are circumcised or water baptized, a person should not automatically believe that their marriage is truly righteous just because they have been

³³ When a person is baptized in water, they 'act out' death (by drowning), they are washed by the water (a symbol of the blood) and they rise up out of the water to show their new life. This water baptism is a symbol of the inner baptism that God does in the life of the person! The word 'baptism' means 'new life', and when a person is water baptized, they receive new spiritual life – spiritual baptism. The spiritual baptism is also called being 'born again', and is entirely necessary for salvation. Real spiritual baptism is a divine action, whereas water baptism is something physical that *we* do to symbolise our acceptance of spiritual baptism (new birth) that God has promised to give us when we turn to Him in repentance and faith. I believe that spiritual baptism is necessary for a person to be saved, however a baptism ceremony in water is not crucial to a persons salvation (see the next footnote also).

‘married’ via a wedding ceremony. Righteousness in marriage comes from a deep internal commitment to being with the partner for life.³⁴ Righteousness is not granted when we perform a particular ceremony or sign a particular piece of paper.

At this point, we can look back to the story the pastor told me of the woman named Sally, related in the introduction to this book. When the pastor spoke to me, it sounded as if Sally was already born-again. She should have been allowed to be water baptized, as this would only have symbolized the relationship with God that she had already entered into. Water baptism is not the deciding factor of a person’s relationship with God. Also, the relationship she had with her de facto partner was stable and committed. Again, the lack of the outward sign of a wedding ceremony was not the deciding factor of the righteousness of her relationship. And, in the eyes of God, Sally was already married to this man – living in a covenant relationship. Rather than telling her to leave him, she should have been encouraged to stay with him – the man with whom she had become ‘one flesh.’

Before moving on from the subject of covenant, we need to look at one last aspect. As with other Biblical covenants, in marriage *God also sets the terms*. These mainly consist of lifelong commitment, love, care and companionship. We are expected to accept these terms when the blood of the covenant is sacrificed.

Where the people involved refuse to accept the terms required of the marriage covenant they have made, the covenant is violated even before it has a chance to properly begin.³⁵ I say ‘violated’ here, because covenants, being permanent, cannot be broken or dissolved by human actions. Rather, human actions violate or defile covenants. With the New Covenant Jesus sealed for us in His blood (Matt 26:27-28, 2 Cor 5:15), we can often see an example of covenant violation. Many people refuse to accept the terms of this covenant – even though the terms of this covenant are called ‘good news.’ And think of the punishment that violation of this covenant brings.... Violation of any covenant is a very serious offence against God (see Jer 34:18-19).

So what of adultery, rape and fornication? These are violations of the marriage covenant. In many cases, there are victims to this violation. Over the next chapters we will address these issues.

³⁴ Assuming of course that the relationship was not adulterous, or against any of the unlawful relationships mentioned in Leviticus 18. We will discuss these relationships at a later point in the book.

³⁵ As was previously mentioned, the stronger party to the marriage (the male) has a much greater responsibility towards the marriage than the female. In cases of rape, the victim is not at fault due to the fact that there has been no consent in the first place to the sex, and also because the stronger party has not had any intention of being righteously married to the woman in the first place. I believe that ‘righteously’ would include allowing each party to consent. We will speak in a later chapter about breaking unrighteous sexual bondages, and in that chapter, rape will be discussed.

Deut 24:1-4 talks about men divorcing their wives. This is the passage that Jesus talks about when He says: "...Moses permitted you to divorce your wives *because your hearts were hard*. But it was not this way from the beginning" (Matt 19:8). Just before saying this, Jesus quoted Gen 2:24, stating that two will become one, and must not be separated. Jesus Himself stated that divorce was sinful – permitted under duress – it was not meant to be. In 1 Cor 7:11 we read: "...a husband must not divorce his wife." Men should never give up their responsibility, love and companionship to their wives – once a couple has sex with one another, they are both bound together to each other for life.

After Jesus clearly confirmed the fact that in marriage two become one and should never be separated, "His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry" (Matt 19:10 KJV). Many of us would agree here with the disciples! If all people knew that having sex with someone bound them together for life – many may think a bit harder before having sex in the first place.

Jesus highly respected the bond between couples that have sex with each other. In Luke 12:53 He says “They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” Husbands will not be divided against wives... Jesus never suggests that couples in sexual relationship should ever be divided – *two become one* (cf. Matt 10:37-38, 19:29).

4

The Responsibilities of Sex

So far, we've learnt that marriages begin with sex – that when a couple have sex God expects them to stay married for life. The Bible certainly does not teach that wedding ceremonies start marriages. In this chapter, we go back to the beginning of the Old Testament, starting half way through the book of Genesis to see how people lived this teaching.

One of the first things we cannot fail to notice is that very often, men had more than one wife! Some men are said to have 'concubines' also – what does this word really mean? In this chapter we'll look at the meaning of the words 'adultery' and 'concubine.'

In the first chapter of this book, we spoke of Jacob, who was tricked into marrying Leah even though he had wanted her sister, Rachel. Eventually, Jacob did in fact marry Rachel also. Jacob loved Rachel more than he loved Leah, however Leah remained his wife. There was no divorce, the second marriage did not annul the first, and the second and subsequent marriages were not called 'adultery.'

In the story, we read that because Leah was not loved by Jacob, the Lord opened her womb for children, and He closed the womb of Rachel. After Leah had borne Jacob four sons, Rachel was very jealous. She said to her husband:

““Here is Bilhah, my maidservant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and that through her I too can build a family.” So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a *wife*. Jacob slept with her, and she became pregnant and bore him a son” (Gen 30:3-5 emphasis mine).

Here we see Bilhah becoming Jacob's wife by having sex with him. And as we follow his story through Genesis, we see that each of the four women Jacob had sex with (including Bilhah), remained his wives for their entire lives. They were in no way free to have sex with other men.

Wives did not have to be those women whom a husband was 'in love with.' Jacob loved his wife Rachel, but not his wife Leah whom he still had sex with (obviously, as they had four children). It is likely that Jacob wasn't 'in love with' Bilhah either – he only married her on the request of Rachel to provide her with children.

So not only does Genesis teach that once a couple had sex they were to remain married – it is also taught that if a man was already married when he had sex with a second woman, then *both* women would be his wives.³⁶ So what then is adultery?

In Exodus 20:14, the seventh of the ten commandments God gives the people is “You shall not commit adultery.” Amazingly, less than a chapter later in 21:10, we read that if a man “...marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her food, clothing and marital rights.”

The reason for this is that the meaning of ‘adultery’ in the Old Testament was sex with a *married woman*. And a married woman is defined as a woman who has had sex with a man that is still alive. *Adultery is not sex with a married man*. A man can have sex with more than one virgin woman without this being considered adultery. Men only commit adultery when they have sex with a married woman (ie. one who has previously had sex with another man).³⁷

Don’t get me wrong here – the Bible never *encourages* men to have sex with more than one woman – it shows rather that this practice, while undesirable, does sometimes happen. And when it does happen, ‘putting away’ (divorcing) any of these women is shown to be a far greater wrong than marrying more than one woman was in the first place. As long as the woman that the man had sex with was a virgin, it was better if she stayed his wife for the rest of her life.

The Old Testament teaches that any time a woman has sex with more than one man (while both men were living), her second and subsequent sexual relationships are adulterous. Because of this, even when a virgin woman was raped, God decreed that she would have to stay with the man who committed this crime. This was far better than the woman being left either without a husband for the rest of her life, or living in an adulterous relationship with a second husband. The Bible’s Deuteronomic law states this quite clearly:

“If a man finds a girl who is a virgin, who is not engaged,³⁸ and seizes her and lies with her and they are discovered, then the man who lay with her shall give to the girl’s father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall become his wife because he has violated her; he cannot divorce her all his days” (Deut 22:28-29 NAS).

³⁶ Perhaps this is a bit of a punishment! A man who had sex with more than one woman was burdened with all of them for life as his wives! Remember that in Old Testament times there was no social security, no reliable birth control and little earning capacity for women.

³⁷ The New Strongs Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible (Thomas Nelson Publishers 1990) defines the Old Testament word for adultery – *na’aph* as a primitive root; to commit adultery; figuratively, to apostatise. The KJV translates it adulterer (-ess), commit (-ing) adultery, woman that breaketh wedlock.

³⁸ We will speak of engaged women in a later chapter.

Here, we find no mention of whether or not the *man* was married before he had sex with this girl. And his punishment for raping her (see the same verse in the NIV) is only that he has to pay fifty shekels and keep her for the rest of his life!³⁹

This law of marriage is supported throughout the Old Testament. We read a striking case in 2 Samuel 13. In this chapter, Amnon, a son of King David, raped his half-sister Tamar. After he raped her, he hated her, and said to her: “Get up and get out!” “No!” she said to him. “Sending me away would be a greater wrong than what you have already done to me”⁴⁰ (2 Sam 13:15-16). Tamar was supporting the law by telling Amnon that he was to keep her as his wife, regardless of the fact that they were half-siblings and that she had been raped. When Amnon refused to keep Tamar as his wife, she became a desolate, disgraced woman who was not to wear the robes of the unmarried (virgin) any longer – for in being raped, she had been married.

We can look at another example of this teaching from the book of Exodus:

“If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride-price, and she shall be his wife. If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he must still pay the bride-price for virgins” (Exod 22:16-17).

In the first verse here we can see that once a man has had sex with a virgin, he *must* pay the bride-price and she *shall* be his wife. The man is obligated to take and pay for the woman, and the woman is obligated to be the man’s wife.

In the next verse, we read that if the father absolutely, utterly refuses to give his daughter away, (an understandable reaction), the man’s obligation towards the woman he has had sex with still stands. Even though they don’t live together, the woman is still the man’s wife. We see this in the fact that he is obligated to provide for the woman – he pays the bride price. He is responsible for her.

The man who had sex with the woman was forced to pay the bride price because it was most likely that no other man would ever pay it – now that the woman had had sex with another. She was no longer unmarried, and from this point on it would be adultery for another man to have sex with her.

It was highly likely that the woman in the above passage would not ever be married by another man – she had already been used – and was no longer ‘pure.’ Men liked to marry virgins – and this attitude was still very common in the world as little as twenty years ago or less. One reason for this is that adultery is against God’s laws – and people used to know more clearly in their hearts what adultery was.⁴¹

³⁹ Of course this sounds very unfair towards the innocent woman, and I am not suggesting that we should follow this course of action today. Rather, I am highlighting that this is a teaching from the Old Testament. We will speak of rape and incest more fully as the book progresses.

⁴⁰ The ‘wrong’ was marrying a half sister – this is prohibited in Lev 18:9,11 as well as marrying her without consent.

⁴¹ People do still know this in their hearts – look among teenagers today (if they will let you) and you may find teenage girls admitting a sense of unfairness – that their male peers can freely speak of their sexual

Back in Biblical times, when there were no paternity tests, men wanted to be sure that their wives were having *their* children, and not the previous man's. I think also that all people had more respect for each other and for marriage – men in general didn't want to take another man's wife. Yes, society is vastly different now, but can we use that excuse as our justification to commit adultery? As Christians, our standard is presented in the Bible, and although difficult at times, this is the basic ideal that we should strive to live up to.

Even if the woman in the above passage did marry another man while the first was alive, in rare cases she could be killed (as per Deut 22:22). Otherwise, she would be known as an adulteress; or a prostitute, because then two men would be obligated to provide and care (and pay) for her – she would have two husbands.

The punishment for adultery was severe, and adultery was when a woman had sex with a second or subsequent living partner, or when a man had sex with someone else's wife. Adultery is only sex with a married woman, not a married man. Even in the New Testament, which we will look at in further chapters, this is the meaning of adultery (cf. 1 Cor 7:10-11, 39).

What about concubines then?

Concubines are often mentioned throughout the Old Testament. Concubines were servant wives who held a lower social position than the wives who were not called concubines.

Remember in Genesis 30:4, mentioned above, when Bilhah was clearly called the wife of Jacob? Just a little later in Genesis 35:22, she is called Jacob's concubine.⁴² Bilhah was a servant-girl – therefore she was called 'concubine,' however, she was still also a wife of Jacob – mother of two of his sons – and part of his household for life (see also Gen 37:2).

In Judges 19, we read the story of a Levite whose concubine was murdered. In Judges 20:4 we then read: "...the Levite, the husband of the murdered woman...." Although she was called a 'concubine' the couple were still married to each other.

There is no difference between a wife and a concubine other than that the concubine had a lower social standing – that of a servant. Both wives and concubines were women who were attached in marriage to the man for life, and while he was alive, neither wives nor concubines were free to marry any other man.

No matter how you look at it, no matter what the social standing of the woman involved, the teaching from the Old Testament is that once a couple have had sex, they must remain married to each other for life, even if the woman is just regarded as a concubine. The ancient Scriptures teach us that women are strictly allowed only one

exploits without being branded a 'slut' or looked down upon. Males who 'play around' are looked up to, whereas females who do the same things are recipients of scorn (cf. Rom 2:15).

⁴² Strong's Concordance tells us that the word 'concubine' is in Hebrew 'piylegesh.' It is a word of uncertain derivation meaning a concubine; also (masculine) a paramour. In the KJV it is translated concubine in all but one instance – it translated 'paramour' once, in Eze 23:20.

husband (while he lives) and that men have a great responsibility to any woman they have sexual relations with (because they are married, and if they separate, the woman may possibly commit adultery).

In 1 Kings 11:3 we see that Solomon “...had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines....” Notice here that the women called ‘wives’ were those of royal birth (a higher social standing). The concubines were still Solomon’s wives – however they were called concubines because they had a lower social status than that of the royal women Solomon married.

So Solomon had married one thousand women.... Having this many wives shows that Solomon was sexually addicted,⁴³ and we can also see this through the fact that even though God forbade the Israelites from intermarrying with people of different faiths, Solomon in fact had many wives that were not Jews (1 Kings 11:1-2). This sexual addiction, and inability to refrain from having sex with women from many different faiths led Solomon (originally the wisest man of all time (1 Kings 3:12)) astray to follow other gods (cf. Deut 17:17). The Lord became extremely displeased with Solomon, raising up adversaries against him and taking the King-ship away from his family line (1 Kings 11:11-14, 23). All this occurred because he could not limit himself to wives who shared the Jewish faith.

It seems highly unlikely that while Solomon had one thousand wives, he also had had one thousand wedding ceremonies. It is more likely that he had just taken different virgins to have sex with whenever he felt like – each one becoming a wife or concubine afterwards. Many times, people will quote the part of Genesis 2:24 which says, “...a man will leave his father and mother...”, and say that this ‘leaving of parents’ indicates a wedding ceremony which they feel is necessary to a righteous marriage. However, the ‘leaving of parents’ only indicates that when a couple is married, the man rather than his (or her) parents is responsible for his wife – ie. the woman becomes a part of the family which her new husband heads.

Solomon did not of course literally leave his parents every time he acquired a new wife or concubine. However, he did become responsible for each woman, as she joined him in his household. The many wives became part of Solomon’s house, not that of his or her parents – this is what the ‘leaving of parents’ part of Gen 2:24 refers to. Even if a man does not literally ‘leave his parents,’ or have a wedding ceremony, *he* becomes responsible for the woman he has had sex with. The phrase refers to responsibility rather than to ceremony.

We’ve spoken in this chapter about the difference between wives and concubines, but there is one other class of wife spoken about in the Bible. That is queen.

In the book of Esther we read the story of King Xerxes, ruler of 127 provinces from India to Sudan (Esther 1:1). This man had many wives, one of which was chosen to be queen.

⁴³ Dr Ed Murphy agrees with this in “The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare” 1996 Thomas Nelson Publishers Tennessee, on page 222.

At one stage, King Xerxes threw a certain party for all his noblemen and officials. The party went for seven days. On the last day, when all the men were probably quite drunk, Xerxes decided to call in his queen – the most beautiful woman of all his wives. He wanted to show her beauty off before all the men. Now the queen had been partying with all the women of the Royal Palace, and when she was requested to parade before all the men, she refused to go (Esther 1).

Xerxes was angry!

“Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes. For the queen’s conduct will become known to all the women,⁴⁴ and so they will despise their husbands and say, ‘King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.’ This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen’s conduct will respond to all the king’s nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord. Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she” (Esther 1:16-19).

Xerxes was angry and consulted the wisest men to decide what punishment was lawful for the crime of disobedience that Vashti committed. Interestingly, the punishment was not divorce. Vashti remained in the Palace, forever a wife of Xerxes, cared for, fed and clothed in his household.

Her punishment however, that she would never again see him, does seem amazingly harsh. However, isn’t it stranger that she was not just ‘kicked out’ of the palace? The second part of her punishment was that her royal position was given to someone else. Now comes another interesting part of the story...

“Later when the anger of King Xerxes had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her. Then the king’s personal attendants proposed, “Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful girls into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king’s eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them. Then let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti.” This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it... And this is how she would go to the king: Anything she wanted was given her to take with her from the harem to the king’s palace. *In the evening she would go there and in the morning return to another part of the harem to the care of Shaashgaz, the king’s eunuch who was in*

⁴⁴ This word ‘woman’ is translated from the Hebrew word for wife *or* woman “ishshah”. So it was being said that Vashti would be a bad example to all the wives.

charge of the concubines. She would not return to the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name. When the turn came for Esther (the girl Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail) to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her. She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality" (Esther 2:1-4, 13-18 emphasis mine).

The king waited in his palace, and whenever he requested, a new virgin would come to his bed. He would have sex with each virgin, who then remained his wife/concubine. Each of these women, after meeting with the king, would move into another part of the harem; the place reserved for those whom were already married to the king. Then these concubines would not return to the king unless summoned by name. So the punishment of the first queen, Vashti, was only that which regularly happened to many of Xerxes' other wives.

Esther was one of many virgins who married the king. However, we read that he was more highly attracted to her than to any of the other women, and he decided to make her queen. After he had married her and made her queen, he gave a great banquet. This was a celebration for the king finding a queen, it was the king and Esther's wedding; a celebration of their marriage. So Esther and the king had their wedding celebrations *after* they had had sex with each other.

This story not only illustrates that there was different classes of wives in Old Testament times, but also that when a man has sex, he must keep the woman as his wife, in his own household. He must continue to provide for her. Therefore, every woman a man has sex with must be a virgin. It also shows us again that weddings were *celebrations of marriage*, and not marriage in and of themselves.

“It is our opinion that the rising problem of divorce and remarriage among evangelical Christians today is largely the result of misinformed counsel that arises out of an inadequate exegesis of the Biblical data.”⁴⁵

There *is* a rising problem out there in the world – and also within the Christian church. Due to inadequate Biblical knowledge about sex and marriage, people are sinning, and this sin is bringing destruction and pain into their lives....

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge... Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children” (Hosea 4:6 NKJ).

⁴⁵ Heth, William A. and Wenham, Gordon J. “Jesus and Divorce: Towards an Evangelical Understanding of New Testament teaching” 1984 Hodder & Stoughton, p. 17.

5

Adultery – Sex With a Married Woman

So, if each woman that a man had sex with became his wife, what of those women who had been married before (ie. were committing adultery)?

In the covenantal terms that God has set for marriage, He decreed that with sex, a couple becomes one – even in the case of adultery.

Jesus said:

“Anyone who divorces his wife and *marries* another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and *marries* another man, she commits adultery” (Mark 10:11-12 emphasis mine).

Can you see here that adultery is actually called ‘marriage’ by Jesus?

In Matthew’s gospel Jesus says:

“...Anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and *marries* another woman commits adultery” (Matt 19:9).

Here we see that marriage can be called adultery.⁴⁶ So it is true that not every ‘marriage’ is righteous.

Because every act of sex is also a joining of two persons into one and is the blood sacrifice of a marriage covenant, *any act of sex can be called a ‘marriage.’*⁴⁷ Although no marriages are ever ‘perfect,’ some marriages are righteous, whereas others are not. *Adultery is an imperfect, or unrighteous marriage* – a violation of the previous marriage covenant.

So, does this mean that God views all sexual relationships as marriages? The answer of course depends on what the definition of marriage is. I believe the Bible teaches that sex brings a lifelong bond called marriage. Sex causes partners to be bound to one another for life. So yes, any sexual relationship can be called a marriage, either wrongful or righteous marriage, but marriage all the same.

⁴⁶ John Stott agrees and states, “Jesus called remarriage after divorce ‘adultery’” on p. 293 of “Issues facing Christians today” Marshall Pickering 1990.

⁴⁷ The word ‘marry’ can also be used of any close joining. For example, in woodworking when two pieces of wood are glued firmly together, they are sometimes called ‘married.’

When a person in our modern society hears the word ‘adultery’ they imagine this to refer to ‘sex with a married person.’ And when we read the word ‘adultery’ in the Bible, we also give it the same meaning. However, in the Bible, this sex is called ‘marries.’ Some marriages are adulterous!

“...And anyone who *marries* the divorced woman commits adultery” (Matt 5:32b).⁴⁸

“...And the man who *marries* a divorced woman commits adultery” (Luke 16:18b).

A divorced woman (one who has previously had sex,) is said to be committing adultery when she remarries. This is because she is still ‘married’ to her original sexual partner. Just as our relationship with God can be defiled, changed and violated, but never broken, adultery defiles, changes and violates an earlier marriage relationship. However, it doesn’t break it. The woman who has sex with any man other than her first husband sins, along with this second man she is having sex with.⁴⁹

This teaching is widely accepted among Bible scholars. Heth & Wenham quote and agree with Dupont’s statement: “This woman whom a divorce has liberated is not free... In speaking as he does, Jesus makes his hearers realize that divorce has no effect on the marriage bond; although separated, the spouses remain united by the marriage. That is why a new marriage would be adultery.”⁵⁰

In Romans 7:2 this is again made clear: “...by law⁵¹ a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage...” Only death releases a person from marriage, not divorce or adultery. The next verse says: “...if she *marries* another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law...” Apart from us seeing here that neither divorce nor adultery breaks a marriage, and that physical death is the only release,⁵² we also see again that *adultery is a marriage in itself. Adultery is a marriage that occurs when a woman has sex with another man while her first husband is still alive.*

⁴⁸ Of course no book on the Biblical views of sex and marriage would be complete without a detailed look into the words “except for marital unfaithfulness” which appear just prior to the words quoted here in Matt 5:32, and repeated in Matt 19:9. Accordingly, we certainly will not neglect these important words – most of chapter 8 will deal extensively with them.

⁴⁹ I am referring here to women who consent to the sex that they are indulging in. I am NOT referring to people who are victims of rape and incest. These issues will be covered later in the book.

⁵⁰ Heth, William A. and Wenham, Gordon J. “Jesus and Divorce: Towards an Evangelical Understanding of New Testament teaching” 1984 Hodder & Stoughton quote on p. 48 Dupont, J. “Mariage et divorce dans l’évangile: Matthieu 19, 3-12 et paralleles” (Bruges: Desclee, 1959) p. 55.

⁵¹ If you look into the context of this verse, you will see that this ‘law’ referred to here is Gods law, not mans.

⁵² I believe that this passage refers to physical rather than spiritual death as we cannot judge when a person is spiritually dead, and even if they were, and we could judge them as such, repentance can and should always be sought – to bring them to spiritual life! Please remember also as you ponder this teaching, that adultery is sex with a married woman, not sex with a married man.

So, while married men could have sex with other virgin women, women were forbidden this concession. They could not have sex with more than one living male. If they did, then they and the man they had sex with would be committing adultery.

But what occurred – on the practical level – when this happened? In 2 Sam 15-20 we see an example of ten married women being seduced by and committing adultery with another man – the results are interesting. In these chapters, we read that King David, upon embarking on a trip, left ten of his concubines to take care of his palace. While he was gone, his son Absalom (who wanted desperately to overthrow his father’s kingship and become king himself) decided to have sex with all of his father’s ten concubines that were left at the palace⁵³ (2 Sam 16:22).

Between this evil and the return of King David to his palace, Absalom is killed (2 Sam 18:15). When King David returned to his palace, he took the ten concubines and put them in a house under guard. He provided for them, but did not ever have sexual relations with them again. They were kept in confinement till the day of their death, living as widows (2 Sam 20:3).

In committing adultery, they had entered into unrighteous marriages. The concubines then lived as widows... Because Absalom their husband had died!

King David had also remained a husband to these women by continuing to provide for them for the rest of their days. However, their marriages to King David had been violated, defiled, and were changed.

It may seem a bit unfair that David was able to righteously marry and keep many women, but that these concubines were not able to do the same. But let’s stop for a minute and compare these human relationships to our relationship with God.⁵⁴

While God can righteously marry and keep all of us, we can never be married to any other god, or to two gods at the same time (cf. Matt 6:24). There is only one true God, and He is God and creator of us all (John 17:3, Isa 40:28). (One God, many people, compare this with one husband, many wives).

God is our first love (Rev 2:4)... He is the first husband of His people – their creator God. And just as King David provided for his wives who had been seduced and defiled by another husband, God will continue to provide for us for all of our days, whether we break faith with Him or not. If we break faith with God – rejecting him or marrying or following after other gods – even if we are seduced and go with another god, then our relationship with the only true God is still there. God still fulfills His marital obligation to us, providing for us and caring for us.

King David’s relationship with his ten concubines was never fully restored. However, God desires His relationship with His adulterous wife to be restored. God desires His people who have broken faith with Him to repent and turn back and to re-

⁵³ This was actually prophesied in 2 Sam 12:11-12, and happened because of David’s sin in committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering her husband Uriah. Note also in 2 Sam 12:11 that David’s concubines are called ‘wives.’

⁵⁴ We see this done many times in the Bible, including Eph 5:25-33, Rev 21:9.

enter into relationship with Him again. The book of Hosea teaches this well. In it, we see God lavishing blessings on Israel, even though she continues to choose to run off with other gods, refusing to repent. If only Israel repented and returned to Him, God would allow total forgiveness, healing and restoration.

The marriage relationship between God and His people always stands – even through idolatry/adultery. Restoration is always sought, and forgiveness is always offered – God continues to wait for each one of us to return to Him.

So, could King David have forgiven those ten concubines and re-entered into relationship with them? Or should they have been killed as adulterers? Let's quickly look at Deuteronomy 24:1-4 before answering these questions. In this passage, we read of a slightly different situation in which a woman has sex with more than one man.

“If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled.”

In King David's situation, he had not sent the ten concubines away (divorced them). If he had sent them away – divorced them – before they had sex with Absalom, then, according to this passage, David would not have been *allowed* to have sex with them again.

Let's say for instance, that David had sent the ten women away (divorced them). Many of these women would have eventually married other men, becoming adulteresses. The Bible teaches that this would have been the fault of David (cf. Matt 5:32).⁵⁵ Let's say then, that the second husbands had found these women to be unsuitable wives, and that they then sent them back to David. If David had then resumed sexual relations with the women again – he would have caused the adultery for nothing. He may as well have never sent them away in the first place, nor caused them and other men to commit adultery.

However, David had not divorced his concubines when they had sex with another man, therefore Deut 24:1-4 did not prohibit him from re-entering into sexual relationships with them.

So, to repeat our first question: Could King David have forgiven those ten concubines and re-entered into relationship with them? I believe that although he chose not to, he would certainly have been allowed to do this – but only if they repented.

Just as the man takes responsibility for all women he has sex with, so must women take some responsibility for all men that they have sex with (excepting the

⁵⁵ We will expand greatly upon this as the book progresses, but basically, if you look at Matt 5:32 without the 'exception clause' you read: “Anyone who divorces his wife... causes her to become an adulteress....”

circumstance of rape). When the Bible tells the story of Absalom having sex with these concubines, we do not get the impression that they were raped. In fact, we get the impression that they consented. Was Absalom entirely to blame? I think that these women needed to take some of the responsibility for what happened. And, if they did this, and repented of their sin, then I believe that they could have re-entered into relationship with their original husband – King David.

This was the case with Hosea who did forgive his adulterous wife and continue sexual relations with her (Hosea 3). Hosea's wife had not been 'put away' (divorced) by Hosea. She went out from a loving husband and committed adultery with other men – yet Hosea was to take her back when she repented and returned to him. This was to be an example of how the Lord would take back Israel, his idolatrous wife. Hosea's wife ended up in a restored marriage with Hosea (Hosea 3:3).

Now, neither Hosea's wife, nor these ten concubines were stoned to death for adultery. They were given time to repent. Should they have been stoned as per Deut 22:22?

This issue is important to address here, as there are many out there in the world today, whom, like Derek Prince believe that "imposing the death penalty on either party if guilty of adultery, automatically released the innocent party to remarry."⁵⁶ Some people whose partners have committed adultery against them believe that they are free to remarry, as they believe their first partner should be dead.

Unfortunately, I cannot personally agree that this is what the Bible really teaches, and as we go on through the chapters of this book, especially looking at those 'stuck' in abusive relationships, this point will be expanded upon. But briefly, for the time being, I must say that death *is* the end result of adultery just as death *was* the end result of Adam biting the forbidden fruit.⁵⁷ However, death does not always come immediately. God did not create us to die, He gives us time to repent and receive the forgiveness He offers.

King David did not immediately have his adulterous concubines killed, neither was Hosea's adulterous wife killed. Even Jesus did not condemn the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). As I believe that David did the right thing in continuing to provide for the adulterous concubines, and giving them time to repent, we also should do the same. We need not focus on killing the adulterous people that we know, or view them as dead. Rather, what we can focus on is the forgiveness of God that can stop this adulterous cycle in its tracks. Our purpose as Christians is to bring others to a saving knowledge of Jesus, not to kill them for their sins, or give them up as hopeless and dead, rejecting them, telling them our love for them was conditional, and has now ended. Remember, this person has been a part of us (cf. 1 Cor 7:4). Although very difficult, I believe that God wishes us to continue loving our sinful partners as He does; praying that they realize that

⁵⁶ Prince, Derek, "God is a matchmaker", Copyright The Zondervan Corporation 1986, published by Bookprint Creative Services for Kingsway Publications, UK.

⁵⁷ God told Adam that he would surely die if he ate the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden. However, when Adam actually did eat of the fruit, he did not – in the physical sense – die immediately (Gen 2:16-17, 3:6-7).

what they have done will eventually bring them true death, and praying that they come to know the forgiveness that God offers – if only they truly repent.

We were not immediately killed for the many sins that we have committed in the past. Neither would many of us kill our own children for disobedience to us. We discipline our children when they are disobedient, as we know that their wrong actions will harm them. We also know that adultery will harm the person that does it – unrepentant adulterers *will* die. But to those who repent, adultery (like any transgression) is forgivable. So, how can we immediately kill this person, if only in our minds? I believe that rather than giving us excuse to get out the virtual shotgun, the laws in Deut 22:22 and Ex 20:14 are there to show us that adultery is a grave sin – like many others. It's as bad as murder. It will bring death, eventually. Rom 3:20b states that "...through the law we become conscious of sin." The laws against adultery tell us that it is sin, and show us the penalty we deserve for that sin. Yet, the same Bible also tells us that that sin is forgivable.

In conclusion, I believe that while your adulterous partner is still alive, you cannot just view them as dead, and choose to remarry. *Many* people around us are spiritually dead, and deserving of death, however, we don't just wipe them off in our minds – pretending that they don't exist. No, we continue to pray for their salvation; that they will learn of their sin and repent! While any adulterous person is still physically alive I believe that restoration of the first marriage is desirable, and also that adultery does not break the first relationship.⁵⁸

For a woman, repenting of adultery may include returning to her first husband. For a man, repenting of adultery may include allowing and encouraging the woman to go back to her first husband (cf. Gen 20:1-7, 2 Sam 3:13-16, 1 Sam 19:11). When one or other partner has sex with another person, the first marriage is not broken. David's marriages to the ten adulterous concubines still stood. Hosea remained married to his adulterous wife. And God remains married to His adulterous people, and will forgive them for their idolatry if only they will repent. Repentance means restoration of the first marriage that was not broken by adultery or idolatry.

"Hey! But what about forgiveness, new lives or even Matt 5:32 and 19:9!" I hear your objections, and these will be addressed. Forgiveness and new lives are possible, God can release people from any bondage. In later chapters, we will look at these issues in detail.

For now, the point I wish to make is this: Sex is an act linked with a much greater responsibility than what many in this generation tend to think – it really does bind people together – spiritually as well as physically. Women especially should not become bound in this way to more than one man, and men need to respect this when they have sex with a woman.

If you still doubt this at all, then please note that very often we can even actually *see* this sexual bonding – especially in cases of rape. The victim is often bound by painful

⁵⁸ In any case, as adultery is 'sex with a married woman', a married man taking another virgin wife is not grounds for his death.

memories, feelings of anger, frustration and deep pain. And this binding unfortunately lasts until the victim goes through the difficult process of forgiveness and asking the Lord to sever the unrighteous bonding that has occurred in their life.

Other cases where this bonding is easily seen is in separated couples who have had a child together. Often these people remain angry with each other for many years, and remain bound together financially and/or legally – often at least until the child is eighteen years of age.

And even in cases where there has been no rape or children conceived, people are still bound – manifesting perhaps in memories of past lovers, comparisons between former and present lovers, fantasies of past experiences, mistrust of the current spouse, jealousy, unforgiveness or desire towards former lovers, or in many other ways.

What I am getting at here is that having sex with another person doesn't change the sexual relationships we have had in the past. Adultery does not un-do what has already happened. If it did, then entering into a sexual relationship would heal victims of rape, and men whose wives have left them for another could find a pain-free future in the arms of a new partner. We know that these things don't happen. Another person cannot make us forget.

Of course, we may not have meant to become bound. We may not have wanted to have sex with the person we did. Nevertheless, we are bound by the sexual partners we have had, and not even adultery or divorce can break this. I know that to many, and even myself, this sentence is very difficult to hear. This book did not come out of a vacuum of sexual experience, I myself have been in these situations. But please hear me out – at the present stage of this book I am speaking of the ideal in a very less than ideal world.

The law that at times may sound restrictive or harsh was made for our benefit (Mark 2:27-28). It's important that we know God's laws so that we can know where we went wrong, we can start over and we can know the best actions for the future. No matter what your past has been remember that God loves and knows you. His teachings may be difficult to follow, however He will help you follow them.

1 Cor 6:9-11 says: "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders... will inherit the kingdom of God. *And that is what some of you were.* But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." Sexual sins are just as forgivable as any other, and righteousness in the sexual area of our lives is just as attainable as righteousness in any other area.

In this generation, it is not uncommon for people to have had well over ten different sexual partners by the age of twenty. Many, many people coming to Christ and joining churches are coming with histories full of sexual sin – and with lives filled with sexual problems (you are not alone!) These problems *can* be dealt with, and with God's help, anyone can translate His teachings into their lives. However, we need to know

exactly what these sexual teachings and problems are before we attempt to rush in and do this.

Remember that misunderstanding the exact nature of sex can sometimes cause people either to repent for the wrong thing, or, through naiveté to actually do what is wrong in the future. Let's learn the truth about these sins, for Jesus said, "...the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Learning the truth will lead us to getting our lives right, it will allow us to repent and will guide us in the future choices we will make.

“If a man is found sleeping with another man’s wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die” (Deut 22:22).

“Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man’s wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished” (Prov 6:28-29).

In the light of what we have learnt so far – that a marriage is started with sex – these verses aren’t very pleasant to many. Do they call *you* to repent? Are you a man who has ever had sex with a woman who was not a virgin? Are you a woman who has ever had sex with more than one living male? If so, take these sins to God in a prayer of repentance.

PART TWO: SEXUAL SIN

6

Porneia

‘Porneia’ is the New Testament Greek word translated ‘fornication’ by the King James Version of the Bible (and some others). In more modern translations such as the New International Version, it is often rendered ‘sexual immorality.’

Porneia would most often be defined as encompassing a broad range of sexual sins, including such things as prostitution, casual sex, adultery, and perhaps even homosexuality, incest and rape.

However, quite a lot of people generally believe it to primarily mean ‘pre-marital sex.’

Yet we have learned that the Bible teaches that sex is the blood sacrifice of a marriage covenant – obligating the parties to remain together forever in marriage. In understanding this, we should see that there can never really be any such thing as pre-marital sex.

Sex initiates marriage. When two people have sex rejecting the marriage bond they have created, they have committed porneia – sinful marriage. Geisler agrees. Talking about intercourse he says: “If it is outside a life-long commitment of love then it is a ‘bad marriage.’ In fact, it is a sin the Bible calls fornication... The first reference to a marriage declares that man and woman become ‘one flesh’ (Gen 2:24), implying that marriage occurs when two bodies are joined... *Intercourse initiates a ‘marriage.’* If it is not engaged in with a life-long commitment of love, then it was an evil union, an act of fornication.”⁵⁹

I believe that the true meaning of porneia is very similar to ‘pre-marital sex.’ However, I would rather change this sentence and say that *porneia is sex outside of a life-long commitment of love*. Many would take the previous sentence and still see ‘pre-marital sex’ as being the definition of porneia, because many assume that if a life-long commitment of love is there between two people, then they will have had a wedding ceremony.

⁵⁹ Norman L Geisler, “Ethics: Alternatives and Issues” (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1975) quoted in Murphy, Ed “The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare” 1996 Thomas Nelson Publishers, Inc. Tennessee, USA p. 149 emphasis mine.

However, in this generation, this is not the case. Porneia is *not* sex without a wedding ceremony. Porneia is sex without a life-long commitment to the other person. (Two different things!) Think about it: How many couples who have been legally married are truly committed to each other for life and stay together for life? Unfortunately, in this society, facts show that up to fifty percent of couples married legally end up divorcing; we see that neither weddings nor legal registration of marriage mean much anymore.

The Bible teaches that a bond of marriage is formed when people have sex with each other. I aim to show in this chapter that when one person has sex without the intention of staying with the other person for life, then that person has committed porneia. In rejecting the bond of marriage that has been formed, this person has sinned.

Porneia therefore, can very much be a sin that only one partner of a ‘marriage’ is committing. One partner can very easily reject the other who is committed to the marriage; and this can happen at any time throughout the marriage.

So what of the situation when a man is committed to a woman who does not wish to be married to him – and the man rapes her? Is she sinning by not remaining committed to him? I believe that in this situation, the man alone commits porneia, and the person who has been raped is a victim to this crime, and to the sin. Secondly, the rapist alone would commit adultery if the woman has already had sex (ie. is already married). It is the rapist who commits porneia and/or adultery by violating a normal and righteous marriage relationship, even if the woman had never been married before – as rape is not normal or right.

In a righteous marriage, there is no force. In righteous marriage, the partners respect one another. A husband is bound to love his wife as Christ loves the church (Eph 5:25). It is a man’s responsibility to have the woman’s consent before he marries her, as he should also know whether or not she is already married or engaged (cf. Amos 3:3, 1 Cor 7:5⁶⁰). As the book progresses, we will deal more with this situation.

For now however, I propose that: *Porneia is the sin committed by a person who can’t or won’t or doesn’t intend to remain in proper righteous married relationship for life with a person they have had sex with.*

The sin of porneia is a violation of normal sexual relationship. Perhaps the couple are already related to each other – this a violation. Or perhaps one of the partners has not consented to the sexual act. Or, the partners may just not be intending on being married righteously to each other. Can you see that I’m saying it’s the relationship *surrounding* the act, rather than an incorrect act in itself that is wrong?

One reason why I believe this point is that repenting of having sex on a particular occasion could be the same thing as wishing your child had never been given life. I do not believe that any child is sin. And sex (even though it can be badly misused and defiled) isn’t sin in itself – it was around before sin entered the world (see Genesis 2:20-3:7).

⁶⁰ I note 1 Cor 7:5 here because of the words ‘mutual consent.’ In the same way as mutual consent is necessary for a couple to have a temporary abstinence from sexual relations, I also believe that mutual consent is necessary for a couple to enjoy sexual relations.

Let's say for instance that after a couple willingly had sex with each other for the first time, they then reject each other. Because the sin of porneia is rejection of the bond and of the partner, and not the sex itself, in repentance for porneia, this couple can be reconciled to one another, holding together two that have rightfully become one. Whereas, if people believe that the sexual act itself between an 'unmarried' couple is sin they may repent of the action that joined them to another being – an action which may even have caused another person (their child) to have life. Then, believing that no bond has been formed, a partner of this couple may feel free to marry another person in the future, splitting apart one family and then committing the sin of adultery.

There are many passages in the Bible dealing with porneia; and when it is viewed in the way I have just described (as a problem with relationship rather than actually being an incorrect act) all of these passages not only become clear, they make total sense. As the book progresses, we will discuss how this definition of porneia wonderfully harmonises both the Old and New Testaments teaching on sex, including Matt 5:32 and 19:9 with their parallel passages in Mark and Luke. However, rather than heading straight towards a discussion of these verses, we will look at some others that will reinforce this proposed meaning of porneia.

We will look firstly at 1 Cor 6:15-18:

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.”

At the top of this passage, we notice the word 'prostitute.' In our society, this word means a person who charges money for sexual favors or intercourse. The meaning of the word 'prostitute' in the Bible however is not the same. The word rendered 'prostitute' in the New Testament comes from the Greek word 'porne,' meaning 'one who practices porneia.'⁶¹

Of course I am not denying the practice of prostitution in ancient times as we know it today. However, there were other forms of prostitution. They ranged from the person who had sex with someone while viewing that sex as casual; to prostitutes as we know them today; to temple prostitutes who would have sex with people as a part of their worship at the temple (cf. Hosea 4:14, Ezek 16:33-34). The temple prostitutes were often not paid for their services; they gave out sex to temple visitors and didn't consider themselves to be married, therefore they were 'prostitutes.' Today, we would only call someone who got paid for sex a prostitute, however, in the Bible this was not necessarily so. Biblically, a prostitute was just somebody who did not respect sex in the way that sex should have been respected.

⁶¹ The New Strongs Exhaustive Concordance (Thomas Nelson Publishers 1990) states that this word 'porne' means a strumpet, or figuratively, an idolater. The KJV translates it as harlot or whore.

When porneia is correctly understood as the rejection of the marriage relationship formed when two people have sex, the passage just read really makes sense. For example, inserting this meaning for porneia in it, we would say: “Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with somebody who will not respect the marriage bond they have formed? Never! *Do you not know that he who unites himself with somebody who will not stay married to them is still one with them in body?* For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” ... Flee from this type of sexual relationship. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who will not respect marriage, sins against his own body.”

When this passage teaches us that all forms of prostitution and having sex with prostitutes is wrong – it is telling us that *any sex without respect for marriage is wrong*.

It tells us that committing porneia is a sin against one's own body – this is because it is the body that joins to another, becoming ‘one flesh.’ When the heart and mind will not accept this, and rejects this, then of course the sin is porneia – a sin which the heart and mind commits against what the body has done.

Geoffrey Wilson agrees that in this passage, the Bible teaches “that there is no such thing as casual sex, because the very nature of the sexual act means that the partners become one body... ‘this union is more than an incidental function of the members. It is a coming together as one body, and it is thus of far-reaching significance for the whole physico-spiritual personal life.’”⁶²

When the Bible talks about prostitution, it is talking about ‘casual sex’ – sex without the intention of being married – not necessarily the type of ‘prostitution’ as we know it today (but certainly including that type of prostitution). ‘Casual sex’ as we may think of it today is never really casual. It affects our entire being. Biblically, it is called ‘porneia’ or fornication. And it is just as bad as the prostitution we know today.

Just a few verses on from the passage above, Paul tells us how to avoid porneia:

“...to avoid fornication (porneia), let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control”⁶³ (1 Cor 7:2-5).

In this passage, we discover again that porneia is not ‘pre-marital’ sex as we think of it today.

Here, Paul exhorts us to avoid porneia by *allowing* men and women to have and to keep their rightful marriage partners. Men and women are *encouraged* to keep their own

⁶² Wilson, Geoffrey B. “1 Corinthians” 1978, Banner of Truth Trust, p. 94, includes a quote from J. Horst, TDNT, Vol. IV, P. 565

⁶³ The first verse here, 1 Cor 7:2, is from the King James version of the Bible.

partner, and *should be allowed* to do this (cf. 1 Tim 4:3). They should each fulfil the ‘marital duty’ to each other – and the ‘marital duty’ is of course to be a lifelong sexual companion. The partner should also be of the opposite sex (man to keep woman and woman to keep man).⁶⁴

1 Cor 7:2 tells us quite clearly that porneia is the *opposite* of letting every man have his own woman, and letting every woman have her own man.

Many times I think the following situation has occurred: An older Christian may tell a young person that they are having ‘pre-marital’ sex and committing fornication. They tell the young person to immediately cease having a sexual relationship. “Stop seeing that person, repent of your evil deed!” However, in this situation, the older Christian is only encouraging porneia (fornication). 1 Cor 7:2 tells us that to avoid sinning, people must keep their own partner – however this older Christian tells the young person *not* to keep the partner they have had sex with! He or she goes totally against 1 Cor 7:2 by saying “You are not to keep seeing your partner.”

Christians should be encouraging young couples to stay with each other *for life* so that they can stay away from sexual sin. However, often well meaning churches and parents have done their best to terminate relationships wherein the couple have not had a wedding. When they have done this – supposedly in the name of God – they have only encouraged porneia, the break up of a young family, and then adultery. We would do so much better if we listened to the Bible’s exhortation: “...to avoid fornication (porneia), let every man have his own woman, and let every woman have her own man.”

You may have noticed however, that in most English versions of the Bible, this verse (1 Cor 7:2) reads “...let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.” However, remember that in the original Greek language that the New Testament was written in, there is no special word for either ‘wife’ or ‘husband.’ There is just one word for woman (gyne) that is sometimes translated ‘woman,’ and sometimes translated ‘wife.’ In the same way, there is just one word for man (aner) that is sometimes translated ‘man,’ and sometimes translated ‘husband.’⁶⁵

After we are told that to avoid porneia, every man must be allowed to have a woman of his own, and every woman must be allowed to have a man of her own, the passage goes on to tell us that we should know that people even actually *own* their partner’s body. In Eph 5:28 we read: “...husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.” People who have had sex with one another

⁶⁴ We will speak in detail about homosexuality in a later chapter.

⁶⁵ The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible (Thomas Nelson Publishers 1990) note that the word here used in 1 Cor 7:2 for “wife” is gyne (goo-nay’); meaning a woman; specially, a wife: It is translated in the KJV as wife or woman. They note that the word here used in 1 Cor 7:2 for “husband” is aner (an-ayr’); meaning a man (properly as an individual male): It is translated in the KJV as fellow, husband, man, sir. The word “aner” appears in the New Testament approximately 200 times, with only about 40% of those instances translated as ‘husband’ in most English translations (most remaining instances translate the word ‘man’). The word “gyne” appears in the New Testament approximately 180 times, similarly translated ‘wife’ on about 40% of those instances, and ‘woman’ in the remaining instances. These words have no relation to whether the woman or man they refer to is actually married or not.

have become one, and actually *own* both their own and their partners' body.... They have been joined in a truly mystical way (Eph 5:32).

Porneia is an alienation of your own body – that of the other person you have become one with. Now we can even more so understand the proclamation in 1 Cor 6:18 – porneia is sin against your own body.

In SOS 3:16 we read, “My lover is mine and I am his.” Once we have sex with another person, our own body belongs to them, and we become owners of their body with them. Accordingly, 1 Cor 7:4-5 exhorts both wives and husbands not to deprive one another of themselves, and the original language suggests that they should not separate from each other – especially by distance – except by mutual consent and for a time of prayer (cf. 1 Cor 9:5).

In having sex, a couple are bound to one another, and own each others body. They have become one! Porneia occurs when this couple go their separate ways from each other – when they no longer have access to each other's body. When they alienate each other. And porneia is encouraged when people try to split apart couples who are in a sexual relationship with each other.⁶⁶

Porneia is a refusal to accept the bond that sex creates. A person can accept that bond whether or not they have had a wedding ceremony. God looks at the inner thoughts of our hearts rather than at the outward workings of our bodies when they sign a marriage register. Many couples, before they have had a wedding ceremony, definitely have intentions of being lifelong partners. When couples in this situation, (many of whom are perhaps waiting for and planning their wedding ceremony) have sex, this is not sin. And in this situation, these couples should begin married life – even if they have not had the wedding ceremony.

1 Cor 7:28 says: “But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.”

Who would ever think that a virgin who has a wedding ceremony and ‘marries’ someone is sinning? Not many. But there are a great deal of people who would consider a virgin (who had not had a wedding ceremony) having sex to be a great sin – the sin of porneia. Here, Paul tells virgins the contrary: “if you do marry, you have not sinned.” He means that when a virgin has sex – and keeps the intention of lifelong commitment, he or she has not sinned – but those who do have sex are entering into a marriage relationship, and they will face many troubles in this life.

Think carefully before you have sex; for once you consent and do it, you have been bound.

Porneia is also sex without the *ability* to be married.

⁶⁶ As long as that relationship is not adulterous or illegal.

I proposed above that porneia is the sin committed by a person who can't or won't or doesn't intend to remain in proper righteous married relationship with a person they have had sex with for life. So far I've focussed on the 'won't' and 'doesn't.'

In some cases, there is also a 'can't.' This is when the partners *cannot* accept the obligations of their sexual union because their union is against the law of God. When a couple cannot accept the obligations of their sexual union because it's against the law of God (such as a man with his daughter), it still isn't so much the sex itself that is sin, rather it's the fact that the relationship is not right. This 'marriage' or bonding is a violation against God – the relationship has been rejected and is defiled even before it has begun. People should never have sex when doing it will mean violating God's laws and the other person.

Even when the parties are willing to stay married to each other, in these unlawful unions, their marriages are disallowed. These sorts of marriages are mentioned in Leviticus 18:

“No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the LORD. Do not dishonor your father by having sexual relations with your mother. She is your mother; do not have relations with her. Do not have sexual relations with your father's wife; that would dishonor your father. Do not have sexual relations with your sister, either your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether she was born in the same home or elsewhere. Do not have sexual relations with your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter; that would dishonor you. Do not have sexual relations with the daughter of your father's wife, born to your father; she is your sister. Do not have sexual relations with your father's sister; she is your father's close relative. Do not have sexual relations with your mother's sister, because she is your mother's close relative. Do not dishonor your father's brother by approaching his wife to have sexual relations; she is your aunt. Do not have sexual relations with your daughter-in-law. She is your son's wife; do not have relations with her. Do not have sexual relations with your brother's wife; that would dishonor your brother. Do not have sexual relations with both a woman and her daughter. Do not have sexual relations with either her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter; they are her close relatives. That is wickedness. Do not take your wife's sister as a rival wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living... Do not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife and defile yourself with her... Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable. Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it; that is a perversion. Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled” (Lev 18:6-24).

Sexual relations of these types are always porneia, whether or not the couple intends to stay together as married. In the first part of this chapter, our definition of

porneia was sex without the intention of being married. The sexual relations mentioned above are also porneia because they are sex without the intention of being married – they are sex used within an incorrect relationship, wherein the intention of being married is against the law of God.

We can glean a number of interesting points from this passage in Leviticus:

1. The passage does not prohibit a man from taking two or more wives (as long as the subsequent wives are not already related to him);⁶⁷
2. In the original Hebrew, the words here for ‘daughter-in-law’ have nothing to do with ‘law.’ The word for ‘daughter-in-law’ means ‘son’s spouse’ or ‘son’s bride’ (cf. Mark 1:30). In any case, ‘in-law’ had nothing to do with the secular legal system, but with God’s laws;
3. A man is not to take a wife related by blood to him – ie. his mother or sister; and
4. If a man does take a second wife, the second wife is not to be related to the first wife by blood – ie. not the first wife’s mother or sister. This shows an intriguing point – that marriage does start a *blood* relationship! I believe that a man is not to marry his wife’s sister, because his wife’s sister is now actually *his* sister.

Some have argued that these teachings in Leviticus aren’t valid any more due to their being the ‘law’ that we are no longer ‘under.’ However, Jesus said quite clearly, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them” (Matt 5:17). These types of sexual relationship are still sin today as they were in ancient times, in the same way as lying, stealing deceiving and slandering are still wrong (Lev 19:11-16). When Christians say that they aren’t ‘under’ law, they are saying that they aren’t *saved* by following the law. The law is still the law whether we are ‘under’ it or not. We cannot be saved by following the law, however, it still stands, continuing to tell us what is wrong and what is right. Sin is still sin, and sin has not changed. What was sin in the Old Testament, is still sin now (cf. Rom 3:20).

When two people who *willingly* have sex with each other are not in a correct relationship with each other, then they are committing the sin of porneia. Either they are related to each other in the ways described in Leviticus 18, or they simply have no intention of staying together as married. For example, in 1 Cor 5:1 we read, “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality (porneia) among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father’s wife....” Here, even though the man and his fathers wife are willing to live together, their sin is called porneia because their relationship goes against Leviticus 18:8 which states: “Do not have sexual relations with your father’s wife; that would dishonor your father” (cf. Mark 6:17).

So, before having sex with a new partner, one must firstly ensure that they are not related to themselves in one of the ways mentioned in Leviticus 18 (cf. 1 Cor 5:1), and

⁶⁷ We will discuss polygyny (marriage to more than one woman at a time) in a later chapter.

secondly, that both partners intend to stay married to each other for life (cf. 1 Cor 6:15-16).

Why should we ensure these things before having sex? Because sex forms a bonding in our lives that usually lasts a lifetime. It is a bonding that is not just physical, but involves the whole person, spiritually, mentally, totally. It is a 'marriage,' and we are to aim that our 'marriages' are righteous and not sinful – for sin hurts us and hurts others, and hopefully we are people who wish to avoid pain – not create it.

So what if we are at fault in this area? What if we have had casual sex, or have raped another person? What if we have been raped ourselves? What if we have committed porneia or have been a victim of it? If any of these things has happened in our lives, then whether we are to blame or not, we are still bound, and to gain freedom in the sexual area of our lives, we need to bring this bondage before the Lord in forgiveness or repentance. We will speak about this more fully towards the end of this book. For now, and for the next few chapters however, we will continue to concentrate on finding out exactly what sexual sins are, so that we will know who we have to forgive and/or where we have to repent.

To finish off this chapter on porneia, we go back to Genesis – to the story of the future of Lot and his two virgin daughters – the only survivors out of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. They settled in the mountains... “One day the older daughter said to the younger, “Our father is old, and there is no man around here to lie with us, as is the custom all over the earth. Let’s get our father to drink wine and then lie with him and preserve our family line through our father”” (Gen 19:31-32).

The actions of Lot’s daughters were wrong – and they knew it. Even though these unmarried girls were having sex with only one partner, the relationships were incestuous – between father and daughters – and were wrong.

“So both of Lot’s daughters became pregnant by their father. The older daughter had a son, and she named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today. The younger daughter also had a son, and she named him Ben-Ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites of today” (Gen 19:36-38).

The shameful acts of Lot’s daughters preserved their family line – however, even this was not a good reason to have unrighteous sex. We read later in Deuteronomy: “No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation” (Deut 23:3). The Ammonites and the Moabites – born out of the sin of incest (which is porneia) – became sinful themselves (cf. Lev 26:39-45), and were not included among the people of God.

Now this story certainly doesn’t automatically condemn all of us who may have been born out of an unrighteous sexual relationship! What it does, rather, is show us that this sin of our parents can have an impact on our lives, just as we who will have sex in future will affect the lives of our children.

If a couple have not previously had sex with any other person, and they commit to be together for life, then their sex initiates a righteous marriage (whether they have had a wedding or not).

Some have said that 'porneia' is a violation of a 'one flesh' relationship, yet these have also believed 'porneia' to mean 'pre-marital sex.'

Any couple who have not previously had sex with any other person would not be violating a 'one flesh' relationship, because they have only just become 'one flesh' with each other, and they have committed to remain 'one-flesh.'

Only if the couple refused to accept the fact that they had become one would mean that they have committed porneia.

7

Separation and Divorce

The word translated ‘divorce’ in the New Testament (eg. Matt 1:19, Matt 5:31, 32, Luke 16:18 etc.) is the Greek word ‘apoluo.’ It means to free fully, relieve, release, dismiss, *let die*, pardon or divorce.⁶⁸

It appears approximately 100 times in the New Testament, yet in less than half of those instances does it refer to the divorce or separation of a man and woman. For example, it is translated ‘send away’ in Matt 14:15, 22, 23, 15:32 and 39 where Jesus refers to sending crowds of people away from Himself. In Matt 27:17, 21, 26 it is translated ‘release’ – referring to the release of Barabbas from jail. And in Acts 3:13, 4:21, 23, 5:40 we find it rendered ‘let them go.’

In the Old Testament also, we see the same thing. When God says “I hate divorce” in Mal 2:16, the word here rendered ‘divorce’ is the Hebrew ‘shalach.’ It also means ‘putting away,’ and among many other Scriptures is found five times between Genesis 8:7-12 in the instances where Noah ‘sent forth’ (divorced) birds from the ark. ‘Shalach’ appears many hundreds of times in the Old Testament, only rarely referring to the divorce or separation of a man and woman.⁶⁹

So while our modern understanding of the word ‘divorce’ is a legal dissolution of marriage, which allows a person to remarry, the Biblical understanding is not the same. When we see the word ‘divorce’ in the Bible – it does not have any legal connotation. *It just means separation.* And where our modern ‘divorce’ dissolves a marriage, and then allows remarriage (with a different partner), the Biblical divorce does *not* do these things.

The Bible shows that any separation due to marital problems of a couple is the same as divorce. In 1 Cor 7:10, we read that “a wife must not separate from her husband”. The word ‘separate’ here comes from the Greek word ‘chorizo’ which actually means to ‘separate by distance’ or to ‘depart,’ and this would include both separation and legal divorce – which are equal in the sight of God. Not only does God hate legal divorce – God hates it even when couples separate.

When the Bible gives instructions for people who have been ‘divorced,’ or for those who have ‘divorced’ their partners, it is talking not only to couples who have obtained legal divorce – but also to couples who have merely separated. Biblically, we

⁶⁸ From New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, 1990, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

⁶⁹ However, in Malachi 2:16 it does refer to the separation of a husband and wife.

cope and deal with separation and divorce in the same way – following the same Biblical instructions.

However, Jay Adams, a respected Christian author, disagrees. He says that “the modern view of separation is an anti-Biblical substitution for the Biblical requirement of reconciliation or (in some cases) divorce.” He follows that at times, (legal) divorce is actually called for, and that in these situations, separation (without a legal divorce) is actually worse than divorce.⁷⁰

Moreover, he also states that “...divorce *does* break a marriage”⁷¹ – even when the *reasons* for that divorce are invalid or sinful. He believes that divorce totally severs the covenantal relationship of marriage – this is why he believes that at times legal divorce is actually called for – and is also why he views separation and legal divorce as two very different things.⁷²

In the first place, Adams’ position on divorce comes from 1 Cor 7:10-11 that includes “A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband.” The New Testament Greek word for ‘unmarried’ here is ‘agamos.’ Adams says that because the separated couple are now unmarried (agamos), and must remain that way, then their separation means that they are not married any more. Therefore, he concludes that their separation must have been separation by legal divorce that totally dissolved their marriage.

If these things were true, why then does it say in Mark 10:11-12: “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery”? Here, it is plain to see that even after a couple has divorced, they are still married, because any further sex with another person is called adultery. How then can the divorce have dissolved the bond of the first marriage?

When we read in 1 Cor 7:10 that a person separated from their marriage partner should remain unmarried, we are not reading that they *are* unmarried, rather, it is saying that they should not have sex. ‘Gamos’ which means ‘marry’ in New Testament Greek, is strongly sexual in meaning.⁷³ Marriage is any sexual relationship. The verse is teaching

⁷⁰ Adams, Jay E. “Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible” Zondervan Publishing House Michigan 1980 p. 33.

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 43

⁷² Ibid. p. 32

⁷³ Luke 16:18 says: “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” Here, for example, the Bible describes adultery as ‘marrying’ another person! Adultery is just sex – and it is called ‘marriage.’ In 1 Cor 7:34 we also see that ‘gamos’ has more of a sexual meaning... We read: “There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world-- how she may please her husband.” (NKJ) Here, we see that a virgin is an unmarried (agamos) woman! Whereas of course in our culture, many ‘unmarried’ women are not thought of as virgins (ie. those who have never had sex). The greek word ‘gamos’ (marry) seen in the Bible clearly carries a much more sexual meaning than our modern understanding of the English word ‘marry.’ As we have seen, Biblically, marriage starts when a couple have sex, and sex is so sacred that it belongs to a marriage relationship *every* time it occurs – marriage can therefore be either sinful or

us that while separated from their marriage partner, *a person should refrain from having sex*. ‘Refraining from sex’ is remaining unmarried – Biblically.

So, if a wife separates from her husband she must remain unmarried – *or else be reconciled to her husband*. Reconciling back with her husband means that she resumes married life with him again, (including sex). She should remain without sex while she is separated from the only man she should be having sex with – her husband! If she wants to have sex again, she should reconcile back with him.

Rather than having sex with other people, the separated couple should work for reconciliation with each other – ie. the wife should remain ‘agamos’ (without sex) while apart from her husband, working towards reconciling the ‘gamos’ (having sex) status of her relationship with him.

Why other Biblical interpreters such as Adams formulate a different understanding of this passage is because they view ‘gamos’ (marriage) as something that is always righteous. However, when the text of 1 Cor 7:11 says “...she must remain unmarried...” it is not necessarily specifying that the wife must stay away from *righteously* marrying another person. It is saying that the wife must stay away from *unrighteously* marrying another person.

As has been explained previously, marriage can be either sinful or righteous. For example, King Herod was married *unrighteously* to his brother’s wife. Even though his marriage was unlawful, it was still called marriage (Mark 6:17-18).

And as was also mentioned before, in Mark 10:11, the Greek word ‘gamos’ which means ‘marry’ is even used to describe adultery (sinful marriage). In the Bible, any sex is called marriage – even within a sinful relationship. So when we read “...she must remain unmarried...”, we are reading that she should not have sex with anyone (*even* if she has sex with a new person she has ‘married’ via a wedding ceremony) *unless* she reconciles with her original husband, in which case she need not refrain from having sex any longer.

Adams also points to Deuteronomy 24:1-4 to support his conclusions. However, in this passage (which we looked at briefly in chapter 3), the wife who has been divorced is not at all called ‘unmarried,’ therefore the passage does not support his claims. This passage teaches that *if* a divorced woman⁷⁴ ‘becomes’ the wife of another man, she cannot go back to her first husband. Adams sees in this passage that the first marriage was broken/dissolved by the divorce because the woman is not allowed to have sex with the first husband again. He sees therefore that she is not still ‘married’ to the first husband – because if they were still married, then of course they should be able to be reconciled.

In answer to this, we can see firstly that in verse 2 it is only *if* she becomes the wife of another man *then* the first husband cannot remarry her. If she had just been

righteous, and is defined as a ‘sexual relationship.’ Biblically, ‘unmarried’ people are those who do not have sex.

⁷⁴ Remember here that while in our society, we view ‘divorced’ women as ‘unmarried’ women, Biblically, divorced women are *not* unmarried. In the Bible ‘divorced’ women are still married – they have just been pushed away from their husbands whom they are still married to.

divorced, and *not* had sex with another man, there is no prohibition against her going back to the husband. The prohibition is only there if she has committed adultery – which the Bible teaches would have been the *fault* of the first husband who divorced her (Matt 5:32).

If the second husband divorced the woman and sent her back to her first husband, and the first husband and the wife resumed sexual relations, then the first husband would have caused the adultery of his wife *for nothing*. He himself had allowed his wife to be defiled, and had caused people to sin – he had reneged in his obligation to his wife. Should he be allowed a second chance to do this again?

Rather than saying anything about divorce dissolving marriage, this passage from Deuteronomy teaches us to think very carefully before divorcing a partner, for not only is divorce a bad thing in itself, it can also lead to adultery – another very serious sin. And in this passage, when a man has committed the sin of divorce, and when that sin has led to adultery, he is not given a second chance to have the woman back again. The one who had caused adultery was not free to just take back what he had given away. Thankfully, in this new covenant age, we are often given second chances that those living under Deuteronomic law weren't given. These days, people aren't stoned to death for adultery, and people who divorce their partners are forgiven when they truly repent.

In any case, if these divorces in the Deuteronomic passage had dissolved their marriages, then the woman would have been free to remarry anyone after being divorced. If divorce truly severed the marriage bond, then there is no reason why the woman could not remarry the first husband after earlier being divorced by him, and being divorced by the second husband.

This passage – and indeed the whole Bible – does not show at all that divorce dissolves marriage. The woman in the Deuteronomic passage was in fact still married to her first husband – however, *he* had caused her to be defiled and *he* had caused their marriage relationship to be violated. The passage states that he had divorced the woman and sent her away. He was the one who had not respected the marriage bond that they had – and God did not want to give him the chance to be disrespectful to his marriage again.

Jay Adams' conclusions that divorce severs a marriage relationship are plainly unfounded via Biblical evidence – and they stem from the fact that Adams does not see sex as the beginning of a marriage covenant, bringing with it the obligations of lifelong companionship in marriage.

When a person makes the same mistake as Adams, and sees marriage as being a human institution – something that man makes with his ceremonies and contracts – we see that man can also break marriages via the same route. However, marriage is made by God, and *what is made by God cannot be broken by man.*⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Marriage is not a human invention, states John Stott in “Issues Facing Christians Today” Marshall Pickering 1990.

Like adultery, divorce clearly does not dissolve a marriage bond, allowing a person to remarry.⁷⁶ “A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry...” (1 Cor 7:39 emphasis mine). There is no mention here that divorce breaks the bond of marriage. And, Biblically speaking, a couple who are separated *are* divorced – or are divorcing each other – in God’s eyes. If you are separated from your marital partner, then at least one of you are ‘putting away’ or ‘cutting off’ the other person from their life (Mal 2:16).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics says that “Under the ‘Family Law Act 1975,’ the only ground on which a divorce may be granted is that of irretrievable breakdown of the marriage. This ground needs to be established by the fact that the husband and wife have lived apart for 12 months or more, where there is no reasonable likelihood of reconciliation.”⁷⁷ So, in Australia, to actually become divorced legally, a couple first need to have been separated for a year or more. To actually get a legal certificate of divorce is also time-consuming in many other countries. I believe that when the Bible teaches us things about divorce, it is also speaking to those who have separated their partners from themselves – for in this generation these two are very linked.

“...A man should not divorce his wife...” does not mean that a man can just separate from his wife. Biblically, the word divorce means legal divorce, separation, or even just making the wife (or husband) move out of the home. We can read this verse to mean, “...a man should not put his wife away from himself.”

Of course, man *can* separate married couples ie. by distance, or by a piece of paper (bill of divorce)... But no human can reverse the divine bond that has been created by God. If even adultery does not dissolve the first marriage bond, how can a piece of paper? As it is God who creates the marriage bond, it is also God who dissolves it – either by death or perhaps after repentance, forgiveness, and a request to God to dissolve the bond has been sought.

Many however, have thought that there is one thing that can break a marriage and/or allow couples to become divorced or remarried – porneia. We will look at this in the next chapter.

⁷⁶ However, when an unbelieving partner leaves a believer – then the unbeliever is the one who is doing the ‘divorcing.’ In this case, the believer is not bound and is free to remarry (cf. 1 Cor 7:15). In this situation, it is the *unbeliever* who has divorced the believer – the believer has not done the thing (divorce) that God hates. We discuss this in a later chapter.

⁷⁷ From the Australian Bureau of Statistics “Tasmanian Year Book 1998” page 95.

Porneia is a rejection of the marital bond. It is not adultery – which is what many over the last centuries have taken it to mean.

1 Cor 7:2 states: “...since there is so much immorality [porneia], each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.” Porneia could not be adultery, as having your own wife or husband does not stop adultery!

If ‘adultery’ was what was meant in both Matt 5:32 and 19:9 then Jesus (and the author of the gospel) would have used the word ‘moichao’ (adultery) – which appears in various forms around thirty times in the New Testament. He didn’t. He used the word porneia – obviously Jesus had a sin other than adultery in mind. Although similar, and although one may lead to the other, porneia and adultery *are* two different sins.

8

The Exception Clause

The reason why many have thought that porneia can break a marriage comes primarily from two Scriptures: Matt 5:32 and Matt 19:9.

The first of these that we will look at is Matt 5:32. This Scripture comes almost in the middle of the famous ‘Sermon on the Mount.’ The sermon begins with what we call the ‘beatitudes,’ a list beginning with “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...” (Matt 5:3). Jesus follows with teaching about the law. He says in 5:17, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them,” and in v. 20 that, “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Then, after speaking about murder and anger, he goes on to the seventh commandment – the one that says “Do not commit adultery” (Ex 20:14, Deut 5:18). He surprises the people by stating that adultery is not just a physical act. He says it can be committed in the heart, when a man just looks at a woman lustfully (v. 28).

Then he surprises the crowd again by saying:

“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery” (Matt 5:31-32).

The English words ‘marital unfaithfulness’ that appear here in verse 32, come from the Greek word ‘porneia.’ The words ‘except for porneia’ or ‘except for marital unfaithfulness’ (found in the middle of Matt 5:32 and also in Matt 19:9) are commonly called the ‘exception clause.’

These words ‘except for porneia’ are those that give many the impression that a person can righteously become divorced and remarried. Many have believed that if one partner commits ‘porneia,’ then the marriage is broken, and the other partner can remarry. Many have also believed that ‘porneia’ in this verse means that one partner has had sexual relations with another person.

However, we have learnt that *porneia* comes from the heart and is an evil intention rather than an evil action of having sex with another person. *Porneia* is a rejection of the original marital bond that sex has created. With this definition and understanding of *porneia* in mind, we can see that just staying faithful *physically* to one person doesn't guarantee that you aren't sinning sexually; rejecting your marital partner and/or abandoning them is the sin of *porneia*, even if you haven't had sex with another.

Now Jesus teaches in Matt 5:32 that anyone who divorces his wife, except for *porneia*, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

To understand what Jesus was saying here, let's first look at this verse *without* the exceptional clause:

“...anyone who divorces his wife ... causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.”

When reading this verse without the exceptional clause, we can see clearly that the verse teaches that divorce is almost equal to adultery. In the context of the chapter, Jesus was teaching men that not only could they commit adultery in the heart, they could also commit adultery just by divorcing their wife!

The people knew that having sex with a married woman was adultery. But Jesus taught that divorcing your wife so that she will have sex with another person is also adultery. He even said that just looking lustfully at another married woman is adultery!

Why would anyone who divorces his wife cause her to become an adulteress? Because a woman who has been divorced has no man to provide for her, and will perhaps seek to be taken in by another. In any case, when a woman has been divorced, she is not living in her husband's house, and therefore can be seen as 'fair game' by other men. Jesus teaches that divorce is wrong because it leads to adultery.

And because Jesus is teaching people how to avoid breaking the seventh commandment, He also states that anyone who marries a divorced woman also commits adultery. Before we look at the 'exception,' we note that in this simple verse (Matt 5:32), Jesus clearly says these two things:

- If you divorce (push away) your faithful wife, you cause her to become an adulteress; and
- If you marry a divorced woman, you commit adultery.

Now, let's look at Matt 5:32 *with* the 'exceptional clause' intact:

“...anyone who divorces his wife, except for *porneia*, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.”

The verse states that anyone who divorces his wife *causes* her to become an adulteress. However, if the wife is committing porneia, then the husband is *not causing* her to become an adulteress.

If we insert our meaning of the word porneia (rejection of the marital bond) into this verse, we see that it says that if a man divorces a woman *who is already rejecting the marital bond she has with him*, then *he* isn't committing adultery or causing her to.

If a woman is committing porneia, then we can read Matt 5:32 as such: "...anyone who puts his wife out of his home (divorces his wife) – except if she is already leaving him herself (committing porneia) – causes her to become an adulteress...."

If she is already committing porneia (removing herself from the marriage) of her own free will, then her husband is not *causing* her to become an adulteress. If she marries another man while her first husband is willing for her to go home to him, then *she* commits adultery (along with the second man she has sex with).

In the second part of Matt 5:32, Jesus then warns men against this very thing. He tells them not to have sex with a divorced woman; He says it doesn't matter if she has been divorced by her husband for any or no reason *or* if she committed porneia. *Jesus says that whoever has sex with any woman divorced for any reason is sinning.* Whoever has sex with a woman who has already had sex with a man still living is sinning.

In Matt 5:32 Jesus is teaching that *divorce* by the husband is tantamount to breaking the seventh commandment. If however, the husband has not divorced his wife, and she has sex with another man, then this first husband is not sinning. Jesus was saying, **"Men, it isn't only women who commit adultery; it isn't only men who have sex with married ladies. You, men, can also commit adultery when you don't love and care for your wives, and when you put them away from you."**

This particular verse says nothing at all about the first husband marrying or remarrying another woman. Neither does it allow a divorced woman to remarry another man. All Jesus was teaching about in this part of Matthew 5 was what constituted adultery. And this is what he taught:

- Even looking at another married woman lustfully was equal to committing adultery;
- If you divorce your faithful wife (push her out of your home), you commit adultery and cause her to become an adulteress;
- If you marry a divorced woman (have sex with a woman who has either left her marriage or been rejected or forced to leave by her first husband), you commit adultery.

He also teaches in Matthew 5 that:

- A man is not sinning if his wife (whom he loves, accepts and cares for) goes out and commits adultery of her own free will. In this case, the woman herself is sinning, and so is the man that she sins with.

In the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ Jesus challenged us to righteousness in all areas of our lives. In the section on marriage he warns us against committing the terrible sin of adultery:

“Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man’s wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished” (Prov 6:28-29).

Many people have misunderstood Matt 5:32, saying that in it Jesus taught that divorce is allowable if one of the partners has committed adultery. This misunderstanding has encouraged much adultery over the centuries, which ironically Jesus was trying to avoid. He had just taught people how to avoid committing the sin of murder. He certainly wasn’t saying anything about legal grounds for divorce or for murder. The only thing he said about divorce was that it was wrong under any circumstance.⁷⁸

Another important misunderstanding that needs clarifying here is that neither divorce nor porneia nor adultery breaks a marriage. No matter what the case of the divorce, *anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. And because this divorce and this marriage do not have to be legal, we can understand this to mean “Any male who has sex with a woman who has had sex with another living man, commits adultery. And any woman who has sex with a second or subsequent male while the first sexual partner is still alive commits adultery.”*

Be sure that this sinful occurrence is not your fault. If you are a married man, then keep your wife. If you are a married woman, then stay with your first husband. If you are a man, married or unmarried, then don’t even think about having sex with a married woman who is not your own wife.

The parallel verse in the Gospel of Mark

The parallel verse in the Gospel of Mark says basically the same thing as Matt 5:32:

“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery” (Mark 10:11-12).

Many have thought that the ‘exceptional clause’ only appears in the gospel of Matthew (5:32 and 19:9). Furthermore, because many have wrongly understood porneia to mean adultery in Matt 5:32 and 19:9, they have had much trouble understanding these verses, translating them, and harmonizing them together with the rest of Biblical teaching on sex.⁷⁹ For example, it seems to many that the gospel of Matthew teaches that

⁷⁸ This statement may evoke feelings of guilt in the minds of many people who may have knowingly or unknowingly committed this sin. It is not the purpose in this chapter to discuss the repentance, healing and forgiveness that are freely available in Christ Jesus. This will be discussed in a later chapter.

⁷⁹ Heth, William A. and Wenham, Gordon J. “Jesus and Divorce: Towards an Evangelical Understanding of New Testament teaching” 1984 Hodder & Stoughton. Pages 14-15.

‘adultery’⁸⁰ is the only grounds for divorce – whereas they see that the gospels of Mark and Luke do not allow this supposed exception.

However, porneia is not adultery, and the ‘exceptional clause’ (as it is called) is not just found in Matthew. We do see it here in the gospel of Mark.

Mark 10:12 says: “...if she divorces her husband and marries another man, *she* commits adultery...” (emphasis mine). If a wife divorces her husband *she* is committing porneia, rejecting him and their marriage. In this case, Mark teaches that it is not her first husband’s fault when she marries another man committing adultery. *Which is exactly what Matt 5:32 taught.*

In Matt 5:32 Jesus was focussing on the sin of adultery, and at *who* was at fault when a woman remarried. If her husband pushed her out, then it was his fault, but if she left herself, it was hers. Mark 10:12 includes: “...if *she* divorces her husband and marries another man, *she* commits adultery,” (emphasis mine) and Mark 10:11 says that if *he* “...divorces his wife and marries another woman”, then *he* commits adultery.

Again, we see the emphasis on who is at fault of the sin of adultery when a woman has sex with another person besides the first man she had sex with (remarries after a divorce).

Although, where Matt 5:32 says nothing about a *man* remarrying, Mark 10:11 is not silent.

It states that if a man *divorces* one wife, then he cannot marry another. If a man isn’t willing to live with his first wife as married, then why should he be able to get another? Again, the focus is on the sin of adultery, and divorce by the husband to marry another woman is targeted as encouraging this sin.

Looking carefully, we see that in these verses (Mark 10:11-12), it is still only remarriage by the first *wife* that is seen to be adultery. In this passage, *remarriage by a married man is not seen to be adulterous unless he has first divorced a faithful wife.*⁸¹

The teaching in Matthew 19:9

In Matt 19:9, Jesus states exactly the same thing as what He says in Mark 10:11, which also agrees totally with what we learnt He taught in Matt 5:32. Look carefully now at Matt 19:9:

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

⁸⁰ If ‘adultery’ was what was meant in both Matt 5:32 and 19:9, then Jesus (and the author of the gospel) would have used the word ‘moichao’ (adultery) – which appears in various forms around thirty times in the New Testament. He didn’t. He used the word porneia – obviously Jesus had a sin other than adultery in mind. Porneia is not adultery (but often leads to it).

⁸¹ And by that I don’t mean sexually faithful as we think of it today. By a ‘faithful wife’ I mean a wife that is committed to her husband and willing to remain married to him.

Here again, the words ‘marital unfaithfulness’ come from the Greek word *porneia*. So, Jesus says:

“...anyone who divorces his wife, except for *porneia*, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

If a man pushes away his wife that has *not* committed *porneia*, then he commits adultery if he remarries.

But if a man had a wife who rejected and left him, (she committed *porneia*,) then if *he* remarries, this remarriage is not said to be adulterous.

Can you see that in all of these verses we’ve looked at so far, Jesus continues addressing the sin of adultery, which is remarriage by a woman?

Although Jesus mentions it in Matt 19:9, He was not specifically addressing the issue of a man remarrying. Neither was He just giving a teaching on adultery. Here, Jesus was answering the Pharisees who had come to him to ask him if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason.

He answers them by quoting Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24, adding that what God has joined together, man should not separate. *Jesus’ answer to the Pharisees clearly was that divorce was definitely not allowed for any reason at all.* He tells the Pharisees that Moses only permitted divorce because the hearts of men were hard; however, He states that from the beginning it was not like this, man was not meant to divorce his wife. So the answer was ‘no,’ a man could not divorce his wife for any reason.

However, if a woman had left her husband, he was not forced to live a life of celibacy or masturbation – he could remarry. Jesus said that if a wife commits *porneia*, rejecting or divorcing her first husband, there is no prohibition against this man marrying another woman. *But*, if a man does divorce his wife, *who was not committing porneia* and marries again, he commits adultery (exactly what is repeated in Mark 10:11).

So men cannot put away any woman they have married. If they do, they commit adultery. If a wife puts herself away from her husband, then the husband can remarry without committing a sin. However, if the wife marries any other man, then both she and the man she marries are committing adultery.

Jesus swings the Pharisees question on divorce around to the subject of adultery. He states that divorce is wrong because it encourages adultery. Men can continue to remarry if they so need to, however, if they do, they are required to keep every wife they attain. Divorcing or ‘putting away’ wives is wrong.

Apart from the fact that Matt 19:9 *itself* does not condone divorce, we can also see that in its context, the whole passage does not condone it. It is interesting then that so many have misinterpreted this verse to say that divorce is allowable if one or other of the partners has had sex with another person.

Why would Jesus state in Matt 19:9 that divorce was allowable if one of the partners had sex with another person? Just a few verses previously, Jesus had taught that

Moses only allowed divorce because the hearts of men were hard. Jesus had just stated that from the beginning, a man and a woman who had become one flesh weren't meant to separate! Why would he then in the next breath condone divorce? This was the very thing Jesus taught Moses so wrongly condoned.⁸²

Jesus was fully God and taught the truth without compromise. While our God is a god of great mercy and love, He will forever uphold the truth and the law. Jesus did this very thing in Matt 19:9 stating that divorce and adultery are wrong. He stated that any man who divorced a faithful wife was sinning, so too was any woman who married another man while her husband lived. That's what Jesus was saying. He wasn't giving a new reason for divorce to be an acceptable practice. He was not following the Pharisees and teachers of the law who had allowed people 'loopholes' in the seventh commandment (Matt 5:17-20).

The lie that divorce and remarriage are acceptable to God when one partner of a marriage commits adultery is not only untrue, it also fosters suspicion, jealousy and mistrust. Many have wanted to spy on their partner to them 'catch' them in the act of adultery. This is not what Jesus wanted. There is no need to spy, it should be fairly clear when a partner is committing porneia: They have moved out of the house for good and they refuse to speak about reconciliation or make any efforts towards that goal.

Porneia is a rejection of and breakdown in relationship. It has nothing to do with a third party otherwise Jesus would have said something about the person with whom the woman committed it. Jesus said nothing about the person with whom the woman committed this sin – because there needs not be another person. Porneia is something that a person can commit with no involvement outside the marriage.

Porneia is also something to be forgiven – in many cases it is a relationship that needs healing! It is not something that should or can be used by the other partner as grounds for divorce. Remember, Jesus only stated that if a woman committed porneia of her own free will, then she was guilty of adultery. He said nothing to allow a husband to divorce his wife for this sin.

⁸² In actual fact, when we look at the Deuteronomic passage, Moses did not so much condone divorce, rather he accepted that it happened, and gave some instructions for when it did – this is much the same as what Paul does in 1 Cor 7.

In the Bible divorce is often seen to be one-sided. *Couples* didn't get divorced – *one* partner divorced the other. At the time of Jesus, there were two schools of thought on the subject of divorce. The Hillel school allowed a man to divorce a wife for any and every reason – for example, if the husband decided that his wife was ugly, then he could give her a certificate of divorce and send her away from the house. And there was the Shammai school that taught divorce was only allowable if a wife committed adultery.

In Matt 19:3 the Pharisees asked Jesus if the Hillel school of thought was correct in His view, and in Mark 10:2 they asked Him if it were right for a man to divorce his wife at all. Some have thought that Jesus sided with the Shammai school, allowing divorce for adultery, however, Jesus clearly sided with neither school, slamming divorce as an unrighteous, ungodly act that was never meant to be. He stated that a man was not to divorce his wife, and that a woman (if divorced) was never to remarry.

PART THREE: PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF BIBLICAL TEACHINGS

9

Remarriage

In the Old Testament many men are seen to have more than one wife. Although this is not specifically shown to be wrong (there is no verse in the Bible that states “you must not take a second wife,”) and many of these polygynous⁸³ men are those portrayed as being righteous, this state is seen to be undesirable (cf. Deut 17:17). Again, the New Testament does not teach that polygyny is sin. It never *encourages* men to have more than one wife, and in fact it *discourages* this – however, it does not condemn the action out of hand.

For example, in the parable of the ‘ten virgins’ related in Matt 25:1-10, ten females all waited to marry the one bridegroom. Polygyny *did* happen and was socially acceptable – even in the New Testament age.

The Bible teaches that a married man can have sex with a virgin woman without the man committing adultery, *as long as he has not divorced a faithful wife to do so* (Matt 19:9, Mark 10:11, Luke 16:18) – a man cannot reject one wife for another. If a man isn’t willing to live with one wife as married, then why should he be allowed another? However, if he is willing to live with both wives, then this is not shown to be sinful.

If a husband does divorce a wife who was willing to live with him as married, and he remarries a new wife, he commits adultery against the divorced wife. Remember that sex with a subsequent wife is not adultery if she is a virgin; Adultery is tied up with the sin of divorcing a first wife or having sex with a divorced woman.

So, can a man really remarry a second woman *without* divorcing the first wife? Biblically, the answer to this question is yes. This is because Biblically, divorce and remarriage are not legal institutions. Remarriage can happen Biblically just by having sex with another person, as neither divorce nor marriage, have anything to do with legalities.

In the Bible, we see many men remarrying without divorcing any of their previous wives. A prime example of this would be Solomon (1 Kings 11:3). He remarried and remarried and remarried without divorcing any of his previous wives or concubines.

⁸³ ‘Polygyny’ means ‘more than one wife,’ ‘polygamy’ means ‘more than one partner,’ and ‘polyandry’ means ‘more than one husband.’

Other examples would include King Xerxes (Esther 1-2), and King David (1 Sam 25:39-43). In the Bible, men could easily have sex with a virgin woman without having put his first or subsequent wives out of the house. We never see this sort of remarriage forbidden. Remarriage is only prohibited when a man has previously put away a wife who had been willing to live with him as married (Mark 10:11).

If a man who has a wife at home, willing to live with him as married, and he bypasses this wife to have sex with another woman, would he not be considered to be ‘divorcing’ the first wife? Unfortunately, there really is no Biblical evidence for this. Divorce in the Bible is seen only as putting a wife out of the home, refusing to provide for her, and be a husband to her. Although seen as undesirable, taking a second wife while the first is still in the home is not seen specifically to be wrong anywhere in the Bible, and is not seen to be a divorce of the first wife (cf. Exodus 21:10, Leviticus 18).

If a husband remarries virgin women while keeping all his previous wives, he is not committing adultery. There is no verse in the entire Bible that prohibits a man from taking more than one wife (see for example the list of unlawful sexual relations in Leviticus 18) – as long as he does not divorce any of other wives he has to do so.⁸⁴ **Sex with a married woman was such a great sin to be avoided at all costs that if a man even just ‘slipped up’ and married a second virgin, he was to keep her rather than divorce her, to ensure that she – now a married woman – did not have sex with another man.** *Biblically, having two or more wives is seen to be no way near as bad as divorcing a woman, or having sex with a married woman – these things are classed as adultery – forbidden even in the ten commandments themselves* (Exodus 20:14).

Here we find an incredible teaching. To many, especially women who have sexually addicted husbands, this will seem horribly unfair. Does God really mean what I am saying?

Josiah, who became King of Judah at the age of eight was probably one of the most righteous men whose story lives on in the Bible. We read glowing reports about him in 2 Kings 22-23 and 2 Chr 33-35, including such verses as 2 Kings 22:2. It states: “He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in all the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left.” Clearly, King Josiah was a righteous man for all of his life, continually doing good and staying close to God and his laws. Yet Josiah had more than one wife. Two of his sons (Hamutal and Zebidah) had different mothers (2 Kings 23:32, 36), and because these sons were only about two years apart in age, it is highly likely that Josiah was married to more than one woman at the same time.

How could Josiah be called righteous when he did this to his wives and children? Can a man be righteous and do this today?

In Biblical times, and even in some cultures today, polygyny is or has been socially accepted. These cultures often suffered a shortage of men due to war or other factors, and/or were those that desired rapid population increase (see the story of Jacob

⁸⁴ Although his second and subsequent wives should not be related to him or any of his current wives (cf. Lev 18:18, Lev 20).

who married a third woman because the second could not have children in Gen 30:1-6). Neither of these two factors exists today: There is certainly no shortage of men or population. It is not only for these reasons though that a man today would be ill advised to take up the practice of polygyny. Firstly, in this culture, polygyny is neither socially acceptable, nor legally allowable. And secondly, even among Christian women, I doubt that many would enjoy sharing a husband with another woman. And this of course may lead to divorce, or to a woman committing porneia. The Bible exhorts:

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself” (Eph 5:25-28).

A husband in this generation who desires to follow the will of God would almost certainly be ill advised to take a second wife. For doing this may definitely cause the first wife to feel displaced, unloved, jealous, angry etc. – and would definitely not be a way to encourage her to holy and pure living. It could also affect the children very badly. We see in Genesis 37 the resentment that the brothers of the unloved wives of Jacob had for the brother of the wife that he loved. Remember also that while polygyny is not condemned, neither is it encouraged or seen as normal. Blessings usually came from the first wife, for example Abraham had his child of blessing, Issac, through his first wife, Sarah. Jacob was the father of Judah, a descendent of Jesus, through his first wife, Leah. And those men in the Bible with more than one wife are seen to have many more problems than those who only had one woman.

Even in Biblical times, when polygyny *was* socially acceptable, it was still a big step for a man to take, and was not common or desirable. When a man did take more than one wife, often he was encouraged to do this by his first wife if she were unable to have children, so the first wife was in agreement to her husband remarrying (cf. Gen 16:1-3, 30:1-4). Today, while still technically Biblically allowable, polygyny certainly would not be advisable if the first wife was in disagreement to it, and also because there is certainly no need for population growth, neither is there a shortage of men for all the single women out there.

There are also some other Biblical reasons why polygyny is not advised for today. One is found in 1 Cor 7:3. The KJV says, “Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.” To avoid porneia, we should let each woman have her own man. That is, a woman should not be made to share her husband as this may easily lead her to porneia and then adultery.

A second reason would be found in 1 Cor 7:28 which says: “...if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned...” Men are addressed first: If they marry, they have not sinned. Then virgins (unmarried women) are addressed, and told that they have not sinned either if they marry. The only group of people left are married women. Married women are never told that they can remarry. Only men

(regardless of whether they are already married or not) and virgin women can marry *righteously*. However, immediately after this verse we read, "...those who marry will face many troubles in this life" (1 Cor 7:28). Just previous to this verse we read: "Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife" (1 Cor 7:27). Here, we see that men who are married should not seek for either them or their wife to be divorced from one another. The second part of this verse says to men that have been loosed from their wives (ie. their wives have committed porneia and left them, or have died,) that they should not seek another wife. Although *allowed* in 1 Cor 7:28, the whole passage in which this verse appears advises men not to remarry (or to indulge in polygyny) as marriage is not easy!

So what option does a wife have when her husband does have sex with other women? Should she just accept it without question? Can she ever divorce him and remarry righteously? And what of a man with an adulterous wife? Should he just accept it and keep forgiving her?

The best that I can say in situations such as these is that Scripture shows remarriage to be undesirable where it is not shown to be sinful. However, I'm not here to judge you or anybody for this – I myself have been guilty of adultery, porneia and remarriage, and I can sympathize with those who desire to be remarried. At this point I am attempting to show you what I believe Scripture says, so that you may take any problems or desires in your life to God in prayer. Only you and God truly know your situation. I have not written this book to be used as a tool to condemn anybody, and I pray that no one else uses it as such. If you are in a difficult situation such as one mentioned above, then remember that there are many further findings to be presented in this book, including such things as forgiveness, repentance and freedom. Remember also that God has put the laws about sex into place so that your life can be one of reduced pain and greater blessings: He cares about you.

We'll continue now with a look at 1 Cor 7:10-11 – a Scripture that has often been used incorrectly to show that remarriage by a man is not allowed.

"To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife" (1 Cor 7:10-11).

By saying here that this is a command of the Lord, Paul (the writer of 1 Cor) is saying that Jesus had actually spoken this command out, which is what he did in Matt 5:32 and 19:9. In those verses, Jesus said that *wives* must only marry one man, and they cannot remarry if ever they are separated from their husbands. Jesus also states quite clearly that a husband must not divorce his wife. These are *exactly* the same things that are repeated here in 1 Cor 7:10-11.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ The reason why I have emphasized the fact that Jesus actually did say what Paul is repeating here in 1 Cor 7:10-11 is that every other scholar I have read questions the part of 1 Cor 7:10 which says "not I, but the Lord". All other modern published scholars that I have read state that Matt 5:32 and 19:9 do not harmonize easily with 1 Cor 7:10-11, or other Biblical teaching on this subject. Basically, this is because

Now, while 1 Cor 7:10-11 specifically prohibits separated wives from remarrying, it only tells men not to divorce their wives – *saying nothing about them remarrying*. Again, this agrees totally with Matt 5:32, 19:9, Mark 10:11 and Luke 16:18. (In Matt 19:9 and Luke 16:18, men are told *not* to remarry *only* if they have divorced a previous wife (who was not committing porneia herself)).

Yes, the Lord did indeed say what Paul has repeated in 1 Cor 7:10-11. These verses and what is called the ‘exceptional clause’ in Matt 5:32, 19:9, are virtually teaching the same thing, also repeated in the gospels of Mark and Luke.

As was remarked upon previously, it is only now in this generation, wherein most cultures emphasize legalities, that we believe a man must divorce his wife before remarrying. We assume that by prohibiting men to divorce their wives, 1 Cor 7:11 also prohibits remarriage. However, while women who are separated from their husbands are specifically told to remain abstinent from sex/remarriage, husbands are *only* told not to divorce their wives, and there is no prohibition against them remarrying, ie. having sex with a virgin woman.

This Scripture teaches that if a wife separates from her husband, she should remain single – and her husband should not close the door on her (divorce her). Rather, he should still welcome her home should she come. In the meantime, he can take on another wife; however, he must remember that then he has two wives – the first may come home at any time. So, while remarriage by a man is allowed, it is still a very serious and ill-advised step to take. Hermas, one of the early church fathers agreed with this so strongly that he in fact advises a man whose wife has committed adultery and porneia not ever to remarry at all for the sake of repentance – ie. in an effort to bring the first wife back to the house.⁸⁶

With all the equality promoted in the Bible, and in the world today, this teaching that men can remarry and women can’t may really seem unfair to a lot of people. God has allowed men to remarry as a concession, perhaps due to their greater sexual drive, or also so that they can continue their family line. Has God kept this same concession of remarriage from women to hurt them? Paul himself may have wondered at this, for, after teaching on these things he says, “I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord” (1 Cor 7:35). Not only is marriage problematic, God realizes that the unmarried woman can also spend her time “...in undivided devotion to the Lord” (1 Cor 7:32-35). And I’m sure that God also knew what only now secular researchers are beginning to find out: Second marriages are at much greater risk of ending in divorce than first marriages.⁸⁷

they believe that Matt 5:32 and 19:9 allow divorce and hence remarriage if one of the partners has committed adultery. However, as explained more fully in chapters 6, 7 and 8 of this book, I have found that Matt 5:32 and 19:9 do not give grounds for divorce and remarriage if one partner commits adultery or has ‘illegal sex’, and I believe that these verses, along with Luke 16:18 and Mark 10:11-12 (which are all the words of Jesus Himself), *are* actually repeated here in 1 Cor 7:10-11 as Paul states.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Heth and Wenham “Jesus and Divorce: Towards an Evangelical Understanding of New Testament teaching” 1984 Hodder & Stoughton.

⁸⁷ From The Divorce Center website <http://www.divorcenter.org/>

We must also remember that God uses human marriage as a symbol of the relationship between Himself and us. God is our first ‘husband,’ our original and only God, and we the people are the ‘bride of Christ’ (Rev 21:2). Just as the bride of Christ is never allowed to marry other gods (ie. commit idolatry/spiritual adultery), God will not allow wives to commit adultery with other husbands either. This is the ideal, the perfection that we – with the help of God – strive to attain. While sin does occur, and is forgiven when we honestly repent, the Bible does uphold the standard that when there are marital problems, reconciliation with the first marital (sexual) partner should *always* remain the number one goal. It shows this very strongly by teaching that even when a man divorces a wife, this has not dissolved their marriage.

Keeping these things in mind, we will now look at the *only* Scripture from the Bible that seems to allow *both* men and women to remarry. This Scripture is 1 Cor 7:15:

“...if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.”

Unlike other teachings on this issue, such as Matt 5:32 and 19:9, this verse was clearly written to both men *and* women. Just previous to this verse in 1 Cor 7:12-13, believers are told to stay with their partners. However, unbelievers may of course leave their partners, leaving a believer single – and this can happen *because* a person has become a believer.

Then, although 1 Cor 7:15 does not actually spell out that the unbound believer can remarry, it does show that God can break the bondages of those who have truly been abandoned (cf. 1 Cor 7:27 KJV). I would assume then that if a person is not bound, they are free to remarry in some cases, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion (1 Cor 7:9). God knows also that He has given women as well as men sexual desires (cf. 1 Tim 5:11), and many believe that celibacy is a gift (1 Cor 7:7).

With 1 Cor 7:15 (often called ‘The Pauline Privilege’), we see that in some circumstances, God does not force abandoned men or women to live without outlet for their sexual desires for the rest of their lives. We must remember though, that in other Bible passages, we are told that a woman *is* bound to her husband for as long as he lives, however, perhaps with prayer, petition and thanksgiving women can present their request to remarry to God, and He may answer favorably.

Traditionally, some women who have remarried after being abandoned have *viewed* their first husband as dead, believing that this man is dead to Christ. And many others – especially in this modern populated world – who never hear from an ex-partner again, sometimes pray to become unbound for they would not know if the husband was living or not. Another way that people in this age have viewed themselves as single after previously having sex is by becoming born again – a new creation free of past bondages.

Some whose partners have continually committed adultery, have considered their sinful partners to be dead for another reason. In Deut 22:22 we read that any person guilty of adultery should be put to death. These days we cannot do this, as the law of the land prohibits it. But there are many who feel so hurt by their partners actions, that they

perhaps almost wish this law to be brought back in. Would we really kill these people if the law of man did not forbid it? Perhaps we would. However, we know that Jesus did not. Full of forgiveness and love, Jesus only asked the person without sin to cast the first stone (John 8:3-11).⁸⁸

I would advise you well to consider all of the above thoughts and Scriptures when faced with a desire to remarry, especially the admonition of 1 Cor 7:27b, “Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife.” Notwithstanding this, I can still say that thankfully for some, it does seem that in 1 Cor 7:15, when *either* a male or female believer is left single, God does not force them to live a life of celibacy. This follows much of the other New Testament teaching on the equality of women and men. It also gives women less reason to deny Christ – for if becoming a Christian meant losing their marriage, and living a life of celibacy, many would think twice before taking the step of committing their lives to God. We can give our lives to Christ no matter who we are, or what our life situation is. God cares for us all and desires us all to come to Him. Women and men need not fear that becoming Christian means never having enjoyable sex again – just as people living in de facto relationships also need not fear that God is going to condemn their relationship when they submit to Him.⁸⁹

However, again I must repeat that by 1 Cor 7:15 only saying that a person is not bound, and not specifically mentioning remarriage, it shows still that great caution should be taken when considering this step – especially when the person is a woman. Abandoned partners should firstly ensure that they have truly been abandoned (that the abandoning partner also believes the marriage to be over), and that there really is no hope of reconciliation. Perhaps the person should also examine themselves for any sin they may have committed which contributed towards the break up of the marriage, and then to repent when sin is found. Abandoned partners should also look at forgiving themselves, the former partner, and anyone else they may feel contributed to the breakage of the marriage. This repentance and forgiveness perhaps will not be things to be done once either. If and when old angers and upsets flare up, the repentance and forgiveness need to be renewed, and *can* be renewed with God’s help.

If this is done, then the person should ask God to break the bond between them and the first (and perhaps subsequent) partner(s) and to release them from any vows that may have been made. This person should then commit him or herself to allowing God to guide them in their next choice of marriage partner – who would have to be Christian (2 Cor 6:14).⁹⁰

It is not that God has different rules for believers and unbelievers. *All* people are told that it is far better to stay with their partner. Unbelievers however, are those who don’t accept that God’s rules are best for them, so they don’t pay heed to them. So when an unbeliever – who does not believe that the best course of action is reconciliation and restoration of marriage – leaves their partner, the believer *is not bound*. Luther himself

⁸⁸ We have already discussed this situation more fully in chapter 5.

⁸⁹ We will speak specifically of de facto relationships in a coming chapter.

⁹⁰ We will speak more about both ‘marrying in the Lord’ and breaking previous bondages in later chapters.

agreed with this so strongly that he called *any* person who deserted their partner an unbeliever.⁹¹

Having sex is such a great responsibility that the life situation should be carefully weighed before taking this step of marriage, especially in the case where a woman has been married before. So while in certain situations, remarriage may be permissible, we must remember that it may not necessarily be beneficial or desirable in our lives (and, believe it or not, people can live without sex!) (cf. 1 Cor 10:23). Remarriage (sex with a new partner) should only be entered into with great caution and prayer, and only after *all* other avenues at reconciliation to the first partner have been firmly closed. This may seem a 'hard line,' however it is not nearly as hard as the traditional view of the church. In 1540, Archbishop Cranmer of Canterbury wrote, "What can possibly be alleged in your excuse when you allow a man, after a divorce, when both man and woman are living, to contract a fresh marriage?"⁹²

...oooOOOooo...

"Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. For your Maker is your husband-- the LORD Almighty is his name-- the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit-- a wife who married young, only to be rejected," says your God (Isa 54:4-6).

⁹¹ Heth, William A. and Wenham, Gordon J. "Jesus and Divorce: Towards an Evangelical Understanding of New Testament teaching" 1984 Hodder & Stoughton. p. 80.

⁹² Phillips, Roderick "Untying the knot: A short history of divorce" Cambridge University Press 1991.

Jesus did not allow a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all. However, Jesus gave the man whose wife *had divorced him* a concession – he could remarry.

Let's say that a wife has left her first husband for another. The first husband remarries – he thinks his first wife is gone for good and he desires children...

Later, if the first wife who committed adultery was repentant, and wished to return to her husband, he would not be under any obligation to accept her back if adultery *was* a legitimate ground for divorce. In this case, if an adulterous wife was repentant, but her husband would not take her back, he would be forcing her out to continue on with this sin.

But God does *not* want people to continue in adultery! How would this woman stop being an adulteress? By going back to her first man. But he has another wife.

Isn't him having two wives better than him forcing the first wife to continue to be an adulteress? Wives are always bound to their first husband (cf. Rom 7:2-3, 1 Cor 7:39), and this first wife should be able to return. If he does not let her back into his life, then he sins (commits adultery), and she is abandoned, and now free (1 Cor 7:15).

Adultery, divorce and porneia are all far worse than polygyny – that’s why we see them prohibited in the Bible – but we never see polygyny prohibited.

10

Abusive Relationships

What solution is there for those who find themselves ‘stuck’ in abusive relationships?

There are many ways a partner can abuse: Mentally, spiritually, physically, and sexually. And because the church has often considered divorce or separation to be the ‘unforgivable sin,’ many suffer in silence. Because of this, not only do many abused partners often eventually leave the church, their children can follow right behind them. This obviously is not a desirable situation.

The Bible says in 1 Cor 7:10-11 “...a wife must not separate from her husband. *But if she does....*” Here, the Bible is neither encouraging separation, nor saying that it is right, rather, it understands that sometimes separation must or does happen. Because of this, God gives us advice, to guard against us making further mistakes.

Taking safety measures is the will of God (cf. Deut 22:8). And not only is the Christian partner bound in marriage, they are also obligated to care for themselves and their children and their partner. Putting themselves or any of their family at risk of being abused and damaged is not a good thing. Living with an abusive parent can often cause just as many problems for a child as can the divorce of their parents. Although God hates it, sometimes separation can and does, and even sometimes should occur. But, when a wife does separate from her husband, “...she must remain unmarried...” (1 Cor 7:11).

I know that this must sound terribly hard on people who are living within abusive relationships. This was certainly difficult for me to write, however it is what I believe the Bible does say. And, although any particular Bible teaching may be difficult, we must always remember that God cares for us, and these life guidelines He has set down in the Bible are there for our benefit.

If an abused person who separates from his/her abusive partner remains unmarried while they are separated, then reconciliation can remain the number one goal. Once one of the partners has sex with another person, reconciliation to the former partner most often gets a lower priority. And reconciliation is vitally important, for with the reconciliation of the marriage, comes healing of the person. Abusive partners are people with problems that need to be solved. And with God and a Christian partner who loves them unconditionally, those problems can more easily make their way to being in the distant past. Helping an abusive partner towards healing may be a very unpleasant station

in life, however it is a very valid station, and a valuable ministry no more unpleasant than many others.

For if an abused partner leaves the abuser and remarries, not only is this person committing adultery, the abuser is also often left worse than before. People who abuse their partners are still people, and a divorce is a terrible ‘kick in the shins’ for these ones whom are already hurting. Divorce leaves many with severe depressive problems, even if their partner has left them because they abused that partner, and in fact, divorced men are nearly three times as likely to suicide as are married men.⁹³ I’m not at all saying that people who leave abusive partners that later suicide are to be blamed for the suicide, for sometimes leaving an abusive partner is a very real need in self-protection. What I am trying to say is that divorce never seems to really fix anything, and that attempting reconciliation and healing at every avenue is one way of possibly preventing terrible outcomes.

In other cases, abusers who have been left may feel ‘free’ to go on to remarry and then abuse again – which in almost all cases they do. Abuse very rarely has anything to do with the person being abused. An abuser will usually abuse any person they are in relationship with.

If a person is forced to leave their abusive partner to keep themselves and/or their children safe (and this can be even by mental or spiritual abuse), the Bible advises them to stay unmarried, working for reconciliation and healing for themselves and the abusing partner. In this case, the person who has left the marriage for safety’s sake would need to ensure that the abusive partner does not consider the one who left to be committing porneia. The person who has left needs to attempt to ensure that the abuser knows that the marriage bond is still respected, and that the person is not leaving for another. Perhaps a course of regular counseling, or even just talking sessions between husband and wife should be suggested. Of course, many abused partners often suggest these things in any case, only to have the abuser reject them and/or refuse to believe them. No, there really isn’t any ‘pat’ answer to the problem of abusive relationships, other than prayer. These things that I have suggested are only the guidelines that I have seen in the Bible. Although it is often very difficult, I do believe that God’s will is for the person being abused to strive for reconciliation and healing over other proposed solutions if possible, continually seeking God and His will and direction in the matter.

If however, the abusive partner decides to leave the relationship, then the Bible tells us that a believing partner is not bound (1 Cor 7:15). Of course though, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, discretion must be used. Before remarrying, the partner that has been left should examine the situation, and if necessary seek repentance and forgiveness, and should strongly consult God and perhaps at least one stronger Christian minister before remarrying (having sex with another partner).

Were any Biblical characters ever in abusive marriages?

⁹³ From the Mends web page – <http://www.peerleadership.com.au/page3.html>

As I mentioned earlier, there are many ways that a person can abuse their marital partner. And although uncommon, we do see some instances of unhappy marriages in the Bible. The marriage of Nabal and Abigail – whose story is related in 1 Samuel 25, is probably one of the worst. Nabal was a mean, wicked and selfish man, and as the meaning of his name suggests, he was a fool (1 Sam 25:25). Nabal was not a wise man, he was abusive, and he couldn't communicate with his wife or others properly (v. 17, 19, 37). He could have even been alcoholic, for we see him very drunk in 1 Sam 25:36.

Abigail though, was a lovely and intelligent woman of God. Even though she knew that her husband was a wicked fool (v. 25), she was still his wife, living in his home. She respected the fact that Nabal and herself were one (v. 24), and we see no evidence that she wished to leave the marriage. Surely, although Abigail respected their marriage, it was not a happy one.

The story of Nabal tells us that David and his men had protected Nabal's property over a certain period of time. However, when David asked Nabal for some provisions for his men – pay that they rightly deserved, and that Nabal actually had on hand anyway – Nabal "...hurled insults at them..." (1 Sam 25:14). David then decided that he and all his men, would kill Nabal and all his men.

When Abigail heard of this, she began to pack. Without her husband's knowledge, she immediately gathered food, wine and other gifts to take to David. Abigail set out with the provisions, and met David's band on the road. She begged David to forgive Nabal, and to let the blame be on her alone. She begged David and his men not to shed any blood – and not to kill Nabal.

Perhaps not many women married to men like Nabal would be likely to beg a band of men out to kill him to spare their husband's life!

Abigail was truly a woman of God. Rather than deceiving her husband by going to David with the gifts without his knowledge, Abigail was saving the lives of Nabal and all his men (v. 19, 25-26). She knowingly kept David and his men from sin (v. 26, 31), was a prophetess of God (v. 28-30), and worked hard for the godly qualities of forgiveness and reconciliation.

This story has a lovely end – almost too good to be true. Eleven days after Abigail met David on the road, God struck Nabal down and he died (v. 38). Later, when David heard that Nabal had died, Abigail became David's wife (v. 42). This story shows quite clearly that striving after God and godly ways leads to blessings.

When in an abusive marriage, the Christian can pray to follow Abigail's lead, continuing to strive after God – not praying for the abusive partner to die. When Nabal died, David praised the Lord that God had "...brought Nabal's wrongdoing down on his own head" (v. 39). *God will repay people who, without repentance, continue to abuse and do wrong.* People who are abused can take some comfort in this as they strive to follow the will of God. Striving to do the will of God will lead to blessings in the end, whereas not doing what is right will bring us to punishment. No matter how abused we are, we should always try to remember to do what is right, and that Godliness does lead to

blessings – so ‘hang in there.’ By that, I don’t mean ‘stay in the house, getting abused.’ I only mean this: remain committed to the marriage; continue to work towards, and to pray for, eventual healing and reconciliation.

Commenting on this and other abusive marriages, the Bloems say, “...like Abigail, we must seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance and use our intelligence and good moral judgement in these matters so that we may please the Lord. We are each individually accountable to Him for our deeds.”⁹⁴ When in an abusive marriage, the person being abused should always continue to seek the Lord’s will. God cares deeply about the abused, and also about the abuser. He sees the ‘big picture,’ and works everything out for good for those who love Him (Rom 8:28).

God relates to those in abusive marriages

And God Himself can definitely relate to those in abusive marriages. Throughout the Bible, we see the recurring theme that God is ‘married’ to his people. And many times, we see His people abusing Him. They take Him for granted, they commit adultery/idolatry, and they refuse to accept Him as their God.

We see just how much God understands the hurt and the pain suffered by abused people when we read the words that He uses to describe how He feels towards Israel’s abuse of Him. In Hosea 2:8-9 for example, we see God feeling unappreciated, as Israel refuses to acknowledge Him as provider. We see God feeling very jealous and extremely vengeful in Hosea 2:10-13. In fact, it seems that God wants to ruin everything about Israel’s life, so that she will come to her senses and return to Him. We feel the unhappiness in God’s heart as He tells of all the things that Israel remembered, “...but me she forgot” (v. 13).

And this is not the only time we read of God’s unhappiness in His relationship to His wife, Israel. God certainly does understand the feelings associated with being abused and divorced. He has gone through the same pain, and is still going through it, as people everywhere continually reject Him as God.

In Jeremiah 3:8, we read God saying, “I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries...” Even though God was the one who sent Israel away, divorcing them to their own devices, God still hated this divorce. More to the point, He hated what Israel had done to encourage Him to divorce her. God sent Israel away to fill her with fear, and to encourage the people to return to Him. He showed them what it was like to live without Him – but He only did this for a very short time. Only three verses later, God pleads, “Return faithless Israel... I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful... I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your guilt... [you] have not obeyed me... Return, faithless people,” declares the Lord, “for *I am your husband*” (Jer 3:11-14 emphasis mine).

⁹⁴ Brummel Bloem, Diane “A Woman’s Workshop on Bible Marriages” 1980 The Zondervan Corporation, Michigan. P. 134.

Although God had given the divorce certificate, He did not cause the separation. Israel had already left Him. She had already committed porneia against Him by rejecting Him and the marriage. So, the divorce by God was only right because Israel had previously left and divorced Him. However, neither the separation, the divorce certificate, or the idolatry or adultery completely severed the relationship between God and His people.⁹⁵ Even after Israel had been given the divorce certificate, God still worked for reconciliation, repentance and forgiveness, and we read that God *remained* the husband of Israel. Comparing this view of divorce to how we see that institution today shows how far society has drifted from the Biblical ideal.

Again in this situation we see that neither adultery, porneia, or divorce ends marriage. After Israel had been divorced by God, and ‘married’ other gods – after they had defiled themselves, rejected God and violated the covenant they had with Him – God still desired to take them back, and to ‘remarry’ them.

But should and can abused people today be like God in their marriages? Should and can they work for reconciliation and should/can they always desire healing for the other partner?

To live in an abusive relationship, to go through a divorce, or to have your partner be adulterous or unfaithful⁹⁶ to you would be absolutely terrible (for most people), and a very difficult experience to go through. I certainly do not wish to minimize the pain of these things, and place unfair burdens on people who are in these terrible situations. However, this book is about what the Bible says on the subject of sex, and I believe the Bible does clearly show that faithfulness to your first sexual partner *is* of the utmost importance – for yourself as well as for your partner and children. More importantly, the Bible shows us that reconciliation and healing *are* possible, and they are what we should desire. People in ‘bad’ marriages can take comfort in the fact that reconciliation and healing are desired by God, and are certainly possible with His help.

Adulterous, abusive relationships

But what if a person has been involved in an abusive marriage for many, many years, and it is now discovered that the marriage is adulterous? Perhaps an abused wife had sex with one or more men before this current marriage, or an abused husband abandoned a first wife to marry the one he lives with now. Should these marriages be ended? Even if the current marriage is not abusive, it still may be found to be adulterous.

⁹⁵ Sometimes people may feel that their relationship with God has been severed, they feel a barrier between themselves and God. Has God sent them away? The answer to this is ‘No.’ God has not severed us from Himself. If we feel a barrier between ourselves and God, the barrier is always caused by sin on our part, and when we repent or forgive, or renew our faith in God, then we find the barrier is broken down. (Compare Matt 5:45, Rom 11:20).

⁹⁶ With relation to marriage, we often view the word ‘unfaithful’ as meaning that one partner has had sex with another person. In the Bible however, you can be ‘unfaithful’ to your partner just by leaving them, and not rendering them your love, companionship, or commitment. Being ‘unfaithful’ Biblically is just leaving the other person, and does not necessarily mean that one partner has had sex with another person.

With tears I have pondered the question of whether a long-established marriage (especially one with children) that is found to be adulterous should be broken. I have come to the conclusion that in most cases, the relationship that a person is currently in when they learn of this teaching should actually be the one that is kept. I say this not only from such Scripture verses as 1 Cor 7:12-13 and 2 Cor 5:17, but also from having the personal experience of seeing first hand the absolutely disastrous nightmare that divorce causes, especially where children are involved. The sin of adultery may have been committed (often times through naivete), and we need to repent of this sin, whether we knew of it or not. In some cases, it may be necessary for a person to go back to their original partner,⁹⁷ however I do not think that this would be the case in every situation. I believe that our God of love can break original bonds and allow current marriages to stand, but I would never expect Him to do this continually, whenever a person decided that their current marriage was not for them.⁹⁸

In 1 Cor 7:13 we read that “If a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him.” In Mark 2:27 we read that “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” Jesus himself actually broke the law (of the Sabbath) when it was in the best interests of the people involved. Hence, I believe that if a couple in an established marriage with each other are later found to be in an adulterous relationship it would be better for them to stay together, and consider their current marriage to be their only righteous marriage. I also think that this is a decision to be made once and for all. You cannot on one day say “Well, this marriage will be the righteous and first.” And then, two days later when things get tough to say “This marriage is adulterous and must be ended.” Also, when I say that Jesus broke the Sabbath when it was best in the circumstances, I do not mean that we can take the same license whenever we feel that we would like to. I only speak about Jesus breaking the Sabbath to make the point that the law is there for people. I pray that you do not take what I am saying in the wrong way: God wants us *not* to commit adultery for our own good – that law is there *for* us and our children. If a long established marriage is found to be adulterous through naivete, then I think it would be better for that marriage to stay intact as if it were righteous, and to have prayer so that the marriage can be made righteous by the Lord. This prayer and perhaps counselling is of vital importance, as sometimes the cause of abuse in the current marriage may be due to the adulterous status of the relationship. In some cases of abusive, adulterous relationships, when the adultery is repented of, and forgiveness is granted all round, the couple find closer intimacy, healing and less abuse.

Getting back to the subject of abusive relationships though, I believe that while God hates divorce, He doesn't say “no” if it is needed because of abuse (remember though that ‘divorce’ is not the end of a marriage). You may separate from your abusive partner (see Prov 22:3). God did it Himself (cf. Jer 3:8). He was abused by Israel, so He divorced them. He hated it though. And He lived for reconciliation. What true love!

⁹⁷ Remember here that although repentance clears us of our sin in the sight of God, there may be situations when our repentance does not clear us of our responsibility to other people – see for example Luke 19:8.

⁹⁸ This could be one situation where – if both partners of a marriage later found to be adulterous – a couple can or should separate temporarily for a time of prayer (1 Cor 7:5).

When a person finds themselves in an abusive relationship, they can listen to such Godly counsel as is found in Phil 4:6-7: "...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." This peace of God may help a person who has separated from an abusive partner to have a reduced sexual desire, while the partners work towards reconciliation. It can also guard the heart from abusive words that may attempt to sting it. And remember that throughout the Bible, we see that prayers and petitions *are* answered.

Continue looking towards God, for there is hope for those in abusive and/or adulterous relationships to come to healing and reconciliation. "...With God all things are possible" (Matt 19:26).

...oooOOOooo...

What happened to David and Bathsheba?

Without doubt, the marriage of King David to the beautiful Bathsheba was based upon sin. Not only did King David commit adultery with Bathsheba, he also conspired and arranged to have her husband Uriah killed. Their story is found in 2 Sam 11.

Their marriage was adulterous, and if David ignored this sin to begin with, he certainly could not fail to notice it after the prophet Nathan brought it to his attention in 2 Sam 12. Nathan also prophesied to David that he would lose ten of his wives, and also his son because of this sin. Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die..." (2 Sam 12:13).

David sinned. Then he truthfully repented. Most of the consequences of his sin did not go away though – his son died, and ten of his wives were taken in adultery. The only thing spared was David's own life.

Perhaps we would think that in his repentance, David would divorce Bathsheba, or at least refuse to have sex with her ever again. But amazingly, this does not happen. David and Bathsheba remain faithful to one another (read 1 Kings 1). They remain married, and not only do they together have at least four more children (1 Chr 3:4-5), but their second son Solomon becomes an ancestor of Jesus Himself.

This sinful and painful marriage continued after repentance. The consequences of its sin still stood, however, in the end it was blessed by God.

You, like many others today may be involved in a relationship that was originally sinful. Perhaps you and your children and ex-partners have suffered considerably because of your misunderstandings about sex and God. Can I urge you to repent? You may well

still have to suffer the consequences of what you have done – you may unfortunately see these playing out in the lives of members of your family. But know that God can and will bless you – know that He can heal, restore and forgive.

David did not send Bathsheba and her children to the street when he repented of his sin with her – he searched his heart and did what was right at the time. I pray you can do the same.

Situation: A married woman is raped.

In the view of many who see porneia as being any type of sexual irregularity or contact outside of marriage that allows a husband to divorce his wife, the rape would give a man grounds for which to discard his wife. This would be a most horrible injustice to the innocent woman who had just been subjected to one of the most terrible crimes. God does not allow the husband of a woman who has been raped to put her through two other terrible episodes – divorce and future celibacy – just for being raped!

When a wife is divorced for porneia (Matt 5:32 and 19:9), this is her sin alone, she has already left her husband. It is not rape. Nothing, not even adultery is a legitimate ground for divorce if the wife repents and wishes to stay with her husband. Jesus stated that what God joined together, man should not separate, and men should not divorce their wives for any reason at all – not even adultery, and certainly not rape.

If a woman who commits adultery decides to repent and return to her husband, then he must take her back, rather than forcing her out to continue on with her adulteries. Husbands must work on their marriages, working with their wives on helping them not to want to commit adultery, and supporting the wife if she has been raped.

Just as God forgives us for idolatry (adultery), so husbands should forgive and support their wives. If this does not happen, the wife should still forgive and love the husband who has rejected her.

11

De Facto Relationships

Couples who live together in sexual relationship without being legally married are called ‘de facto’ couples. Many of these relationships exist today in the world. And many people living in these relationships are looked down upon by others, including, and perhaps especially, Christians. De facto couples are said to be ‘living in sin,’ although that is a term that should more appropriately be used of any person who lives their life oblivious to God in rejection of Him. In this understanding, we see that there are many married people who are living in sin, as there are many single people doing likewise. ‘Living in sin’ has nothing to do with sex; it has to do with rejecting God.

Should Christians discourage people from living in de facto relationships? Can a verse such as 1 Cor 5:13 (expel the immoral person) be used against them?

In this chapter, we will take a look at de facto relationships from the point of view of what we have learned in previous chapters of this book.

It is true of course that some people enter into de facto relationships with the express intention of their arrangement being temporary. However, probably a much greater number of people who enter into de facto relationships have quite the opposite intention.

Whether people in de facto relationships intend remaining bound companions for life or not, in most western countries, de facto couples are seen legally as being married after they have lived together for a certain short period of time. In Australia, that period of time can be as little as one day.⁹⁹ These days, in most countries, it is almost as hard to ‘split up’ from a de facto partner as it is to ‘split up’ from a partner within a registered marriage. In Australia, for example, de facto partners have virtually the same rights as legally married partners within such institutions as the Family Court. The point I am wishing to make here is that being de facto doesn’t seem to make it any easier to ‘escape’ from a relationship, than if a couple had actually registered their marriage.

Nevertheless, whichever intention a de facto couple has, churches and parents should be encouraging them to stay together,¹⁰⁰ for people living in de facto relationships

⁹⁹ For example, for purposes of welfare benefits, Centrelink – the Australian Social Security agency – will begin to treat a couple as married even when they have only lived together for one day.

¹⁰⁰ This is assuming of course that the de facto partners can be righteously married, ie. the relationship is not incestuous (cf. 1 Cor 5:1). We have also spoken about the fact that many people engage in lives of sexual promiscuity before entering into de facto or marriage relationships. The question “Should these couples be

are not unmarried. Biblically, unmarried people are those who have not or do not have sex.¹⁰¹ Christians should be those people who teach about the sacredness of sex. They need to promote the fact that sexual relationships bind couples together for life. We should see de facto couples as married, and support them to stay as such.

As in God's eyes they should stay married, so too should they be in ours.

Why committed de facto couples don't have a wedding...

There *is* such a thing as a committed de facto couple. And there are many, many reasons why committed couples living in de facto relationships do not have a wedding.

The other day I met a young lady in the supermarket who had previously told me that she was engaged, and living with her fiancé. "When are you getting married?" I asked. "When I can afford it," she answered, "I'm only working part time at the moment, and I don't get paid a lot... All our money goes on the house... But we're happy – whether we're married or not."

Unfortunately nowadays, this is probably the most common reason why many couples in committed de facto relationships have not had a wedding. Weddings today are usually costly affairs – and many couples today *want* to have that costly 'dream' wedding. Many would rather have no wedding at all, than to have a cheap wedding in a registry office.

And even a cheap wedding has been a barrier at times to those who really have no money at all. "In 1867 the Liverpool Daily Courier reported the case of a couple who had merely lived together, and yet registered their children as legitimate. They could not afford the marriage fees, so knelt and mixed handfuls of meal in a basin, swearing on the Bible not to part until death, a ritual they felt to be as binding as marriage."¹⁰²

There are many other reasons besides financial why committed de facto couples don't have weddings. Among secular society especially, weddings just aren't seen as that important (from a religious perspective). Many view a wedding certificate as just a 'piece of paper,' that they feel is practically meaningless. They may also feel that a wedding doesn't mean lifelong commitment any more; it doesn't seem to bind couples for life.¹⁰³

In other cases, perhaps there is a legal barrier to the couple becoming 'married' by the church or court. Perhaps one or both have been legally married before, and have not

encouraged to stay together or should they be encouraged to separate in favour of their first partner?" has been asked, and we have seen in the last chapter that in many cases the answer is likely that the couple should remain together. I believe that this goes for those in de facto relationships as well as those in legally registered relationships.

¹⁰¹ Or are perhaps widows (1 Cor 7:8) or those who are separated from their partners as in 1 Cor 7:11 – we have taken a closer look at the use of the word 'unmarried' in this verse in chapter 9.

¹⁰² Baker, Margaret "Wedding Customs and Folklore" 1977 David & Charles (Publishers) Limited.

¹⁰³ In the same way that many people do not see a certificate, wedding or contract as binding for life, neither do people see any more that sex binds couples together for life either.

yet obtained a certificate of divorce. Perhaps one of them has recently immigrated to the country and is required to wait a certain time before marrying. And in rarer cases these days, perhaps a couple has been disallowed by the church to marry due to one or other of the partners having been previously divorced.

And then of course there are some de facto couples who are not committed to each other, and do not want to legally register their marriage for that reason. Often times these people may be scared of the finality of commitment that a wedding (or legal marriage) brings. For some, this is because they want an easy way of 'escape.' They don't feel so 'tied down' when they aren't 'married.' Others specifically want a 'trial marriage.' And there are many who don't want to be seen as married for financial reasons.

Wanting to be able to escape easily, not wanting to get too close to another person too soon, and wanting to protect your money are common feelings among humans. However, these attitudes are not those that God wants us to have in our lives. People who fear commitment have often been rejected at some point in their life, and *they do not want to commit for fear of being rejected again*. They want to guard themselves against bad things happening again. They aren't willing to take a chance on getting hurt.

And those who want to protect their money, rather than get close to another person are also often suffering from some sort of fear – fear of poverty, fear of losing control, fear that the other person only wants the money rather than them. Many times in the Bible we read that God does not want us to fear. Being fearful is not a good way to live. And it is only perfect love that drives out fear – but how can the love drive out the fear when it is not allowed in?

In many cases where a de facto couple are not committed to one another, there exist these deeper spiritual problems. These people (perhaps subconsciously) expect to be abused or rejected or hurt. They may think, 'no one will ever get close enough to abuse me again – I won't let it happen.' These people are often the broken-hearted (even though they may try their best not to let it show).

Now, many of you have probably witnessed a person living in de facto relationship come to Christ. Have you also seen this person being advised to leave their partner if the partner is still unwilling to be 'married'? Those living in de facto relationships are often made to feel that the relationship they are in is sinful, and often times these couples do break up. When this happens, the partner – perhaps already suffering from a broken heart and unwilling to commit for fear of rejection – has just been rejected *again, and this time, in the name of God by a partner who has just become Christian*.

It is no wonder that ex-de facto partners of people who have become Christian are often extremely hostile towards Christianity, and to God. For this time they feel that it was God Himself who rejected them, and compounded the problem of their broken heart.

Christians should never rush to advise couples to split up. We should be the very people who, like Jesus, work towards the healing of broken-hearted people (cf. Ps 147:3, Isa 61:1), and the making permanent of sexual relationships that should be made so.

Rather than advising de facto couples to split up (even perhaps until such time as they can ‘get married’), or to end the ‘sinful’ relationship altogether, we should be following Biblical advice such as the following:

“...each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts. *Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him*” (1 Cor 7:17-20 emphasis mine).

We have seen already that it *is* God’s command that a couple accept the obligation of lifelong commitment that sex brings. In this passage we see that everyone should keep God’s commands, and should remain in the situation in which they were in when God called them. De facto couples are married in God’s sight, and they must stay together, in the situation that they are in (keeping God’s commands), whether their marriage is legally registered or not. For:

“...If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. *For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy...*” (1 Cor 7:12-14 emphasis mine).

This passage tells the believer who has an unbelieving partner not to ‘put away’ that partner. This passage does not talk about registered marriages or divorces. Neither does it talk about wives and husbands in a legal sense. As has been previously mentioned, in New Testament Greek, the word for woman is ‘gyne.’ The word for wife is also ‘gyne.’ There is no difference between the two words. Hence, whenever we read ‘wife’ in the Bible, we could substitute the word ‘woman.’ The same goes for the words ‘man’ and ‘husband.’ In the above passage, we could quite justifiably read “...If any brother has a *woman* who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not put her away. And if a woman has a *man* who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not put him away....”

Any believer living in sexual relationship should not put their other partner away. The unbelieving partner may eventually come to the knowledge of Christ through the believer. When we follow this clear Biblical advice, the rejected are not rejected again, and they may even see Christ’s love through their believing partner. Children remain with both much-needed parents. How sad it is when this Biblical advice is not followed and a child’s home is broken because one or both of their parents becomes a Christian and the relationship is broken up because it was ‘de facto.’ When this happens, the rejection

pattern is only continued; only now it is a child who has lost mom or dad ‘in the name of God.’

When any married (or de facto) person becomes a Christian they should be taught that it is sex itself that brings with it an obligation of lifelong commitment, companionship and love. De facto couples aren’t all committing porneia; and even if they were, to reduce porneia, we must let and encourage each person to have and to keep their own partner (1 Cor 7:2). Even when couples who are legally married enter the church, the fact that their marriage is registered is no guarantee that they understand God’s standard that says a permanent commitment must exist within sexual relationships.

We can at this point contrast the example of a person living in a committed de facto relationship entering into the church, with a person who was married in say a Hindu wedding ceremony. According to the horoscopes of the couple, the Hindu priest chooses the day for Hindu wedding ceremonies to occur. The ceremony begins with prayers to Lord Ganesha who is a god with the head of an elephant.¹⁰⁴ If a couple married in this way aren’t asked to ‘re-marry’ each other when entering the Christian church, then why should a de facto couple? If couples who were married in a Hindu ceremony are recognized as being married by the Christian church, even though their wedding ceremony was filled with many anti-Christian elements, then why should a de facto relationship not be recognized either?

Just as couples who were ‘married’ in anti-Christian ceremonies are usually not asked to have a Christian wedding ceremony when entering the church, neither should committed de facto couples be pushed in this direction. It should wholly be the choice of de facto couples if they *want* to have a wedding. They are married in God’s sight just as the Hindu couple are, and many committed de facto couples are also ‘married’ in the sight of the community (sometimes called ‘common law marriages’), just as Hindu’s and those of any number of other religions. Usually however, de facto couples will choose to have a wedding anyway, and of course this is not at all wrong. In fact, the following passage would apply in this situation:

“Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, won’t he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall” (1 Cor 8:9-13).

While *you* may realize that a wedding ceremony is not the true joining of a couple together in marriage, other people and weaker Christians may not. If a weaker Christian sees you in de facto relationship, he may think that you are having sex without commitment. While not all de facto relationships are without lifelong commitment, many

¹⁰⁴ Mayled, Jon “Marriage Customs” 1986 Wayland Publishers Limited England, p. 19.

will not realize this fact, and may think that the couple and/or the church are condoning temporary relationships, trial marriages, or casual sexual relationships that can be broken. A weak Christian therefore may well be destroyed by perhaps imitating the exercise of your freedom in Christ.

In cases such as this a wedding ceremony may be necessary, so that others will not think that you view your relationship as one which may be broken.

Related to this, in Acts 15 we read that some apostles and elders of the church met in Jerusalem for a formal meeting to discuss whether or not circumcision was necessary for salvation. After much discussion, Peter addressed them. He told how God accepted the uncircumcised just as He accepted the circumcised. He claimed that the uncircumcised (as well as the circumcised) were purified by faith and not by the outward sign of circumcision. Then Barnabas and Paul told about the miraculous signs and wonders they had seen God doing among the uncircumcised. James spoke up and quoted the Old Testament prophecies that proved that God would save many uncircumcised people. The council then agreed that salvation was in fact by faith, and that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision had any value in Jesus Christ.

Yet, in the very next chapter of the book of Acts, we read that Paul, probably the most ardent advocator of salvation by grace – a man totally against the need for circumcision – himself actually circumcised Timothy, one of his missionary companions. We read, “Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area...” (Acts 16:3).

Timothy was circumcised not so that he could become a Christian. He was circumcised only because of the Jews who lived in the area that Timothy and Paul would be ministering in. Timothy was circumcised because these Jews were weak, and they would have thought that Timothy was unsaved, a heathen, and most importantly, they would have seen him to be rejecting the law of God – even though he wasn't.

In the same way, sometimes we must have a wedding ceremony. This is not so that our marriage is seen as right and just in God's eyes, but so that other people will not be thinking that we are 'flaunting the laws of God,' or rejecting what they believe are His ways.

When it is not possible for a de facto couple to have a wedding, say for instance when only one partner of a de facto relationship becomes a Christian, and the other is not willing, the believer should still stay with the unbelieving partner. Perhaps discretion or a course of teaching among the congregation should be used in this case.

Our God is a God of relationships, and it is never His desire to have them broken, regardless of their worldly status. When God sees a couple having sex, He doesn't look on the marriage registry to decide if their intercourse is sin or not! God looks into hearts and minds (1 Sam 16:7). He knows peoples intentions, and He knows their lives and motivations. Only He can judge sin or righteousness in a life; we can trust Him to convict us and others of guilt if it exists (John 16:8).

In conclusion, we have learned that rather than being specifically pre or extra marital sex, or the sex that couples in de facto relationships have with each other, porneia is actually sex without the intention to be married, that is to live in a lifelong commitment of companionship. So, this sin is not necessarily always committed by those in de facto relationships. Furthermore, this sin can happen at any time within any marriage... a person can at any time reject the marital bond that he or she is in. So, if a person within a de facto relationship (or even within a legally registered marriage) decides to end the relationship, they are in fact committing porneia; rejecting the fact that a lifelong marital covenantal relationship has been formed.

Many within the church (traditionally) have said, “If you love each other, why don’t you proclaim it to the world by having a wedding?” But isn’t living together proclaiming that you are in love with each other? And isn’t sharing children together saying that you intend to stay together?

Sometimes, sadly the answer to these two questions is no. But do you always answer yes to this one: Does a wedding guarantee that a couple are totally committed to each other and will always stay together?

12

Annulment

After eighteen years of marriage, King Henry VIII's first wife, Catherine, had still not given him the son that he wished for. Their only child to survive was a girl (they had had five babies die, and numerous miscarriages). Henry desired to remarry so that he would gain his heir. At this stage in the course of human history in England (and most of the rest of the world), divorce was definitely still outlawed, and not an option for Henry – he didn't even consider it. Rather, he looked towards annulment to get rid of Catherine.

Annulment is not a Biblical term, but a declaration that a marriage either never really existed, or was invalid or illegal from the beginning. For example, if people legally married to each other had never had sexual relations, their marriage could be annulled. In the eyes of the law or the church, impotency has at times been a valid reason for the annulment of a marriage. An annulment can also be granted if the two persons were found to be related by blood to each other (this is called consanguinity), or if the two persons were found to be related by marriage (called affinity). Some other reasons why annulments have been granted are fraud or force, or if either party was under legal age at the time of the marriage. To this day, the Roman Catholic church does not allow divorce, but it does sometimes allow annulment in special circumstances such as these.

Henry could not appeal for annulment on the grounds that his marriage had never been consummated, for it had clearly been so. However, almost by a stroke of luck, Henry was able to appeal to the condition of affinity. Before Henry had married Catherine, she had been married to his older brother Arthur. Arthur had died, and then Catherine had married Henry. One of the Scriptures Henry liked to use to back himself in this issue was Lev 20:21 which states that a man could not marry his brothers wife.

However, because his brother had been dead at the time of Henry and Catherine's marriage, and also because Henry and Catherine had been married for nearly twenty years, the church was reluctant to grant his wish. Henry therefore consulted many respected people on the annulment issue, including Luther, Melancthon, Bucer, and Erasmus whom all suggested that Henry remarry a second wife (who was to be Anne Boleyn) without annulling his previous marriage or divorcing Catherine. That is, they suggested that he have two wives. Luther even wrote: "...before I would approve of such a divorce [annulment] I would rather permit the king to marry still another woman and to

have, according to the example of the patriarchs and kings, two women or queens at the same time.”¹⁰⁵

Church leaders continued to refuse Henry an annulment, so in the end, “Henry adopted the view that his marriage was null and void according to God’s law, and he proceeded to marry Anne Boleyn secretly in January 1533, soon after she was found to be pregnant.”¹⁰⁶ Not long after, due to problems between Henry and the Pope surrounding this remarriage, Henry became head of the newly formed Anglican church.

Henry was never able to divorce Catherine legally. And in his subsequent marriages that broke down, there were two annulments, as even though Henry was the head of it, the Anglican church still disallowed divorce.

Not only is it strange for us who live in this culture where divorce is commonplace to see that for Henry, a king of England, it was totally out of the question – it is also interesting to see that annulment was also frowned upon! For although not found in the Bible, annulment definitely has Biblical basis. Firstly, it cites that a marriage was never a marriage if it had not been consummated (ie. the couple never had sex with each other). This is exactly what the Bible teaches. If a couple has not ever had sex with each other, then Biblically, they are not married. (Sex is the only thing that sets a marriage relationship apart from any other human relationship). Annulment agrees that just because a couple have had a ceremony, exchanged vows and signed contracts, that the marriage was not one at all if sexual relations have not been entered into.

Secondly, annulment voids marriages that are illegal according to the Bible, such as those illegal sexual relations found in Leviticus 18.

While annulment is an appeal to the state or church to legally dissolve a marriage, especially for the purposes of allowing a remarriage, Christians can see in its requirements the high regard that people formerly had for the teachings of the Bible. With annulment, a couple who were legally married yet went against the guidelines of Leviticus 18, could appeal to the state or church to have their contract broken. Today, in many countries, a legal marriage contract can be broken without any reason, and people would hardly bother with annulment as divorce is so socially accepted.

Vow making

Were vows ever actually made between a couple who were getting married in the Bible? The answer to this is ‘No.’ Although we do see many laws about vows in the Bible, none of these are seen to be between a man and woman who are to be married!

In Numbers chapters 6 and 30 especially, we read much about the making of vows, and neither of these chapters in any way refers to vows being taken in marriage. In Numbers chapter 30 we even read that the husband or father of a woman can break or

¹⁰⁵ The information presented here on Henry VIII was gleaned from Phillips, Roderick “Untying the knot: A short history of divorce” Cambridge University Press 1991 pages 20-22.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 21

nullify the vow that the woman in question has made. Then, after reading of all the vows a woman may make, while unmarried or married, we read that “These are the statutes which the LORD commanded Moses, between a man and his wife, and between a father and his daughter in her youth in her father’s house” (Numbers 30:16). If wedding vows had been mandatory, they would surely have been mentioned here.

To make a vow before the Lord is a serious thing. In Numbers 6 we see the multiple requirements of cleansing a person before that one makes a vow. And in Deut 23:21-22 we read: “If you make a vow to the LORD your God, do not be slow to pay it, for the LORD your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin. But if you refrain from making a vow, you will not be guilty.”

Not making a vow is not sin. You are *not* required to make a vow to your partner or even to God when you marry. When you marry (ie. have sex,) you are just *expected* to stay with that partner for life. Because this is expected, God does not need to hear you vow to do it. And because *not* making a vow is *not* sin, *making* a vow does not make anything righteous. Just because you’ve made a vow to stay married to a particular person does not mean that you will always be righteously married to that person.

And if you *do* make a vow and do not fulfil it, you are sinning, so it will be doubly worse for you if you vow to stay married, and you break the vow by divorcing the partner. In Matt 5:33 Jesus says: “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’” If you’ve made a vow to marry someone, then the vow stands, you are required to keep it. It’s interesting though what Jesus says in the next verses: “But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one” (Matt 5:34-37). In marriage, I do not believe that either person needs to make any sort of oath or vow, and could it be better if this is not done?¹⁰⁷

If a couple have been legally married to one another, (ie. had a wedding and/or signed marriage contracts etc.), yet one of them is unable to perform the sexual act, then they are still bound by their vows and/or contract. They are not yet married in the Biblical sense, as long as there has been no sexual activity. If they wish to be released from the legal ‘marriage,’ then they could appeal for annulment (in many countries this still exists). Spiritually, I believe that God can free people from any bondage, and can release people from vows after they repent of their sin and forgive all parties involved.¹⁰⁸ However, often the impotency or frigidity which may not allow a couple to engage in sexual intercourse comes from a spiritual problem; rather than breaking off the relationship, a course of healing and ministry should be entered into to allow the problem to be resolved.

¹⁰⁷ Perhaps your marriage ceremony can just include a reading of appropriate Scriptures and an affirmation that each partner does respect God and His laws – this can be done without making actual vows.

¹⁰⁸ In Numbers 30:3-8 we see an example of vows broken by man.

When a couple have sex, lifelong righteous companionship is not an option. It's not something to be promised if you think that this is the 'right' partner for you. You do not need to vow to stay with the other person, rather, you must stay together. Whether you've promised or not, your sex has bound you to the other person, and you are required to stay married to them.¹⁰⁹

In conclusion, annulment or the breaking of marriage vows are not mentioned in the Bible simply because the Bible sees marriage as a sexual relationship that *requires* continuity. Annulment is not mentioned in the Bible because it refers to registered marriages; annulment is a legal maneuver to dissolve a contract or a vow made according to law.

In the Bible, marriage was never seen as a legal institution or something that started with a vow or registration. Therefore, legal forms of annulment or the making or breaking of vows are not seen. Biblically, either a couple were married or they were not! Marriages began with sex, not with legalities or vow making. *There were no un-consummated marriages in the Bible.*

¹⁰⁹ Unless of course your relationship is adulterous or illegal as per Lev 18.

When the legalisation of divorce began to be advocated back in the sixteenth century, some of the early English church reformers – notably William Tyndale and Thomas Becon – still only agreed to divorce in cases of the *wife's* adultery or desertion. They also believed that the 'exceptional clause' (marital unfaithfulness) did not allow women to divorce unfaithful husbands.¹¹⁰

The early church father Origen stated: "Already contrary to Scripture certain church leaders have permitted remarriage of a woman while her husband was alive. They did it despite what is written: 'A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives' [1 Cor 7:39] and: 'She will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive' [Rom 7:3]."¹¹¹

While men have been and are allowed the concession of remarriage, this is not and has not been desirable for many. Men must remember that if they do take an extra wife, the bond to the first wife is not dissolved – even if they are 'divorced.' He should always keep his 'door open' to the first wife returning to the household – men really need to stay forgiving towards their wives, whatever they have done.

¹¹⁰ Phillips, Roderick "Untying the Knot: A Short History of Divorce" Cambridge University Press 1991, pages 22-23.

¹¹¹ Origen, Commentary of Matthew 14:23 – see Heth & Wenham pages 42-43.

I'm sure many modern men however, living in this sex-soaked world with its contraceptives and social security would not think that leaving the door open to any woman who wanted to have sex with him would be too bad a problem at all. However the Bible clearly shows that it is. Marriage brings with it many problems (1 Cor 7:28). And it is better for married men to exercise self-control rather than to gain another wife (Matt 19:10). In fact, the men we are to look up to as our pastors and leaders are men who have only married once (1 Tim 3:2, 12, Titus 1:6, Lev 21:7).

PART FOUR: FURTHER BIBLICAL TEACHINGS

13

The Husband of one Wife

Rick got married when he was 18 to a woman who herself was only 22. Things started to go badly, and at 23, Rick was divorced. Two years later, at the age of 25, Rick became a Christian! Shortly after, he met Sue, and when he was 27 they got married. Since becoming a Christian, Rick had only had sex with the one woman (Sue). However, when he was nominated to become a deacon within his church when he was 32, his church reluctantly disallowed him from taking this position, due to the fact that he had had two wives. They believed that their decision was wholly Godly, and used 1 Tim 3:2, 12 and Titus 1:6 to back up their decision.

In the same church, at the same time, another man, Steven, was also nominated to become a deacon. Steven was 31 years old, and he had been married for seven years. His nomination was accepted, and he became a deacon. What was not known – or even cared about – was the fact that in his life, Steven had had sex with over ten different women, and two of those had been brief ‘flings’ while he was both a Christian and married. However, because legally he hadn’t been married more than once, the church didn’t see any reason to exclude him from the position he sought.

This chapter asks the question: Do the verses 1 Tim 3:2, 12 and Titus 1:6, really talk about a man who has been legally married more than once? Do they exclude men who have been divorced (and/or remarried) from the pastoral ministries?

The verses in question are as follows:

“Now the overseer must be above reproach, *the husband of but one wife*, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...” (1 Tim 3:2 emphasis mine).

“A deacon must be *the husband of but one wife* and must manage his children and his household well” (1 Tim 3:12 emphasis mine).

“An elder must be blameless, *the husband of but one wife*, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient” (Titus 1:6 emphasis mine).

Traditionally, these passages have been used to deny men who have been divorced and remarried a place in pastoral ministry. But what of men who have had sex with more than one person? Some men, like Rick, were divorced and remarried long before becoming Christians, and yet are condemned because of this. Others who have had sex with more than one person, are allowed in pastoral ministries by their church because only one (or none) of these sexual relationships have been a registered marriage.

Biblically however, *every* woman that a man has sex with is said to be his wife. The more women that a man has sex with, the more wives he is obligated to look after and provide for. This stops the further adultery of the woman who is bound to the man whom she has had sex with for life – regardless of whether he has had sex with another woman before her, or has sex with another woman after her.

In a lot of countries bigamy (marrying more than one partner) is against the law. In Australia, it is a criminal offence. Christian men who have sex with a second virgin today put themselves in a very difficult position. To obey God, they must keep the second woman as their wife. But to actually marry her legally would be impossible. Socially, this would most likely be unacceptable. In any case, these days just marrying a second woman would be very detrimental to the first marriage, for I should not think that many women in the western world today would agree to their husbands taking in a second wife.

When we spoke on remarriage and touched on polygyny (having more than one wife) in chapter 9, we learnt that back in Biblical times, it was not illegal by the law of the land for a man to have more than one wife; nor was it socially unacceptable. I believe that the verses in question in this chapter refer to this situation of polygyny – *or* to men who have had sex with more than one woman even if they didn’t actually *keep* them all as wives.

In our day and age, where polygyny is neither common, legally permitted, socially accepted or warranted, these verses would apply to a man who has had sex with more than one woman (while a Christian). Where the verses say that any man whom the church is thinking of promoting to pastoral ministry should be “...the husband of but one wife...”, they are saying that he should have been able to exercise self-control in the sexual area of his life; having had sex with only one woman.

If a man joins the church with more than one wife in tow, then there is no reason for the church not to accept both him and the wives. There certainly is no Biblical requirement for the man to divorce any of the wives. This man however, who has more than one wife, would be excluded from the pastoral ministry. Deut 17:17 tells us that having many wives can be detrimental to men in positions of authority. It says that the King “...must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray....”

In this generation, where the situation of polygyny is extremely rare, these verses still apply – to men who have had sex with more than one woman – especially after becoming Christian. When a man becomes a Christian, his sins of porneia and adultery and homosexuality can be wiped away in repentance (cf. 1 Cor 6:9-11). A man can become renewed and restored, and whatever happened in the past is gone. However, when becoming a new Christian, although our sins are wiped away, some find it difficult to change their ways; there is so much to learn when becoming converted, and the Christian life is an ever growing one. In 1 Tim 3:6 we see that the man going into pastoral ministry should not have been recently converted. A man needs to have remained unmarried (without sex), or faithful sexually to one woman only for an extended period of time before taking on the responsible position of pastoral ministry within a church.

In the examples cited at the beginning of this chapter, I believe that Rick should not have been excluded from pastoral ministry on any sexual basis, because while a Christian, he had not had sex with more than one woman. Legally, he had had two wives, but divorce had occurred before he had become a Christian and realized the sacredness of sex and marriage. The fact that he had remained faithful sexually to only one woman for an extended period of time after his conversion should have also emphasized the fact that he now had a high respect for sex, and control over the sexual area of his life. These things should have gone in his favor when the decision to allow him into the pastoral ministry was made.

The passages we are discussing do not refer to what a person has done before becoming a Christian for other reasons. In 1 Tim 3:3 which follows on from our first passage, talking about the qualifications that ‘overseers’ (bishops or pastors) must have, we read that they must “not [be] violent but gentle...” Titus 1:7 also affirms this saying that an overseer, “...must be blameless ... not violent” Now, the very writer of these passages, Paul, himself had been a murderer! Paul says: “...I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man...” (1 Tim 1:13, cf. Acts 9:1). But then Paul also says: “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service” (1 Tim 1:12). The service that Paul had been appointed to was one in the pastoral ministry. Paul was an overseer (Acts 16:4-5), an apostle (1 Tim 1:1), a preacher (Acts 17:22-31), a spiritual father (1 Tim 1:2), a travelling missionary (Acts 16:10-14), a teacher (1 Tim 2:7), and he also became an author of sacred Scripture, and an inspiration to many humans over thousands of years.

The requirements of the passages in question relate to things that have happened while a Christian, and things that have been tested over time. They state that men who have had sex with more than one woman *while being Christian* cannot serve in the pastoral ministries. Rather than the man in our first example, it should have been the man in the second example, Steven, who was due to be excluded from pastoral ministry. Although in the eyes of the law, he had only ever had one wife, spiritually Steven had many; this was even after committing his life to God and his body to one wife.

Focus on the Family, one of the largest Christian organizations in America, recognize that a man who has had sex with more than one woman cannot serve as a leader in their organization. In their ‘succession plan’ to appoint a new leader if and when the

current leader retires from ministry, they state that the new leader must have had “a strong marriage with no lapses in moral behavior.”¹¹² By stating this, they mean that the person must not have indulged in any sexual activity apart from with their one marriage partner.

Focus on the Family sees that their leader is to only have had sex with one woman. Unfortunately though, they don’t seem to realize that there is scriptural back-up for this position that they have taken, because Focus on the Family see the verses that state that ‘a man must be the husband of only one wife’ in a legal light.

Being the ‘husband of only one wife’ however, has nothing to do with legalities. It means that the man must have been a man (sexually) to only one woman.

Here we see that Scripture teaches what Christians know deep down to be right. The people at Focus on the Family know that it’s right for a man in leadership to only have had sex with one woman, and Scripture of course goes right to this, clearly saying that a pastor/priest/pastoral leader must have been the *man* of only one *woman*.

Now, if divorce totally wiped out a former marriage, then you could never say that a divorced/remarried man was the husband of two or more wives. The passages that speak of a man in pastoral ministry only being allowed to have one wife, mean that since being a Christian, and over time, a man should not have had sex with more than one woman. Legal divorce and remarriage really don’t have a lot to do with this teaching at all – neither does this teaching refer to men having only one registered wife at a time.

We see a very similar teaching in 1 Tim 5:9 that says: “Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man...” (NKJ). Again, this doesn’t exclude a woman from gaining the support of the church if she has been a party to more than one registered marriage. If she had sex with two (or more) men, then, when one husband died, she may not truly be a widow!

I would imagine God to be more concerned with his pastoral ministers being sexually pure, self-controlled and able to maintain good personal relationships rather than whether or not they have had more than one wedding.

¹¹² From their newsletter: “Family News from Dr. James Dobson – Focus on the Family” May 1999 Colorado Springs, CO 80995 USA.

Two people having sex with one another do become one flesh.

If one of those partners is not planning on 'following the rules for marriage,' then that person is committing porneia.

The couple still become 'one flesh,' ie. married, but one (or both of them) reject this and belittle their relationship. This person is not thinking of God, or the bonding He allowed them to enjoy.

What of the men in the book of Ezra?

In the book of Ezra, we read of the return of a large number of Jews to the land of Israel after they had been in captivity in Babylon. There were two main groups that returned, and the second group contained Ezra, a most influential Jewish leader.

As Ezra arrived in Israel, he was greeted with bad news. “The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices ... They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness” (Ezra 9:1-2). Ezra was appalled, and so were many of the faithful. They prayed, confessed, fasted and wept. In the end, Ezra said to all the people: “You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel ... separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives” (Ezra 10:10-11 NKJ).

And so the pagan wives were sent away.

If sex joins people together for life, then how could these women have been sent away righteously?

Firstly, the very word ‘pagan’ in these verses comes from the Hebrew word ‘nokriy’ which can actually mean foreign, non-relative, adulterous, or different. We have no reason to disbelieve that some of these women may have already been married when they were taken by Jewish men. But why would they commit adultery in this way? Because these women were of a different faith than the Israelites and in their laws, adultery may not have been condemned. And whether or not these women were committing adultery, it was likely that they did not respect marriage as the Israelites did, and they didn’t respect the Lord God of Israel either.

However, regardless of what these women did, the Israelite men themselves had sinned. They had disobeyed God in taking foreign women and mixing their faith and people with those from another culture. This was something that they had been told not to do.

I think that in sending away the foreign wives, these Israelite men were not sinning because God had specifically told them not to intermarry with those of other faiths way before they did this (Ex 34:16, Deut 7:3). They sent these women away because they had been committing porneia in the very first place – theirs were illegal relationships in the beginning.

I believe that this teaching is a prelude to those verses in the New Testament such as 2 Cor 6:14 which tell us to marry a person of the same faith as us. Today, we are not to mix Christian with non-Christian.¹¹³

¹¹³ That the wives were of a different race/color was not the issue here in Ezra. ‘Foreign’ referred to those of a different faith and religion. Ken Ham wrote an excellent article on this issue in the ‘Creation’ magazine

So can *we* send away a partner if they are not a believer? Can we do what these men in the book of Ezra did?

In most situations, I think that the answer to these questions would be ‘No.’ According to such passages as 1 Cor 7:12-24, we are to stay with the partner that we have – even if that partner is an unbeliever.

So what are we to learn from Ezra? Follow those teachings in 2 Cor 6:14 and 1 Cor 7:39 – do not marry an unbeliever. The men in the book of Ezra had gone against this ruling, but we should not, for do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character” (1 Cor 15:33). As a Christian, practice self-control, don’t have sex with anyone that does not believe in the same gospel that you do, *unless* you are already married to that person.

However, there may be times when sending away a partner is appropriate, as it was in the book of Ezra. These are some of those situations:

- a) If a man had married his daughter, sister or other close relative, then I believe he would do well to divorce this woman and repent of his sin in this area;
- b) If a man had married a woman who was already married, and her first husband desired her back; or
- c) If a man married a woman who had clearly never been committed to the marriage, and had no intention of remaining faithful in any way to that marriage (eg. a Christian man had had sex with a prostitute as we know them today).

Remember though, that before taking any action in this regard, I would strongly advise much prayer. Ezra did not immediately condemn the men of Israel who had taken foreign wives, he spent much time fasting, praying, and even weeping before giving his verdict (Ezra 9). Ezra did not act impulsively, and there are other Biblical men who were in similar situations who did not send away their wives. For example, Abraham did not divorce his wife Sarah at any point, although she was his half-sister. Jacob did not ever divorce his wife Rachel who was the sister of his first wife. This story in Ezra shows that sometimes, unrighteous marriages can be split apart, especially if the people involved knew that they were unrighteous before the marriage began. Marriages that were unrighteous through naiveté, such as Abraham’s and Jacob’s, were not split apart. They were made righteous through prayer and sanctification (cf. 1 Tim 4:4-5).

dated June-August 1999, Vol 21, No. 3. He teaches that the Bible describes all humans as being of ‘one blood’ according to Acts 17:26 and 1 Cor 15:45 (we are all descended from Adam). One example he gives of an approved inter-racial marriage is that of Ruth, a moabitess, and Boaz, an Israelite. Their marriage was righteous, even though Ruth was from another country and culture, because before the marriage, Ruth had proclaimed her faith in the one true God of Israel. Ruth and Boaz went on to be the grandparents of King David, and then ancestors of Jesus.

“I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in God’s name and said: “You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves. Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God who made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women. Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women?”” (Neh 13:25-27).

14

Mary and Joseph

In Matt 1:19 we read: “Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.” Because it is said that Joseph wanted to ‘divorce’ Mary, many think that they were actually married.

But, because they hadn’t had sex, they were not married. Mary was a virgin (Matt 1:23, Luke 1:34), and rather than them being married, Mary was still only “...pledged to be married to Joseph” (Matt 1:18).

It was only because they hadn’t had sex and weren’t actually married that it would have been acceptable for Joseph to ‘put her away’ – and this was all that Joseph would have been doing. There was no marriage between them that had to be dissolved (legally or otherwise.) We notice also that in the very verse where Joseph contemplates putting Mary away (divorcing her,) he is called a ‘righteous man.’

Directly after the statement in Matt 1:18 which says: “Mary was *pledged* to be married to Joseph...” we read, “...*but* before they came together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.” This verse shows that ‘coming together’ would have made Mary and Joseph married. If only a wedding ceremony or a vow or contract would have made Mary and Joseph ‘married,’ then the verse would have read, “...Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they actually got married...” Or even, “...but before they had their wedding...” However, it was the ‘coming together’ in sex that would be the deciding factor in their marital status. They were pledged to be married, but before coming together (actually getting married) Mary was found to be pregnant.

When Mary is called Joseph’s ‘wife,’ the Greek word is the same as ‘woman.’ After Joseph was told in a dream that the baby in Mary’s womb had been conceived by the Holy Spirit, Joseph took Mary home as his ‘woman’ (Matt 1:24). They were still only pledged to be married, and now Joseph realized that they could still one day marry one another, because Mary had not had sex with another man. She was still going to be his, and would be his alone. He would not be committing adultery by marrying her.

Mary and Joseph were not married until they had sex with one another – after the birth of Jesus (Matt 1:25).

This passage, which describes the relationship between the parents of our Lord Jesus, definitely does not show that separation or legal divorce between a married couple is ever righteous.

Rather, it shows us some things about engaged couples, or couples who are not yet married. Firstly, it shows that they are not couples who have had a sexual relationship with one another. Mary and Joseph were engaged, and had not had sex with one another (something quite different from a lot of today's 'engaged' couples).

It also shows that even though they were not married, they still had a strong link to one another. Actually, it follows much teaching in the rest of the Bible showing that not only did people generally only have one partner for life *after* marriage – often they only had one partner *before* they were married also. For example, Mary and Joseph had most likely been pledged to each other for many years; even though they weren't actually married, she was in some way 'his woman,' as she was the one *for* him.

In Biblical times, people didn't 'test' partners for marriage suitability. They didn't have strings of boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. They accepted that marriage to any person would have its problems. Nowadays, in this very different world, people seem to think that it is normal and right to 'test' many partners before marriage. Young people especially often have many sexual relationships. This is definitely not the pattern seen in the Bible. Furthermore, this pattern that many are in today sets young people up for eventual divorce. Let me explain: Many young people in our world today know exactly how to 'break up' with a partner, because they have broken up with so many boyfriends/girlfriends. If they have 'casual' sexual relationships with people, then they are in fact marrying and divorcing, marrying and divorcing. When they eventually 'get married,' they know how to break up so well, that they often easily end up doing this. Once a person learns how, it becomes fairly easy and/or normal for them to divorce any person they enter into relationship with. And because divorce and separation are both socially acceptable these days (and even sometimes financially beneficial), there really isn't often much stopping them from doing so.

The Biblical ideal of having only one partner even before marriage may be very difficult to achieve in this age, however, it should still be encouraged. People who have more than one partner before marriage are learning to do something that should never be done – put a family member out of their life.

Now, if sex obligates people to stay married, then what sort of sexual behavior is appropriate for couples who are not married?

One of the reasons why the people of the Bible only had one partner even before marriage was because they knew that any sexual activity between a couple was not appropriate for people who were not to be married to one another, or who were not married to one another.

In Deut 22:23-24 we read: "If a man happens to meet in a town a virgin pledged to be married and he sleeps with her, you shall take both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death – the girl because she was in a town and did not scream for help, and

the man because he violated another man's wife. You must purge the evil from among you." Here, the girl who is only pledged to be married is called her fiancée's 'wife,' because she is his woman, even though they have not actually married each other. When a girl was pledged to be married to a man, she was practically his – he knew that in time she would be his wife, and he could righteously desire to have sex with her.

Any sexual activity between a couple, including desire, can cause a bond to be formed between them (cf. Matt 5:28). These days, among many "good" Christian couples who desire to abstain from sex until marriage, many go so far as to enjoy such things as oral sex, or mutual masturbation, and because they don't actually have intercourse, they seem to think that they aren't having 'pre-marital' sex, and aren't sinning.

However, *all* sexual activity, including oral sex, mutual masturbation, and even passionate kissing is for marriage only. In his book "Helping others find Freedom in Christ", Neil Anderson says, "...even without intercourse, when the body is given to, or violated by, another in intimacy, bonding can occur..."¹¹⁴ We may not be able to see this so well in couples who have only kissed each other passionately, however it is easy to see this in situations of sexual abuse. Although in many instances of sexual abuse, intercourse was never performed, just things such as touching and kissing has often brought the abused person under bondage.

If an engaged couple participate in any sexual activity before they actually have sex with one another, then they can become bound to one another. Although not properly righteously married, there really is no righteous option for them *but* to become married. They belong to one another. This strong bond between engaged couples is what we see talked about in the passage from Deuteronomy quoted above.

Couples these days who participate in oral sex or mutual masturbation before marriage are bonded to one another already – they should become married. Sex and sexual activity is not sin as long as the couple wishes to stay together for life (and aren't related in any way prohibited in Leviticus 18). 1 Cor 7:36 says: "If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to... they should get married." In the middle of this verse, it says: "...he should do as he wants..." If a man wants to marry (have sex with) a virgin woman, he should do it, "...he is not sinning..."

There really is no Biblical requirement for couples these days who desire to be married to one another to abstain from sex for any time at all. If they wish to be married, and believe that they should be married, then they should marry. Putting themselves through the pain of burning with desire, or masturbating while they wait for their wedding date is not a requirement of God. The Bible says:

"But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Cor 7:9).

Couples should not think that such things as oral sex are not sex, or not actions reserved for married couples only.

¹¹⁴ Anderson, Neil T. "Helping others find Freedom in Christ" Regal Books USA, 1995.

When in the Bible Isaac and Rebekah were seen 'sporting with each other' (caressing each other) (Gen 26:8), their lie that they weren't married to each other was exposed. When they were seen to be caressing each other, the King (whom they had lied to) knew that they were married. Obviously, even though they weren't actually seen to be having sex, the activities they were indulging in were things that only married couples did with each other.

If you aren't married, or you don't plan on being married, then you should not be participating in any sexual activity at all. And if you are in a relationship wherein you are indulging in sexual activity without actually going all the way into intercourse, please think and pray seriously over what you are doing, as in this situation you should become married to the partner, committing yourself to a lifelong relationship.

In the NIV translation of the Bible, 1 Cor 7:1 reads, “It is good for a man not to *marry*” (emphasis mine). Next to the word ‘marry,’ there is a footnote mark. When we follow that mark down to the bottom of the page, we read, “Or ‘It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.’”

In Bible translations such as the KJV and NKJ, the same verse is rendered, “It is good for a man not to *touch* a woman.”

The same word in 1 Cor 7:1 is sometimes rendered touch, sometimes rendered marry, and sometimes rendered sexual relations! The word actually means ‘to touch in a sexual sense,’ and from this we can see that many Biblical translators recognize the fact that ‘touching’ a woman sexually is the same as marrying her; for this is what the context of that verse also actually shows!

15

Homosexuality

These days, more and more people indulge in homosexual activity at some point throughout their lives. Some people even consider themselves to be specifically homosexual (meaning that they are only sexually attracted to people of the same sex as themselves), and others consider themselves to be bisexual (meaning that they are sexually attracted to people of both sexes). Some homosexual couples establish long-term relationships that are similar to marriage and consider themselves married, however, most countries have laws forbidding couples of the same sex from registering a marriage.

In many parts of the church, there seems to be endless debate on this issue of homosexuality. There are many who call themselves Christian that do not believe homosexuality to be sin, and some wonder whether the sin is only in the action, or in the thought also. Perhaps the world has influenced us by its teaching that just as it is natural for some to be heterosexual, it is also natural for others to be homosexual.

To consider yourself a Christian, but to also have homosexual desires can be extremely traumatic and confusing. Some Christians believe that if they are involved in a permanent loving relationship, it does not matter if the person that they are in relationship with is of the same sex as themselves. Some believe that God has made them homosexual, many believe it's just their 'lot in life.'

I spent a lot of interesting time studying what the Bible had to say about homosexuality, and in this chapter I will present my findings. Basically, I came to the conclusion that homosexual actions and fantasies are sinful. I know that this may be difficult for many to hear. I do not wish to condemn these people at all in what I am about to write. Rather, in explaining the sinfulness of homosexuality once and for all perhaps confusion will dwindle in some whom will then be freed to repent.

I'll start with one of most well known and clear passages dealing with the homosexual issue, Romans 1:18, 25-28:

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men ... [who] exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even *their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones*. In the same way *the men also abandoned natural relations*

with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done” (emphasis mine).

The big question here, is “What exactly are ‘natural’ relations?” Is it ‘natural’ for some people to be homosexual?

To look at Rom 1:26 first, we see in the NKJ that “...even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.” Here, the word ‘natural’ comes from the Greek ‘phusikos,’ which means physical or instinctive. The next word ‘use’ comes from the Greek ‘chresis’ which means employment, or use in the sexual sense. Strongs Concordance says it specifically means sexual intercourse. So the ungodly women exchanged the instinctive, physical use of their bodies, for something that is against ‘nature.’ Here, the Greek word for nature is ‘phusis,’ which means growth (by germination or expansion), i.e. (by implication) natural production (lineal descent).¹¹⁵

I do not believe that there can be any doubt that here in Rom 1:26, it is homosexual relations between women that we are being told are sinful and unnatural. We read that the ungodly women have exchanged the instinctive sexual use of their bodies for something that is against procreation. Lesbianism (female homosexuality) is against procreation, and is not the instinctive, physical sexual use for the female body. To be blunt, the female sexual organs were designed so that a penis could enter into them – and this is true even for people who consider themselves to be lesbians.

In the next verse, Romans 1:27, we read: “Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful....” Again, when we look at the Greek in this verse, there can be no doubt that homosexual acts between men are sinful. The men here are said to have left the ‘natural use’ *of women*, and again the Greek words for ‘natural use’ imply the instinctive physical sexual use of their bodies with women that produces growth.

Only sex between a male and a female can produce growth (growth of a new person, germination, expansion, descent). The acts called sinful in Rom 1:26, 27 were sexual acts that did not produce this growth – acts not instinctive to the *body* – acts between those of the same sex.

In Rom 1:26-27, that which is natural is heterosexual intercourse. That which is un-natural is homosexual activity. The text says that “...men left the natural use of the woman”, and that “...women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones....” This implies that any sort of sexual activity between men, and any sexual activity between women is against what is righteous, and even normal.

This passage in Romans is quite clear in its teaching on homosexuality, and within it, there can be no doubt that homosexuality is shown to be wrong. However, some have tried to discount it on another level. Claiming that because this passage was only written

¹¹⁵ From New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, 1990, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

by an apostle (Paul), and not by Jesus Himself, they say it is not definitive, and that in the gospels Jesus Himself did not specifically mention homosexuality.

However, the Bible states that “...*all* Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...” (2 Tim 3:16), and we cannot discount anything in the Bible just because it was not written personally by Jesus. In any case, although Jesus did not specifically mention *homosexuality*, he did in fact speak a lot about *sexuality*, teaching many times about its righteous use. He quoted Gen 2:24, “...a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh,” and spoke about the marriage relationship on quite a number of occasions.

We have already seen in this book that Jesus, and in fact the whole Bible, teaches that a man and a woman who have had sex with each other are to live together as married for life. We have also seen that the Bible says that we were created male and female. The first marriage was between a man and a woman, and as the Bible moves on, we see that every lifelong sexual relationship (marriage) is always seen in the Bible as being between male and female. However, this last point is another that has again been denied.

One relationship often said to be homosexual in the Bible is that of David and Jonathan (related mainly in 1 Sam 18-20, 2 Sam 1). Whether or not David and Jonathan actually did have sexual relations with each other is unlikely, although debatable. In any case, even if David and Jonathan did have sexual relations with each other, neither of them were specifically homosexual. Within the story of the friendship of David and Jonathan, we read of David marrying his wife Michal (1 Sam 18:27). And it is quite plain to see further on that David enjoyed heterosexual activity, because he ended up having many wives. Furthermore, never again is David seen to have any close relationship with another male (such as the relationship he had with Jonathan).

For his part, Jonathan had also obviously engaged in heterosexual activity, due to the fact that he had a son (2 Sam 4:4, 9:3-6).

Whether or not David and Jonathan actually indulged in sexual activity with each other, the story of their friendship is not one that in any case promotes homosexual relations or relationships, or a homosexual way of life.

Another Biblical relationship that is sometimes questioned as homosexual is that between Naomi and Ruth. However, again there is no evidence to indicate this. In this relationship, rather than seeing lesbianism, we see only a godly friendship. Neither Naomi or Ruth are painted as being lesbians, for we see that both of them had married men previously to their friendship with each other, and after their husbands had died, Ruth (who was much younger than Naomi) married again. In fact, the man that Ruth married was the grandfather of King David, a direct ancestor of Jesus himself. Ruth has been given a mighty honor in her role as grandmother to the king, and ancestor of Jesus, and throughout the book of her life, we see her only as a highly virtuous and godly woman. It is highly doubtful that she was ever involved in homosexual relations.

In both of these examples, of David and Jonathan and Ruth and Naomi, it is doubtful as to whether any homosexual relations ever existed. And in any case, if there were any homosexuality, the Bible does not commend, show or promote this action. And neither of these cases could in any way be seen to be either monogamous, or lifelong homosexual relations such as a righteous marriage relationship between a man and a woman. If there were homosexual relations at all between these Biblical characters, then they would have been casual homosexual relations. We have seen already in this book that any casual heterosexual relations are wrong; but what about casual homosexual relations?

In Leviticus 18, when we read about many various prohibitions related to sex, we read at verse 22, “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.” In Lev 20:13 the Bible goes even further saying: “If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.”

Some have said that this law is no longer valid, due to the fact that with the New Covenant, Christians are no longer ‘under’ law. However, with the coming of the New Covenant, Jesus said: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matt 5:17-18). When Christians say that they aren’t ‘under’ the law, they are saying that people aren’t *saved* by following the law. As Jesus said, the law itself still stands, although it is not something that we can be saved by. The law is still there telling us what is wrong and what’s right. Sin is still sin, and sin has not changed. What was sin in the Old Testament, is still sin now (cf. Rom 3:20).

However, it says in 1 Cor 6:12 “Everything is permissible for me – but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me – but I will not be mastered by anything.” So, although not beneficial, are homosexual relations sometimes permissible? Apart from homosexual relations being prohibited in Leviticus, we also read many other prohibitions against all sorts of things. A good example we can compare homosexual activity to is that prohibition against living in a house with mould in it, found in Lev 13:47-59, 14:34-57. These passages basically state that if there is mould (mildew) in a house, then the house is unclean, and the people who have been in it are unclean. The mildew has to be removed in a certain way, and if it keeps returning, the house must be destroyed and the building materials taken to an unclean place out of town.

Today however, most Christians would allow themselves to go into, and even to live in a house that has mould in it without even thinking of this Levitical prohibition.

Can we just forget Levitical laws? Can we forget the law against homosexual activity just as we can forget to clean the mould out of our houses?

In the August 1999 issue of Readers Digest, I was interested to find an article entitled “Is your home making you sick?” It said: “Common moulds may be responsible

for a surprising number of ailments... household mould can make you sick...”¹¹⁶ Now, according to 1 Cor 6:12, everything is permissible. So as Christians we can live in a mouldy house – but it may make us sick (ie. it’s not beneficial).

The Levitical and other Old Testament laws are still applicable, and are there for a reason. If many had listened to Leviticus and removed mould from their houses, they wouldn’t have been sick today! Are some receiving problems in their lives for not listening to the laws in Leviticus related to homosexuality? Unfortunately, we see in Leviticus that participating in homosexual activity carries a far greater penalty than living in a house stained with mildew – homosexuality brings death (Lev 20:13). A person sleeping or eating in a house with mildew is only classed as unclean until evening, and has to wash his or her clothes (Lev 14:46-47).

It is *permissible* for us to live in mouldy houses (1 Cor 6:12), however this will make us sick. Dwelling with mould is not beneficial for us, therefore we should listen to the law and remove ourselves from it. In the same way, it is permissible for us to indulge in homosexual activity, however this will bring an even greater penalty to us – perhaps eventually death? The end of Rom 1:27 says: “...men with men committing what is shameful, and *receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due...*” Although our salvation does not rest on whether or not we indulge in homosexual activity, we should listen to the law and remove ourselves from this sin, for the penalty is great.

I said that homosexual activity was permissible, because while Christians are saved, sometimes they still sin – yet of course they are still saved. In the same way as a Christian who commits adultery may repent and be forgiven and freed, a Christian involved in a homosexual relationship may also repent and be forgiven and freed. Homosexuality is wrong, and not beneficial to our lives. However, we must realize that homosexuality is not the worst ever sin. Nor is it an unforgivable sin. God can forgive those who have had homosexual fantasies¹¹⁷ and indulged in homosexual activity – if they repent and seek forgiveness. However, to repent, people need to know that homosexuality is sin.

After speaking about ungodly people abandoning natural sexual relations, Rom 1:28 goes on to claim that “...since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.” Unfortunately, it is often heard that homosexual people pray that they will be able to discontinue the homosexual activity they have been involved with – with no success. They are seemingly unable to stop their behavior. Yet, there are many others who speak impressive testimonials to the power of God in their lives, not only for taking the homosexual fantasies and activity from them, but helping them to enter and stay in satisfying long-lasting heterosexual marriages.

¹¹⁶ Readers Digest (Australian Edition) August 1999, “Is Your Home Making You Sick?” Clare Macken page 32.

¹¹⁷ We will speak about sexual fantasy in the next chapter of this book.

In light of this, and on reading Rom 1:28, one must really wonder if the people who cannot refrain from homosexual activity really know that homosexuality is wrong and un-natural? Have they in fact repented of this sin? Or have they been confused by the many homosexual ‘Christians’ claiming that homosexuality is normal and not condemned in the Bible?

Notice the first part Rom 1:28: “...since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.” Part of knowing God is learning things about Him and His creation. Part of coming to know God is learning His plans and purposes and laws for humankind – and gaining understanding into such things as what is right when it comes to sex.

Rom 1:28 tells us that it is people who don’t know God *and His laws* who are doing what ought not to be done. These people believe in their minds that what is wrong is right (a depraved mind). When one continues to believe that homosexuality is right in action as well as *thought* (cf. Prov 23:7 KJV), and continue to refuse to listen to God’s clear teachings on the matter, God allows them to keep a depraved mind, and to do what ought not to be done.

Again, this Biblical teaching may sound extremely harsh, especially to those genuine believers who are plagued with homosexual temptation. I emphasize at this time that this teaching is not an excuse for people with homosexual tendencies to be condemned. My aim in exposing this teaching here is to show these genuine believers that homosexuality is sinful, so that they can be motivated to repent, and to come to know and trust God, while making their way towards freedom from their problems. And for those who minister to people with homosexual problems, I pray they are motivated to show God and His love and His power to them.

God *can* take away homosexual fantasies and acts from any person’s life and sometimes this is a long process, because it involves changing our way of thinking, submission to God, and true sorrow for sins committed. Bonds made with homosexual partners need to be broken (through prayer, repentance and forgiveness). Perhaps there are other issues, such as bad relationships with friends or relatives that need to be looked at. But the most important thing is for the person to come to know Jesus as their own personal savior and Lord, who cares deeply for them. When a person comes to know God more and more, these sins will eventually go away as the relationship with God and knowledge of Him grows in their life.

We must also always remember that ‘homosexuals’ are people – not homosexuals. They need the gospel like everyone else. People who consider themselves to be homosexuals or bisexuals or anything else are all people whom God loves and cares for, and died for. God also knows them, deep down inside; for He knitted them together in the wombs of their mothers.

People who are struggling with wrong sexual behavior or thoughts can take their problems to God in prayer, trusting in Him and being open with Him. They have no need to fear that God wants to take away something from them that they feel they *need*. They can take comfort in the fact that Jesus Himself was tempted in *every* way (Heb 4:15), so

He Himself relates to people struggling with wrong sexual temptations. In fact, He can provide a way away from them (1 Cor 10:13) and “...because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (Heb 2:18).

Although refraining from having homosexual fantasies and indulging in homosexual activity may seem a tough ask to some, they can remember that the road that leads to life is narrow for *everyone* (Matt 7:14). It is not only people with homosexual desires that have a hard road to follow; every one of us is attracted to at least some forms of sin, and have had to learn to exercise self control. We all must learn to allow the Holy Spirit to give us the strength not to be dragged away to do what is wrong.

In the end, we must trust that God can change people if they let Him and want Him to – when people repent from sin they can have faith that God will help them not to sin in that way again. While secularists have no ‘cure’ for homosexuality, “...with God *all* things are possible” (Matt 19:26).

When we think of a relationship as being ‘monogamous,’ we think of a couple whom only have sex with each other. A ‘monogamous’ relationship is one in which the partners remain sexually faithful to each other.

It’s interesting then, that the word ‘monogamous’ itself comes from the words ‘mono,’ a prefix meaning one or single, and ‘gamos,’ the Greek word found many times in the New Testament for ‘marriage.’

We understand ‘monogamous’ in English to mean one *sexual* partner, yet in Greek, this same word is understood to mean one *marital* partner.

This is because a sexual partner is always a marital partner.

Fantasy, Masturbation and Pornography

When God created us for one partner (of the opposite sex) only, He meant this not only for our bodies, but also for our minds. And this was meant as a blessing to us, not as a curse. God knew that being faithful in *all ways* to a partner would bring the most wonderful sexual life ever with fantastic intimacy. If we are thinking (fantasizing) about other sexual partners, then we aren't really being sexually faithful. We aren't just bodies – we are whole persons and should be faithful in both body and mind.

Again, this may sound tough – even unreal! Is imagination that bad? Can sexual fantasy be destructive?

We must remember here that Jesus quite clearly stated that lusting over another person in our minds is as good as physical adultery:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt 5:27).

In other words, we sin even when we only imagine having sex with another person who is not our own partner. Staying faithful physically seems not to be enough.

I don't base this statement on one Scripture only. The Bible says quite a lot about our thought life including these things:

“...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things” (Phil 4:8).

“...we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor 10:5).

We should not be *thinking* about doing anything that is sinful; this would include having sex with other partners.

We've spoken many times in this book about how human marriage is like the marriage between God and His people. Would we as Christians fantasize over other gods and think that that would be righteous? Should God's people fantasize that Jesus is different from whom He really is? Should we hope for a different way of salvation (ie. look for another way to be 'married' to our God)?

The answers to these questions would be no. God desires our wholehearted devotion to Him alone. He is a jealous God, and will tolerate no other gods in our lives at all. There is only one way of salvation, and that is through the blood of Jesus (John 14:6). Jesus is fully God, and we should love Him and know Him as God. Thinking that He is not God paves the way to all kinds of other wrong thoughts,¹¹⁸ and we should not want Jesus to be anyone other than God (cf. Gal 1:8-9).

If we can recognize that fantasizing over and desiring other gods is wrong, we should be able to see that fantasizing over a different sexual partner (no matter who or what they be) is also wrong.

And just as imagining God doing something that He never has and would never do is wrong, imagining our partner doing something that they have never done and would never do would also be wrong. In this vein, we bear in mind that God desires us to accept the time and place and situations that we are in. It is not good to spend life wishing to have been born under different circumstances in the same way that it is not good to imagine our partner being different than what they are (cf. 1 Thes 5:18).

In Hebrews 13:4-5 we read:

“Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral... and *be content with what you have...*”

We see here that not only should marriage be honored, but that our marriages must be kept pure; *we must have only had sexual relations with one person*. A marriage is not pure if either of the partners have had sex with other people, both before or during their marriage.

And a most important and often overlooked part of that passage says that God also wants us to be content with what (and who) we have.

Both of these points rule out fantasizing. The marriage bed must be pure, in mind and body, and to effect this, we must be content with the partner we have.

But what if our partner just doesn't 'turn us on'?

Some people who aren't 'turned on' by their partner, believe that they have to fantasize before they will be able to orgasm. For many, fantasy is an easy way to enjoy sex.

I think that we can probably find ways to justify ourselves here: For example, some may say, “But I have sexual fantasies to orgasm so that my husband will think that he is ‘good in bed.’” However, in the end it's usually just a strong desire for orgasm that

¹¹⁸ Most religions that deny the full, almighty deity of Jesus Christ and the trinity doctrine also deny salvation by grace, as they do not attribute their salvation to God almighty alone. The Jehovah's Witnesses are an example of believers of this serious distortion of the gospel message.

entices people to fantasize and in many cases, lying to one's partner becomes part of the act. You may be able to justify this sin to yourself; but can you to God?

Having a sexual fantasy is not the only way to achieve orgasm. Many couples are 'turned on' by each other and don't need to use this device. But can you still be 'turned on' by your partner even after years of marriage? The answer to this question is yes! God is a great healer of relationships. He can heal any barriers, whether physical, mental or spiritual, to having orgasm (although I will be concentrating more on the mental/spiritual aspects). It is possible to be 'turned on' again by our partner and come to orgasm without the aid of fantasy. God can help us to turn our thought lives around, and one reason for this is that God *is* love (1 John 4:8). We need to love before we can 'make love' in the best way that God planned for us.

To begin with, we will look at what love is:

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Cor 13:4-7).

We hear this passage so many times, but how often do we stop to remember that we must love both ourselves and our partners in this way?

To truly 'make love' to your partner, you need to love them, ie. you have to be patient towards them, you must be kind. You cannot truly 'make love' if you are envious of your partner, or if you are looking to boast of your sexual experiences, or be proud of your skills. If you are having sex with a self-seeking attitude (just doing it for the orgasm), then your love-making will not be as successful as it would be if you were focussing on the partner rather than on yourself. And you cannot really 'make love' when you are angry towards your partner, or without wiping clear the record of wrongs you are keeping about them.

But to enjoy a successful sex life, people need not only to love their partner; they need to love themselves as well. When we are in relationship with God, we truly can love ourselves. Christians can learn to know that God Himself loves them so much that He died for them as individuals.

Even learning this may sound like a tough call to many! Of course it's much easier just to sin; have a sexual fantasy and not do the work of building relationships with God or your partner. It is true that not one of us is perfect enough to constantly stay away from sin, and live up to the ideals of the Bible. However, getting closer to God and living His way makes our life better, fuller, more satisfying and enjoyable. With God all things are possible, and if we are faithful in our desire to live God's way, and to have relationship with God, our marriages *will* become much closer to being the enjoyable, satisfying relationships God wants us to experience.

Some practical steps we can take to improve our marriages would include:

- All sexual fantasies and previous unrighteous sexual relations need to be repented of. We need to confess our evil actions and thoughts as sin, and believe that God has purified us from these sins (1 John 1:9).
- We need to understand our status as children of God; people whom God loves and cares for (1 Peter 5:7).
- We need to sincerely desire the right, and to ask God for righteousness in our lives. We need to ask God for a godly love for ourselves and others, and pray for our marriages.

We must also not be fooled. Sexual fantasy is sin; it is a sin that can remain hidden and therefore can fester and grow into a boil, and the boil of sin is death (James 1:14-15). The death of marriage (divorce) is an ugly and painful thing to experience, something never to be desired; and it is something that can grow out of the sin of sexual fantasy. Sexual fantasy leads people onto a vicious circle, for once a person starts fantasizing, they do gain a "... continual lust for more" (Eph 4:19 cf. Prov 23:7 KJV). Only God can help us out of this vicious cycle.

In fact, even secular sex researchers agree that "risks... always come from mixing fantasy with reality."¹¹⁹ Of course, imagination *is* a gift from God, and it is not always bad or destructive. What we must learn is not to use it in the wrong way by fantasizing over sin. Thoughts may come to mind, and when they do, we must learn not to allow them to dwell there. We must not use unrighteous thoughts for our own pleasure.

What thoughts can be used instead? Think on your partner and why you love them. Remember enjoyable past experiences with your partner (sexual or otherwise). And I emphasize again, pray for your marriage – including your sex life. If you truly cannot love your partner and enjoy sex by thinking of them alone, then although difficult, it is probably better not to have sex at all. This may be one time when a couple can deprive each other by mutual consent for a time of prayer (1 Cor 7:5). This time may also be used to build the relationship by talking about the issues you have with your partner.

Sex is best when we truly love our partner, when we know and understand them, when we trust them and hold no anger towards them. When we love them with all our hearts, minds and spirits, we enjoy truly intimate and pleasurable sex – just as God intended it. God wants more for us than just orgasm, and within marriage we can find that 'more.' Sexual fantasy may give us the orgasm, but it holds us back from attaining that 'more' intimate relationship with the one we desire to love.

And God is faithful. He desires for us to be satisfied and to enjoy marriage even more than we desire it. God can and has helped many people to achieve the type of sexual relationship that he planned for them. We need to remember His words though. Forgive, love, and do not be angry.

¹¹⁹ O' Connor, Dagmar "How to Make Love to the same person for the rest of your life and still love it" Book Club Associates Great Britain, published 1986, p. 127.

After looking at the fact that sexual fantasy is sin, we can probably guess that masturbation is also. However, we will begin now to look closely at it, and at some of the reasons why it is sin.

Over the years, masturbation has ranged from being totally condemned, (“You’ll go blind! Your palms will become all hairy,”) and called ‘self-sexual-abuse,’ to being totally condoned, even by Christians. However, various research has consistently shown that a very high percentage of people, both male and female, will masturbate at some time in their lives.

Many think that the closest it comes to being mentioned in the Bible is in Genesis 38:8-10. Here we read of a man named Onan whose brother had died. It was Onan’s duty to produce offspring for his brother, but because the offspring would then not be called his, whenever he had sex with his brother’s wife he spilled his semen on the ground. This act was so wicked in God’s sight that the Lord killed him. Whether this sin was masturbation or not has been a topic for great debate over the centuries. The general consensus nowadays seems to be that the sin was not so much to do with masturbation as it was with not fulfilling a duty.

I believe we find a much closer example of masturbation in Leviticus 15. Here, all sorts of discharges from the body, including emissions of semen are mentioned. In verse 16 we read: “When a man has an emission of semen ... he will be unclean till evening.” Now, the emission of semen mentioned in this verse could have come from a ‘wet dream’ or from masturbation. And it is interesting here that the emission of semen is considered normal and is mentioned along with a woman’s menstruation which is also considered ‘unclean’ (verse 19). There is no death or sacrifice needed to atone for the discharge of either bodily fluid.

So masturbation is not directly prohibited in the Bible as is homosexuality or adultery – and thankfully so. For although young children do not masturbate, they have a natural curiosity with their genitals, and should not be smacked or scolded for touching themselves – which I’m sure many more would have been if masturbation was clearly condemned in the Bible. Even without it being mentioned in the Bible, horrible things have been done to people throughout the ages to stop it – such as the little cages that were introduced in the 1800’s, some with inward facing spikes, to be locked over the sexual organs of young boys.

Notwithstanding the facts that masturbation is not mentioned in the Bible (God didn’t want masturbators to be stoned to death), and neither is it physically harmful – many would still agree that it is sin.

Firstly, masturbation easily becomes an obsessive habit. Foster says: “Obsessive masturbation is spiritually dangerous....”¹²⁰

Secondly, many people describe feelings of great guilt (cf. John 16:8), and would also say that sexual intercourse with a partner is a far better, more enjoyable outlet of sexual tension. Where the Bible says “It is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1

¹²⁰ Foster, Richard J. “Money, Sex and Power” 1986 Hodder & Stoughton, UK, p. 126.

Cor 7:9), it is saying that sex within a marriage relationship is a far better way to stop the ‘burning’ than what masturbation is.

And thirdly, we have already seen that sexual fantasy (which so often accompanies masturbation) is wrong, and we have also seen that we are to have one partner only for life. This includes our thought life (and also, a person cannot righteously marry their hand).

While masturbation is wrong, it is a very common sin. It can be likened to other common sins such as pride or lying. Most Christians know that pride and lying are wrong, and they aim to have these sins eradicated from their lives. However, these sins are those in which just about everyone falls from time to time, including the most respected and mature Christians.

And just as no one would write a book condemning to hell those who have been prideful or have lied, saying that every person who has done these things should feel guilty and sinful and never do it again, neither would I write that about the sin of masturbation. This is not a sin that the church can order stopped!

Many Christians are prideful, or they lie, or they masturbate, but day by day, they allow God to work with them to eradicate these things from their lives. We need Holy Spirit power, mixed with prayer and repentance and understanding to overcome this sort of sin.

After Foster says: “Obsessive masturbation is spiritually dangerous”, he continues with: “But we must also be aware of the opposite obsession – the obsession to quit. This obsession is especially painful because one failure can cast a person into despair. It becomes a desperate, all-or-nothing situation.... We do not need to put people into impossible either/or binds. What we are after is control, balance, perspective.”¹²¹

People who masturbate and/or have sexual fantasies should ask God for a conviction of sin in these areas, and ask Him to remove them from their life. God can also help these people to either achieve a godly marriage the way He intended, or to reduce the passionate desires for sex that they have.

God wants the best for you, and usually it is only you and He that knows if you are having sexual fantasies and/or masturbating. Don’t let these things get in between your relationship with Him:

“...put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and ... put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness...” (Eph 4:22-24 emphasis mine).

Believers should strive to keep their consciences clear before God, *and man* (Acts 24:16). For all the secrets and sins and motivations of believers will eventually be revealed. Paul writes in 1 Cor 4:5 “He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and

¹²¹ Ibid. p. 126.

will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God." Masturbation and sexual fantasy are wrong and these things will be revealed if they are not repented of. Perhaps this may encourage you to take to Jesus any problem you may have with sexual fantasy or masturbation?

Pornography

Pornography awakens sexual desire. When a person looks at pornographic images, it makes them want to have sex. Yet, sex is so special, creating a lifelong bond of marriage, that we are to be very careful when having sex for the first time. The Song of Songs tells us three times: "Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires" (SOS 2:7, 3:5, 8:4). Having sex is a big, life-altering step in a person's life – so to take that step without thinking first is a big risk. Not only does it lead to masturbation, pornography is also a fast track way to taking that step thoughtlessly.

Pornography fuels fantasies, and looking at pornography can be highly addictive. It often leads to the person 'playing out' fantasies, broadening sexual experiences and increasing numbers of sexual partners. Our English word 'pornography' comes from the Greek words 'porne' (one who practices porneia (sexual immorality)), and 'graphein' meaning to write. It refers to written and pictorial material. But all images of nakedness are not classed as pornography. Pornography is specifically sexual nude imagery that awakens sexual desire. It is also the type of imagery that many people find offensive and indecent.

In the last few decades pornography has stooped to lower levels than ever. Upon entering almost any 'sex shop' violent pornography is prominently displayed. Child pornography that awakens and stimulates people towards sexual desire for children is also often available. Ed Murphy says that child pornography should be a capital offence¹²² and this is not only because of its being made in the first place, it is also because once made, it often does not stay within the pages of the book.

While sexual fantasy and masturbation aren't so much specifically mentioned in the Bible, nakedness, which relates to pornography is.

In the Bible, the first time we see 'nakedness' is in Genesis 2:25. Here we read: "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." Humans were created naked, and nakedness in itself is not shameful. Then, as sin entered the world, we read, "...the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves" (Gen 3:7).

Then we read this conversation between Adam and God: "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he [God] said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat

¹²² Murphy, Ed "The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare" 1996 Thomas Nelson Publishers, Inc. Tennessee, USA p. 463.

from?" (Gen 3:10-11). Being naked shows us as we really are – our sinful inner selves are revealed.

The next time we hear anything about nakedness is in Gen 9:21-25. Here we read the story of Ham seeing his father naked – with the disastrous result that his family was cursed forever.

From then on throughout the Bible, nakedness is linked either with shame or with sexual relations. We see that it is never 'good' for a person to be seen naked (cf. Eze 16:36-37, Nah 3:5), and in Leviticus 18, where we read the words "Do not have sexual relations with...", the original meaning of the words is actually, "Do not uncover the nakedness of..." The Bible translators realized that seeing another person naked (in this context) was equal to having sexual relations with them.

In fact, King David committed two very great sins after only seeing Bathsheba naked. We read in 2 Sam 11:2-4:

"One evening David ... saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her...."

This sex was wrong because it was adultery, and because it led to David killing Bathsheba's first husband, Uriah. And it all started because the woman's nakedness aroused David to want to have sex with her.

While it is shameful to let a person who is not your sexual partner see you naked, we mustn't go too far with this – hiding our bodies from our young children or those in the medical profession etc. Remember, our bodies themselves are not sinful or shameful – even Jesus had one. It is discretion and common sense that must be used with nakedness.

The Bible also shows that as Christians, if and when we do see someone naked, the proper response is that of compassion; not of sexual desire.

"...when you see the naked ... clothe him" (Isa 58:7).

We are also not to parade our own nakedness:

"Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed" (Rev 16:15).

And to those who are involved in looking at pornography, or involved in the pornographic industries, God says:

"Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies. You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn! Drink

and be exposed! The cup from the LORD's right hand is coming around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory..." (Hab 2:15-16).

Although it sometimes happens, being involved in making pornography and/or using pornography are not proper actions for Christians. Like other unrighteous sexual activity this should be repented of.

Foster sums the evils of pornography and sexual fantasy up nicely: "The problem with the topless bars and the pornographic literature of our day is not that they emphasize sexuality too much, but that they do not emphasize it enough. They totally eliminate relationship and restrain sexuality to the narrow confines of the genital."¹²³ Sex is not just meant for procreation, nor is it just meant for the orgasm. Sex is something that affects our whole persons. To use it best is to use it within a loving lifelong husband/wife relationship.

¹²³ Foster, Richard J. "Money, Sex and Power" 1986 Hodder & Stoughton UK, p. 92.

A common type of sexual fantasy many people have (and sometimes act out) is called 'bondage and discipline.' A person fantasizes that they are bound and forced into whatever sexual activity the other partner requires.

This is very interesting considering that what the people are fantasizing over is very similar to what they really truly should have – but don't. We *are* meant to be in bondage to our sexual partner, and we *are* owned by them. 'Bondage and discipline' games however, are a twisted form of reality.

The bondage and discipline in true marriage is something good and loving. Perhaps people who have these improper fantasies are yearning for the true security of real love.

PART FIVE: FURTHER PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF BIBLICAL TEACHINGS

17

The Woman at the Well

The past chapters of this book have taught us that ideally, a person should have sex with only one other for life. But what of the people for whom is too late? Some may be happily married (and by this I also include de facto relationships), however, they may be married to a person who was not their first sexual partner. Are they still obligated to the first partner they had? Should they break their current relationship to go find their first sexual partner? Are they obligated to all sexual partners they have ever had? Is this current relationship adulterous?

Should people who are not currently in any relationship, seek out the person whom they first (or last) had sexual relations with to rejoin that relationship? Are these people who have had sex before ever free to marry again?

These questions have been looked at in past chapters, especially 9 to 12. However, as they are very important, we look a little further at this time, specifically focussing on renewal and restoration of a person after having sinful sexual relationships. We remember also that the answers to these questions may differ in various situations, however, the Bible does give us many guidelines that taken with prayer, will lead people to the correct steps for them to take towards the repair of the sexual area of their lives. God knows that sin exists, so in the Bible He tells us how to cope with it, and eradicate it's harmful consequences from our lives.

In Jer 33:6-8 we read God saying: "...I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security. I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity and *will rebuild them as they were before*. I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will *forgive all their sins* of rebellion against me" (emphasis mine). God would do these things when His people repented. In repentance, God will also heal, rebuild and renew us. He will cleanse us from all sin and forgive us, and in fact, "...if anyone is in Christ, he is *a new creation*; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17 emphasis mine).

In repentance, we are forgiven, restored and renewed – made 'whole' and new again. Many people need this 'newness' in the sexual area of their lives; and not only is it available – God also desires for us to come to it. 2 Cor 12:21 says "...I will be grieved

over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin [porneia] and debauchery in which they have indulged”¹²⁴ (cf. Rev 2:21).

To come to this renewal, we need to repent, and in some cases, we will need to forgive. Spiritual bonds need to be broken.

And regrettably, not only is it when a person *willingly* participates in unrighteous sexual activity that bonds are created: Bonds are created even when the person has *unwillingly* become a victim of unrighteous sexual activity. It isn't fair, but rape and incest do have terrible repercussions in the lives of victims, and often victims are kept in bondage, because spiritual bonds have been formed. Neil T Anderson says: “Bonding takes place when unholy sex is committed. The person has become one flesh with his or her partner. Tragically, that is true even in the case of incest or rape. The body is used as an instrument of unrighteousness.”¹²⁵

Sex forced on a child (or person of any age) often produces damaged, hurting people, who often want to gain power over all others so that they are never hurt again. Victims often go on to abuse others. They can suffer from multiple personality disorders, guilt, or can become sexually inhibited or promiscuous or demonized for the rest of their lives. Child sexual abuse is atrocious, it violates childhood, and violates the person in probably the most horrible of ways ever. Child sexual abuse is horribly unfair. It can ‘break the soul’ (cf. Ps 34:18, Prov 15:13). However, bonds formed even in this sort of crime can be broken, and the burdens can be lifted.

Anderson points out the way that God provides escape from any sexual bondage. He encourages Christians to pray, “Lord, I ask you to reveal to my mind every sexual use of my body as an instrument of unrighteousness.” As the Lord brings to mind every unrighteous sexual use, whether done against their will, or by them willingly, every occasion should be renounced with this prayer, “Lord, I renounce (name of the specific use of your body) with (name of the person) and ask you to break that bond.”¹²⁶

And in asking God to break bonds, the people with whom we were bound must be forgiven. The Bible says, “...if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matt 6:15). Victims of sexual crime, and people who need to forgive any former sexual partner should ask the Lord to bring to mind every person whom they need to forgive, and pray, “Lord, I forgive (name of the person) for (name of the sins committed against you). Please help me to continue to forgive this person day by day.”

Of course, this can be a very difficult and often time-consuming process for people to go through. But we can forgive in the knowledge that God Himself will repay each person according to their sins (cf. Ps 94:22-23); we need not carry the burden of anger and wrath. God is faithful, and desires for us all to come to repentance and

¹²⁴ The words here translated ‘impurity’ and ‘debauchery’ come from the Greek words ‘akatharsia’ meaning impurity (the quality), physically or morally (translated ‘uncleanness’ in the KJV), and ‘aselgeia’ meaning licentiousness. (From The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, Thomas Nelson Publishers 1990).

¹²⁵ Anderson, Neil T. “Helping others find Freedom in Christ” Regal Books USA, 1995 p. 217.

¹²⁶ Ibid p. 290-291.

forgiveness for our own healing and freedom, and we can, because we ourselves have been forgiven by God, just as we ourselves have been loved by our righteous God.

In some cases, the process of repentance and forgiveness will also include telling the perpetrators of crimes that they are forgiven. And in other cases, people will need to go and ask forgiveness for crimes that they themselves may have committed. However, these things should *not* be done alone: They should be done after much prayer, and with an experienced Christian, perhaps a pastor or counselor, if possible.

Once these things have been done, the way has been paved for renewal. The damage and hurt that was present, the 'broken hearts' and burdens that were produced, can be lifted and healed (although, sometimes this may take much time and prayer). It is also not uncommon for people, even Christians, to be afflicted by sexual demons. A Christian experienced in deliverance ministry may need to be called upon to help the person become free from any sexual demons that may be oppressing or possessing them. The prayers of renunciation and forgiveness should be prayed through with the experienced Christian, and the demons then quietly commanded to leave in the name of Jesus.

Prayers of renunciation and forgiveness can be prayed by anyone; even those who have not suffered incest or rape. These prayers can and should be prayed by people who have even just had sex with more than one person, or who have committed any form of porneia, adultery or homosexual activities, or even just masturbated and/or had sexual fantasies. In many cases, the person will need to ask the Lord for the strength not to sin in those areas again.

Can a person pray that *any* marital bond be broken? For example, if a woman is a married to an abusive husband, can she decide at any time to ask God to break the bond between them? While I believe that marital bonds can at times be broken, I would not think that this can happen with just any bond; especially in the situation of a long established marriage. People do need to take caution with this teaching, and to remember that, just because the bond may be broken on your side, it may well *not* be broken on the other.¹²⁷

Let's have a look at a woman in the Bible who was this position of having had sex with more than one person, and needed renewal:

Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said

¹²⁷ In most cases I would imagine that marital bonds are only broken on one side. In only some instances though would I imagine that this can cause great problems, say for instance in this example: A couple are married as virgins, the woman leaves and marries another person. The original husband still desires her back. A short time later she becomes Christian and realises that her second marriage is adulterous. Should she leave this marriage and go back to the first? Or should she stay in the second marriage, praying for previous bonds to be broken? In this situation, a person must pray about the fact that firstly, the previous bond with the first husband was not unrighteous (they were both unrelated virgins), and secondly, if she just prays that the first bond is broken, the first husband may still be under bondage. In situations such as this, then the people involved to claim guidance from God as to which life direction they should take (Prov 4:11, Ps 48:3).

to her, “Will you give me a drink?” (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?” Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.” He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.” “I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.” “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet...” (John 4:6-19).

Jesus had known well the facts of the woman’s life. Yet he had still said to her: “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” Jesus would have given her living water! Jesus offers us all new life, no matter who we are. (How different this is from some churches, who wish for people to break up from de facto partners before offering them new life, or who wouldn’t think of ministering to a prostitute or homosexual person that they knew.) It is lovely to see in this passage that even a ‘worthless Samaritan female adulteress’ (this is how she would have been seen) was offered living water by Jesus.

When this woman at the well looked at God, she was confronted with the knowledge of sin in her life, as we are when we look at God. It is in coming to God, that we see our sins, and while we are Christian, God is continually eradicating it from our lives. We are all sinners while in this life, and yet God offers us living water.¹²⁸ We are never clean on our own merits when we come to God. We come to God first, and then we are cleansed. And the cleansing process continues for the rest of our lives. It is the sinner who needs God.

Of course then, no Biblical teaching is ‘too late’ for you, we *can* always be forgiven and renewed, even while we are Christians; in fact, it is while we are Christians that we are forgiven and renewed the most. We can always pray with the Psalmist who said: “...I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul... Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground” (Ps 143:8-10).

¹²⁸ Many believe this ‘living water’ to be new life with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said to the woman at the well, "...You have had five husbands...." Some think that this woman had had five wedding ceremonies and legally 'married' all five of these men, and that now she was living in de facto relationship with a man with whom she was not married.

However, this was not the case. This woman had just had sex with five men (and perhaps had lived with some or all of them). Jesus was bringing up the woman's sin! Can you imagine that if the woman had had sex with ten other people, Jesus would have ignored this? Jesus was not just telling the woman how many men she had 'married' legally. He was telling her how many men she had married unrighteously – ie. He was telling her how many men she had had sex with. If she had married all of these men legally, then the fact that she had had five husbands would have been widely known. However, it seems that the fact that she had had five men was one which was not widely known (cf. John 4:29, 39).

For as has been explained in an earlier chapter, in the languages that the Bible was written in, there is only one word for both 'man' and 'husband.' In New Testament Greek this word is 'aner.' There are no separate Greek words for 'husband' and 'man' – 'aner' means both. When the word 'aner' is used in the New Testament, our English translators sometimes render it 'man,' and sometimes they render it 'husband' depending on context. Whenever we see the word 'husband' written in the Bible, we could rightly substitute the word 'man.' The same goes for the words 'wife' and 'woman,' their Greek equivalent being 'gyne.'

In the above passage, Jesus said to the woman: "Go, call your *man* and come back." She replied: "I have no man." Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no man. The fact is, you have had five men, and the man you now have is not your man." The man with whom she was currently living (or currently having a sexual relationship with) did not 'belong' to her; he was not her rightful husband, so she had no man that she could call.

Her own man, the man that would be considered to be her rightful husband had probably put her away, or she had left him; and now she was an adulteress.

Was the fact that she had married five men something that was not her fault? Some say that in this passage, Jesus was addressing the sin of men whom, in that time (like today) married women and then discarded them as they willed – basically treating women as second class citizens that they could use or control. The passage is not clear as to whether Jesus was addressing the sin of the men who had had sex with the woman, or the woman herself, and this is most likely because Jesus was addressing them *both*. As the saying goes 'it takes two to tango;' women are not often silent and unconsenting partners to sex.

This woman was having sex with man number 5! This could have been just to get some food or shelter (cf. Prov 6:26). He could have been living with another woman. But still, even though the man was sinning, the blame did not lie entirely on him. The Expositors Commentary speaks about this: "Jesus shocked the woman when he lifted the curtain on her past life. The conversation had passed from the small-talk stage to the

personal. Her evil deeds were being exposed by the light, but was she willing to acknowledge the truth?"¹²⁹ No matter what the woman's intentions were, by having sex with a man who was not her rightful husband, she was sinning.

Even if she had been involved in five registered marriages, remarriage is still sin; the same as adultery (cf. Matt 5:32, 19:9). Perhaps the woman or the society had not known this. In any case, prior to Jesus' reminding the people of the truth, divorce (and hence remarriage), had been allowed according to the law of Moses (who had only allowed divorce because the hearts of the men were hard (Matt 19:8)). If the woman at the well had been divorced 'legally' by each of the men she had had sex with, then she may not have realized that she was committing any sin. However, we see that she did know she was sinning by answering Jesus, "I have no husband." She knew that the man she was having sex with was not rightfully hers.

She knew that she was committing adultery, so why was she not stoned (the punishment for adultery according to Deut 22:20-21)? It was most likely that she had not been *caught* committing adultery, hence her surprise at Jesus knowing this fact (John 4:29, 39). Also, this woman was a Samaritan, and although many of the Samaritan people had Israelite ancestry (cf. John 4:12), and used the same Hebrew Torah (law) as the Jews, they were considered to be 'inferior' to them. They were considered by the Jews to have another religion which was more lax with regard to the law (cf. John 8:48). Regardless of our religion, though, sin is still sin.

And Jesus showed the woman her sin. He did not then tell the woman to 'break up' with the man she was with, and He didn't tell her to go back to her first husband's house. In the same way as Jesus does not tell the woman at the well to go back to her first husband, I do not think that God wants people to forsake their present situation to search out the person with whom they first ever had sex (cf. 1 Cor 7:20). Our sins can be repented of, and relegated to the distant past.

In John 8, we see the story of another woman who had had sex with more than one man. Obviously in this case, the adultery *was* at least partly seen as the woman's fault. This woman had committed adultery while living in her husband's house – ie. she had not been put away or 'divorced' by her husband when she had sex with another.

In John 8:3-11 we read: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened

¹²⁹ Gaebelein, Frank E. (Ed.), "The Expositor's Bible Commentary" Zondervan Interactive.

up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”
“No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared.
“Go now and leave your life of sin.”

While adultery is wrong, we see quite clearly that Jesus still loves the person committing this sin. He did not condemn either of the women we have spoken about in this chapter. He only brought to their attention the fact of their sins, saying to this woman of John 8, “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

Like these women, when we come face to face with God, we see our sins (or should do.) When faced with the understanding of what our sins are, we can (and should) repent. God wants us to know our sin so that we can repent. God desires us to become cleansed, and to do what is best for ourselves in the future. No matter what has happened in the past, we can become ‘born again’ and made new.

If a person has remarried, been divorced, is living in a de facto relationship, or whatever, then God still loves them and accepts them. God is not ‘into’ splitting up relationships. When a person sees their sins, I believe that in most cases they should not break up their current relationship in any effort to fix them; for this may fracture another home, leaving children without a parent (or step-parent). In chapters 9 to 12 we have spoken more on this issue, and that being ‘born again’ in this regard is not something we can choose to repeat and repeat whenever we feel unhappy in a marriage or any relationship. We also remembered that the law was made for the people, not the people for the law.

John Stott, a respected Christian teacher, states that he also would not recommend the break up of a second marriage on the grounds that it may have been adulterous. “...You should see that your present marriage is God’s will for you... All Christians... recognize that their past sins have inevitable consequences which we cannot alter. But however blatant our past denials, Christ still offers us forgiveness and the opportunity to love and follow him in the future...”¹³⁰

I believe that God can break any bondages that we may be under (Jer 30:8). He can wash, sanctify, justify and free us, and we can start again. Please keep in mind though, that if we continue to sin in our marriages, committing adultery or porneia against the current marriage blatantly thinking that God will always forgive us, even after we know the truth of what sin is, then no sacrifice for sin is left (Heb 10:26).¹³¹ Pray that you do not continue to lust after other persons and do not consider committing adultery or forsaking your current marital partner for another. Pray that the Lord sanctifies your current marriage and breaks the curse of sexual sin off your life, and strive, with His help, to be holy in this area.

¹³⁰ Stott, John “Issues facing Christians today” Marshall Pickering 1990 quotes Heth & Wenham “Jesus and Divorce” Hodder & Stoughton 1984.

¹³¹ Of course I am not speaking of honest mistakes and unplanned sin. If you or a person to whom you are ministering have a problem with sexual or any other type of sin, and believe that these sins cannot be helped, then I would suggest serious ministry. Jesus can deliver us of our sin, it can be healed if we are willing.

“[Jesus] at no time stated or implied that something of the kind [of a wedding] was a requisite of becoming married, nor did he state what does or does not constitute a valid marriage – whether for example a couple could take each other for husband and wife by private vows, or whether some kind of public occasion was required.

“At the most, we can say that when in his teaching he refers to the subject he implies that a wedding involves a public occasion, but without ever in any way indicating that this was to be regarded as something which was required for a valid marriage.”¹³²

¹³² B. Ward Powers, “Marriage and Divorce – the New Testament Teaching” Family Life Movement of Australia, 1987, p. 19.

18

The Wedding

In the book of Amos, we are asked this lovely simple question, “Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?” (Amos 3:3). ‘Walking together’ is certainly what two people must do after indulging in the eternal act of sexual intercourse. Therefore, before participating, it is good that the partners know and discuss the fact that they will be required to be lifelong companions. Couples *should* (but often don’t) agree to ‘walk together’ for life before taking the plunge to sexual activity, and this is one of the reasons why the actual ceremony part of the wedding began: It was a formal agreement made before witnesses to ‘walk together’ forever.

Weddings didn’t always include such a ceremony with a formal agreement. They began as celebrations of new marriages recognizing the beginning of a ‘walking together.’ They celebrated an end to childhood, the start of new married life, the start of a couple running their own household, of prospective parenthood, and of an entire new way of life for the people involved. The first time a person had sex was a momentous occasion – certainly something to celebrate.

Back in ancient times when the wedding was just a celebration, it was not thought of as the beginning of marriage, for people knew that it was *sex itself* that was sacred and sex was the only ceremony *needed* to start a marriage relationship. People knew that a wedding was not what married a couple just as a funeral was not what killed a person. A wedding only marked the marriage in the same way that a funeral only marks death. People also knew that sex meant ‘walking together’ forever – so they were careful in their choice of partner.

These days, the story should be the same, however it isn’t. People have sex without thought, and the modern wedding has very little to do with the start of a new sexual relationship (marriage). Almost every person having a wedding ceremony today has previously had sex (often with numerous partners). And because of this large gap between sex and marriage, people even think that it is a wedding or the priest that joins two people together in marriage. Think about it yourself: What do you view as being more closely aligned with marriage? A wedding, or sex? Biblically speaking, sex should be your answer. However, most today would overwhelmingly answer ‘a wedding.’ If you say you are ‘married’ these days, people understand this to mean that you’ve had a wedding. Sexually active people are often still considered ‘unmarried.’

In chapter 11 of this book, we looked at some reasons why Christian couples who are not married legally should have a wedding. In this chapter, we look at how Christians should really view the wedding ceremony, and at some of the reasons why Christians have always thought of a wedding as being Biblically mandated.

Christians should know that it's not the priest, the wedding or the contract etc. that joins a couple to each other. When a couple have sex then they are bonded and have entered into covenant relationship with each other, and it is each person's internal commitment to this that keeps a marriage together. Now, believing that this internal commitment can be made only when a person has a wedding ceremony, or signs a marriage contract is a very serious mistake. People should make this internal commitment when they are going to have sex with someone, or if they are currently in an otherwise righteous sexual relationship.

It's strange that even Christians view the wedding as more binding than sex itself considering that nowhere in the entire Bible is it even implied that a wedding feast, promise or contract is required to make a valid marriage. Jesus said "...a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh... they are no longer two, but one." (Matt 19:5-6) Once a couple has sex, they must remain married and must not separate or destroy the bond that has been made. In the Bible, we see that sex is what joins couples together, not a wedding.

Well known Christian authors Tim & Beverly La Haye affirm this fact also, saying: "The wedding ceremony in itself is not the act that really unites a couple in holy matrimony in the eyes of God; it merely grants them the public license to retreat privately to some romantic spot and experience the 'one flesh' relationship that truly unites them as husband and wife."¹³³

Even though it was not required by the Bible, it was actually the church that has made our wedding ceremonies so much like they are today. In *The Knot Tied*, Tegg writes "It was not until the Council of Trent (1545-1563), that the intervention of a priest, or other ecclesiastical functionary, was deemed in Europe indispensable to a marriage."¹³⁴ He goes on to tell how from this time on, the church stepped into marriages more and more, and increasingly, over the centuries following this decision in England, the religious clergy attempted to gain 'control' or 'regulation' of marriage. Not only was a priest deemed necessary for marriages to be legal, other regulations were formed over the years which made marriage certificates much more difficult to obtain than what they really should have been. For example, over time, weddings became ceremonies that had to be performed in a church building. The church felt that by this, reverent fear would be struck into the hearts of the people getting married, to remind them that they were taking their vows in the presence of God. However, of course God is everywhere (Ps 139:7-8). He sees every sexual joining in which we participate (Mal 2:14), and knows our every thought.

¹³³ La Haye, T & B "The Act of Marriage: Enjoying the Beauty of Sexual Love." Harper Collins Publishers 1976.

¹³⁴ Tegg, William "The Knot Tied – Marriage ceremonies of all nations" 1970, Singing Tree Press, Detroit.

Of course, the reasons behind the formulation of these regulations likely originated only with good intentions: The church was regulating marriage in their attempt to stop the spread of sexual sins. However, in this generation, we can see that they do not do this.

Another regulation that began was that couples were not allowed to be married without the publication of ‘banns’ which were the written intention of the marriage.¹³⁵ The ‘banns’ were to be published in the church for three Sundays preceding the solemnization of the marriage – and all sorts of other regulations were necessary if for example the couple lived in different parishes. Nowadays, in most countries, couples must have what is called a ‘marriage license’ to get legally married. In Australia, it takes around a month to get this license, and in most other countries there is a similar waiting period between the time they apply for the license and the time when they can actually be called ‘married’ in the eyes of the state. This waiting period developed from the church custom of the ‘banns,’ giving the couple about to be married time to make sure of their intention, and also to give anyone else who may wish to object to the marriage time to do so.

Today, many of these regulations surrounding sex have become more important than sex itself. In this generation, sex is seen in a far less important light than the wedding ceremony that was originally designed to protect its use. People spend months planning their weddings, and often many thousands of dollars. Sex, on the other hand, is often participated in without thought.

In Col 2:23 we read: “...such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.”

Many Christians today uphold the importance of the wedding ceremony. With its carefully worded promises, and its requirement that sex must wait until it is over, it looks full of wisdom, and very godly. However, it treats the body harshly, forcing it to ‘burn,’ saying ‘Do not have sex until you have this wedding!’ (cf. Col 2:21). However, as the Bible says, it lacks value in restraining sensual indulgence: Many couples ‘fail’ to reach this standard. They have ‘pre-marital’ sex and later live in guilt, feeling that their sexual desires and/or actions were ‘wrong.’ And the wedding ceremony fails to restrain this because it is based on human commands and teachings, and not on the word of God (cf. Col 2:22).

“Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: ‘Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!’? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence” (Col 2:20-23).

¹³⁵ From the 1999 World Book Multimedia Encyclopaedia (IBM) entry on “Marriage”.

I'm not saying that wedding ceremonies are all 'bad,' sinful or unrighteous. In modern Christian wedding services, the duties each promise to perform eg. love, cherish, keep in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, come straight from the Bible,¹³⁶ and even most of the acts performed symbolize something of marriage from the Bible. For example, the father or friend 'giving away the bride' symbolises God giving the woman to Adam. And the kiss at the end of the service – 'you may now kiss the bride,' is actually a vestige of sex.

And back when the wedding ceremony was still evolving, the church used it as an opportunity to teach the partners involved exactly what they were getting themselves in for. In the Church of England wedding ceremony the couple was given "a full collection of the duties of both parties, drawn from the epistles of two great apostles, St Peter and St Paul"¹³⁷ so that each should "hear and know what those laws are which they have engaged to perform."¹³⁸ Other Christian churches have traditionally also required that the couple be sufficiently instructed in the Christian doctrines surrounding marriage so that they would know its obligations and requirements, and also that they realized the grave consequences of entering into sexual relationship.¹³⁹

While the wedding ceremony became what it is today via the church, and through good intentions, in the modern western world, where close to fifty percent of couples getting married via a wedding ceremony end up divorcing, *we need to change our view of its importance to marriage*. As Christians living in a world that no longer sees a wedding ceremony as the start of a lifelong sexual relationship, *we need to put the wedding ceremony and sex back into their proper perspectives*.

We need to see that the regulations the church instituted surrounding sex are no longer protecting it. We need to see that in this sex soaked society we live in, sex is important: It is not something that can be had casually, or forgotten about. Sex is sacred; it is an eternal act! And God has told us that when we have sex (rather than a wedding), we must stay married.

Over time, we have let go of this command that sex is a sacred act reserved for marriage alone – *so* reserved, that when couples have sex, they should remain married. Instead, we hold on tightly to mans wedding tradition, seeing only couples who have had a wedding as married. In Mark 7:8-9 we read: "You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men. You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions." And this is true with regards to the wedding. So many times we see even Christian couples who have had sex before their wedding refusing to acknowledge the fact that they are married until after their wedding ceremony. In some cases, people in this situation even repent of what they believe to be 'porneia' and break up. They separate what God has joined together, rejecting the fact that sex joined them together in a blood covenant.

¹³⁶ Ibid. p. 19-20

¹³⁷ Ibid. p. 33

¹³⁸ Ibid. p. 32

¹³⁹ Ibid. p. 38

The whole misunderstanding that a wedding is more important than sex itself has had numerous detrimental repercussions to many, many people. Children have lost fathers, and married couples have been separated. And of those who have stayed together, many, such as Joan in the next example, suffer guilt for years afterwards.

Joan had only had sex with one person, her husband of six years, Paul. Even though they got on well, neither of them was happy in their sexual relationship with each other. Often times Joan felt guilty and ashamed of herself for one reason; she and Paul had had sex before their wedding. Although they had only had sex together twice before the wedding, and had repented of it, Joan still felt terrible. Throughout her counselling, I also discovered that Joan and Paul had been engaged for two whole years before their wedding! During this time, there were many more opportunities for the couple to have sex (which is what they had wanted to do), however, besides those two occasions, they made themselves hold back, and they avoided being together alone as they felt this was the 'right' thing to do. The guilt caused by their failure to abstain from sex until marriage, mixed with their being so used to 'holding back' was ruining their sexual relationship now.

When God says "...it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Cor 7:9), He means that when a person has a high sexual desire, they should enter into a marriage relationship, rather than to continue to desire sex (and perhaps masturbate).

Often though, if a person were burning with sexual desire, the church would advise them to wait until the wedding before they enter into a marriage relationship. And even the quickest weddings take a month to organise.¹⁴⁰

1 Cor 7:7 tells us clearly that not everyone has the ability to remain celibate, and for those people, marriage is the way to go. If a person has not the gift of the ability to remain celibate, then why is that person sometimes forced to remain so by society and the church until a certain wedding date which is usually a long way off? Long engagement periods and fancy weddings that take months to organise are certainly not advised in the Bible.

God is not against people having sex, and is not against young people marrying. He says "...if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry" (1 Cor 7:36 KJV). To 'let him do what he wishes' means to let the couple have sex; let them do what they desire!

The last three verses that we have just read tell us to let couples have sex and be married, and also tell us that it is wrong to make a couple wait for a wedding ceremony if they are burning with desire. Obviously, it's an important teaching. Sex between a reasonably mature virgin woman and a man who has not previously divorced a wife, who

¹⁴⁰ In Australia, at least one month's notice must be given to the Registry of Births, Deaths, and Marriages before a marriage license is granted and a contract can be signed.

aren't related to each other and desire to spend their lives together is not wrong, as long as they remain committed to one another.

We should not be encouraging the continued practice of many of our young people today who are hiding the fact that they have had sex. This is so often what many do, firstly because they are under the mistaken impression that they are 'too young' or 'too uneducated' for marriage. Society in general advises people to get married at a later age, even though we have already seen that research and statistics shows this to be detrimental to marriage.¹⁴¹ Secondly, not many young people realize the eternal bondage that they enter into when they have sex with another person. And thirdly, many young people would rather hide the fact that they are sexually active than to tell their parents, friends and churches that they have decided to get married; for it would be a rare parent of a teenager that would have no objection to their child getting married. In fact, quite a lot of parents seem as if they would rather their child have casual sex than to be married.

However, as we have just seen in 1 Cor 7:36, God says that if a couple are acting inappropriately toward one another for an unmarried couple (ie. getting turned on by one another, desiring strongly to have sex with one another, and perhaps even engaging in mutual masturbation, etc.), then, if this couple are old enough (ie. at reproductive age, and reasonably mature), and if they so require (ie. if they wish too and feel God has given them this gift), then let them do what they want (ie. let them have sex), they have not sinned (ie. sex is not a sin), *let them marry* (ie. let their sex be the start of a continuing marriage relationship.)

If a young Christian couple followed this clear Biblical advice and 'did what they will' today, practically every older Christian they knew would probably be telling them they were sinning if they had not gone through the massive rigmarole of a wedding ceremony. This is of course because we see so many young people enter sexual relationships and later split apart from one another. But rather than changing 1 Cor 7:36 to read: "If anyone is behaving inappropriately towards virginity, well they better stop immediately until after the wedding day!" we should be teaching that lifelong commitment walks hand-in-hand with a sexual relationship. We can allow and even encourage our youth to have sex; but only if they are mature, and this means that they understand commitment, and are encouraged towards it.

It *is* better to marry than to burn or masturbate or to have casual sexual relationships. If a mature person desires sex so strongly, then parents and churches should be encouraging marriage rather than these things, even if the person is still in their teen years, and even perhaps younger than the legally allowable age of marriage.¹⁴²

I am not by any means advocating that any person should just rush into sex. Rather, I am saying that if a person strongly desires sex, or has already had sex then they should marry and be encouraged to stay with their sexual partner for life. This is far better

¹⁴¹ This was detailed in chapter 2.

¹⁴² In Tasmania, Australia, people have to be 18 years old to get married legally, yet they can be as young as 17 to be old enough to consent to having sex without that sex being called 'rape' or 'sex with a minor.' (According to the Criminal Code Act 1924).

than having casual sex perhaps with many partners, or developing the obsessive habit of masturbation.

If a decision to marry is made for these reasons, with the knowledge of what the Bible says about sex, then consultation with parents, pastor and partner is highly recommended. Attempting to make a go of marriage is surely better than to have casual sexual relationships. If a person desires to be in a sexual relationship then they should marry, remembering that if this one sexual relationship does not ‘work out’ then they would be sinning to discard it and enter a new relationship. Hopefully this requirement will spur them on to thoughtfulness and prayer over the situation.

If a couple does go ahead, has sex, and considers themselves to be married, they may come against much opposition from some members of their church or family. This difficult situation was discussed in chapter 11, where couples in de facto relationship were advised to be discreet if necessary, and then to have a wedding ceremony as soon as possible. They must however remain together, and can take the advice of Col 2:16 which reads:

“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.”

Couples are married whether or not they have had a wedding ceremony. People should not be judged by the religious festivals they have or have not celebrated. Christians should be viewing the sexual relationship itself as sacred. So sacred, that often couples *will* have a wedding ceremony to celebrate it, while remembering that the wedding ceremony is not a mark that a sexual relationship is legitimate in God’s eyes.

But shouldn’t we submit to the laws of the land?

As for actually legally registering the marriage, many refer to such verses as Titus 3:1 which tell us to be in subjection to rulers and authorities, and to be obedient to the ‘laws of the land.’

Legally registering a marriage is definitely desirable for any married couple. It allows children to have parents with the same surnames. It safeguards the property rights of family members in the event of the death of one of the partners, and often has other legal benefits. However, referring to verses that tell us to be obedient to the ‘laws of the land’ have nothing to do with this subject: For living in a de facto relationship is not in any way against the law.¹⁴³ Living in a de facto relationship would only be lawless if the couple were doing such things as denying their relationship to earn extra money from social welfare agencies.

In any case, when the Bible teaches us to ‘obey the laws of the land,’ it is doing so so that we may avoid punishment from those rulers (see Romans 13:1-7).

¹⁴³ I’m not sure if this is the case in every country in the world, however, in most countries I would doubt that living in de facto relationship would be against the law. In many countries, it is even allowable for homosexual couples to live together as married.

There is no real urgent Biblical or social need for a marriage to be legally registered. Of course, the marriage should not be hidden among the community, church, family and friends though, and if the lack of legal registration is going to cause a weaker Christian to stumble, then it should certainly be registered if possible (see the end of chapter 11).

In the end though, we must understand that failure to sign on a dotted line is not sin; nor is it against the law. Sin is not failure to have a wedding ceremony! *Sexual sin occurs when you don't have a commitment to the person you have had sex with (and also not adequately ensuring that your partner has that same commitment.)* It's quite seriously wrong to say that not having a wedding is sin, because that distorts to us what sin is. Sexual sin is denying the marriage bond that is formed by sex. We do not need a wedding ceremony before we can accept that bond.

As has been said before, porneia is an evil intention that comes from a heart rejecting God (Rom 1:24-29, Matt 15:19). It's not a wedding ceremony that is needed to combat this sin, rather, it is a love, acceptance and submission to God, and a knowledge of and commitment to follow His laws that overcomes.

But doesn't the Bible mention weddings?

It does, but only very rarely! The only time we even find the word 'wedding' in the Old Testament (in the NKJ) is in SOS 3:11 which only recalls the 'day of Solomon's wedding.' In the King James version of the Bible the word 'wedding' doesn't even rate one single mention in it's Old Testament.

In the New Testament, the word 'wedding' comes from the Greek word 'gameo' which is closer in meaning to the words 'banquet' or 'feast,' than to anything like a modern wedding ceremony with a contract. Accordingly, we note that in Matt 22:2-14, where we read the word 'wedding,' the parallel passage in Luke (14:16-24) says 'big dinner' or 'banquet.'

Of course, Jesus did turn the water into wine while he was at a wedding feast (John 2:1-11), and we see two parables centered around a wedding in the gospel of Matthew (chapters 22 and 25), however, neither of these instances has any mention of vows or contracts. Rather, these 'weddings' were celebrations of marriage, and there is no mention of them being a necessary occurrence before a couple are allowed to have sex.

If the wedding ceremony was so important, and so Biblical and righteous, then why would there be no wedding ceremony in the Bible? Even Jay Adams who views the formal contractual side of marriage as far more important and prominent than the sexual side¹⁴⁴ admits, "We have no engagement or wedding ceremonies of any detail in the Bible."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Adams, Jay E., "Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible", 1980 Ministry Resources Library (Zondervan) USA. p. 15.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 13

A wedding ceremony is merely an external sign that may accompany a new marriage, and is not at all necessary for a new marriage to begin. In the same way, water baptism is also merely an external sign that may accompany a new ‘marriage’ between God and a person. Water baptism is also not necessary for a new relationship with God to begin. All we need to do to become a follower of God is respond in prayer and repentance to Him. We need not engage in any ceremony, or have any contract drawn up and signed. No human is needed to judge our relationship with God or when it has begun. The person knows deep down that they are committed to God, and no external sign can change this fact. God Himself also knows the person’s inner intentions and thoughts: He doesn’t judge on external appearances or religious ceremonies. When we discussed this more fully in chapter 3, we saw that in Biblical times many people entered into relationship with God without having a water baptism. Of course these people were ‘baptized,’ but this does not mean that they were baptized in water. They were baptized spiritually, that is, they were given a new life by God Himself. This is similar to the way that God joins people spiritually and physically in marriage.

Just as water baptism doesn’t necessarily mean that a person is in relationship with God, having had a wedding doesn’t necessarily mean that a couple are truly committed to each other either, just as going to church doesn’t guarantee that a person is a Christian.

Just as our salvation must rest in God alone, and not on any ceremony, so too when we have sex, we must not rely on the fact that we have had a wedding ceremony to know that our sexual activity is righteous. Sex is righteous only when we have that internal heart intention of love and companionship with the other, and when we are not committing adultery or any other form of illegal sex (as per Lev 18).

In the New Testament, where the baptism ceremony is prominent, we can see that this is almost always an impromptu event. When a person is converted to Christianity in the New Testament, they are baptized immediately (see Acts 8:12-13, 35-36, 16:33) to show the change of life that has just occurred. So too, in the Bible, weddings are also impromptu events.¹⁴⁶ When a couple is married, a party (wedding feast) is often organized there and then so that friends and family can celebrate the new marriage (see Judges 14, Matt 22.) In the same way as baptisms and funerals are unplanned markers of life changes, so should weddings be.

Accordingly, among people of the Quaker (Christian) religion, couples just declare their commitment to each other at a public gathering when their marriage begins. They believe that as God makes a couple married, no officials or special ceremony are required.¹⁴⁷ Their belief comes straight from the Bible – as every time we see a marriage covenant being made, we see that it is made before God (who is everywhere and sees everything), and not before human witnesses (cf. Prov 2:17, Mal 2:14). Performing ceremonies does not appease God.

¹⁴⁶ In the parable of the ten virgins (Matt 25:1-13) we see that this wedding had no set time, for the parable teaches to “keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour [that the bridegroom will come].”

¹⁴⁷ From the 1999 World Book Multimedia Encyclopaedia (IBM) entry on “Marriage”.

And a lot of the time these days, the ceremony doesn't even *attempt* to appease God. In Australia in 1996, 46.8% of all wedding ceremonies were performed by non-religious civil celebrants.¹⁴⁸ The modern wedding ceremony is by far a more worldly affair than a godly one – just like our modern Christmas is far more worldly than godly. This doesn't mean that we should stop having weddings and Christmas! Or that *all* people celebrate weddings and Christmas incorrectly. The point I wish to bring out by this is only that the church needs to look upon marriage as being something different from what the world sees it as; in the same way we look at Christmas as being something different from how the world sees it. Our Christian weddings need not follow the pattern of the worldly imitation, just as our Christmas gatherings should be a time of praising God, rather than thinking of Santa.

The church needs to celebrate marriage at its wedding ceremonies just as it celebrates Jesus at Christmas. It needs to see the sexual relationship side of marriage as being more prominent than the legalistic side that is seen as easily broken in our world where marriage and divorce are seen as institutions belonging to the state.

Wedding ceremonies should not be seen as the seal of marriage – the 'tick' on a de facto relationship or the 'trial marriage' that worked out OK. Just as sex forced a marriage relationship to continue in Old Testament days, then so should it now; our God does not change and neither does His laws.

Shotgun weddings

In the last generation, around thirty or forty years ago, so-called 'shotgun weddings' were common. These were hastily arranged weddings for couples who had conceived a child. If the wedding was arranged swiftly enough, the baby born perhaps 8 months afterwards could be called 'premature,' and avoid being known as a child born out of wedlock; which was not acceptable socially. If a child was born out of wedlock, sometimes it was called a 'bastard.' However there were no bastards of this sort in the Bible. Bastards in the Bible were children born to parents of differing nationalities; not to unmarried parents. In the Bible, there were *no* children born to unmarried parents.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ From the Australian Bureau of Statistic's "Tasmanian Year Book 1998" page 95.

¹⁴⁹ The word 'bastard' is only found twice in the King James Version of the Bible. In Deut 23:2 we read: "No one born of a forbidden marriage nor any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation." The King James Version of the Bible calls this person born of a 'forbidden marriage' a bastard. Can you see that the parents of this 'bastard' are still married, yet married unrighteously? And in Zech 9:6 where we read "Foreigners will occupy Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines," these 'foreigners' are called 'bastards' in the KJV. Related to this in John 8:41, certain Jews told Jesus that they were not born of 'porneia.' This was immediately after Jesus had told them that they were not Abraham's children. They thought they were being accused of being foreigners – non-Jews, and they replied that they had not been born of 'porneia,' ie. their parents had remained together, and the ones they had called 'parents' were really their biological parents. Being called a 'bastard' had nothing to do with the legal status of the parents marriage, but rather with whether or not the parents were Jewish (of the faith), and had stayed together as the faith required.

When we read in Hosea 1:2 that Gomer had children of unfaithfulness, they were children not of legally unmarried parents, or of parents who were not married at the time of their birth. Gomer's children had parents that did not remain together in married relationship.

In the situation of a 'shotgun wedding,' the couple were forced by family, friends and often churches, to actually accept the responsibility of the marriage that they had already begun. We've probably all seen old-time movies where the father of a young pregnant girl goes to her boyfriend and urges him to 'become responsible' for what he has done, meaning that the boyfriend should marry the girl. Once a couple had sex, and made a baby, they were expected to stay together. The man was expected to remain in relationship with the mother (and the baby) for the rest of their lives (cf. 1 Tim 5:8); otherwise he would be socially ostracised as being extremely irresponsible and unfaithful.

By the time this current generation began, many marriages that had begun with a 'shotgun wedding' had failed. The introduction of almost perfect chemical contraceptives to the world had encouraged a decrease in moral standards. Legal divorce became easy to obtain; so did legal and medically safe abortion. False scientific evidence that God did not exist, and that the Bible was not true was taught in schools. This generation has never needed a 'shotgun wedding.' Many, many people are against encouraging young people to marry, even when a baby has been conceived.

Responsible Christians must not be dragged away with the world on this issue. 'Shotgun weddings' failed, but they need not (as we shall see in the next chapter of this book). We could choose divorce, contraception and/or abortion. We could accept false scientific evidence against God and the Bible. We could decrease our own moral standards, and allow casual sex to flourish in our families and churches. But if we love God, we should not do these things. Many marriages that began with 'shotgun weddings' did fail. Many reasons why can be given. Pick an excuse if you like, but the Bible teaches that sex does force the responsibility of marriage.

The pendulum has now swung too far to the left. In this generation, couples are often encouraged so much more towards breaking up than staying together. Sometimes couples who marry legally because they have conceived a child are even looked down upon.

God hasn't made this ruling, and doesn't create this bond to hurt people. God wants people to have sex with one partner only because He wants the best for them, and He knows that the best is for them to be pure. *Impurity* has sex with more than one person. A wedding ceremony does not make someone pure, or help them to remain so. Only a high respect for God and a knowledge that His will is best, coupled with a high respect for sex, a desire not to sin in this area, and a knowledge that staying with the one partner for life is right. Once a couple has had sex, they must remain married rather than repenting of something that they only think is porneia.

Marriage (staying in lifelong relationship) is the moral responsibility of any person who has sex.

This truth is so important. We are now living in a world where sex is thought of as nothing, hence people have sex with one partner after another, without a thought of the bond that has been created, and without a thought of the obligations each partner is required to fulfil. The intensive form of porneia, 'ekporneuo' is found in Jude 7 that reads: "...Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality [ekporneuo] and perversion...." These towns were destroyed by fire for committing the utmost form of porneia, so similar to the casual sex we see among many today.

It's all meant to be very simple: Love God and know Him. Have an intimate lifelong sexual relationship with one person. Don't be like the people God talks about in Jer 2:32 which asks:

"Does a maiden forget her jewelry, a bride her wedding ornaments? Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number" (cf. Hos 2:13).

Remember God and His laws, not just the pretty ceremonies we humans have instituted around them.

At the end of Ephesians chapter 5, we read that Christ has made the church incredibly glorious, holy and radiant – blameless, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish – just like a bride preparing for her wedding day.

Is this like most brides of today?

19

Marry ‘in the Lord’

The Bible exhorts us to ‘marry in the Lord’ (1 Cor 7:39, Mal 2:11-12). This means we are to marry someone who shares the same faith in God as we do. However, for many this hasn’t and doesn’t happen. Can the persons involved then strive for a happy, fulfilled marriage? Can the young teenage couple who have not planned on being married, but who have had sex with each other hope to be able to stay successfully married for life?

I am convinced that any couple can make their marriage work – no matter how it began. Marital problems can certainly be solved successfully when people follow the teachings of the Bible. And even when only one partner follows them, the marriage will still be better; at least for that person. An example of this is the marriage between Nabal and Abigail as told in 1 Sam 25, and explained in chapter 10 of this book.

There are many books on the shelves about improving marriage. While improving marriage is not a focus of this book, I would like to point out a number of Scriptures that have given me hope that any marriage can work. I pray these Scriptures may show you also that unlikely couples can stay together.

We’ll start by looking at some Biblical marriages that worked against great odds. The first of these is the marriage between Moses and Zipporah. This couple had different religious backgrounds and beliefs.

Moses, a Hebrew descendent of Abraham, had not been brought up by the people of his own faith and culture, however, he remained an Israelite at heart, having faith in the one true God. As a confused young adult, he murdered an Egyptian whom he saw beating one of his people. Upon this becoming known, he fled his country, and became an alien in a foreign land. A priest of Midian whom he met upon fleeing, gave Moses one of his daughters to be his wife. Her name was Zipporah.

As did her father, Zipporah served false gods (see Jethro’s statement on his later conversion Ex 18:10). This was a serious matter. In Deut 7:3-4 God tells the people: “Do not intermarry with them [pagans]. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD’s anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.”

God knew that intermarriage with those of different faiths would threaten the spiritual purity of Israel, therefore, it was something to be punished. We spoke in an earlier chapter of how King Solomon, originally the wisest man of all time (1 Kings

3:12), was led astray to follow other gods by his non-Jewish wives. Zipporah may well have been used by demons to lead Moses, one of the most important men in the history of the people of God, into paganism.

When Moses married the pagan Zipporah without consulting God, he was in for a tough time. Firstly, when their spiritual differences caused their son not to be circumcised, God almost killed Moses, who was near death (Ex 4:24) when Zipporah finally circumcised their son against her own wishes.

And when God told Moses to return to Egypt to save the Israelites, he took Zipporah and their two small sons – making them leave the extended family, saying that he had ‘heard from God.’ This must not have been easy on their marriage.

Moses had a strong calling by God on his life that seemed to take precedence over his marriage. Through their spiritual differences, Zipporah could not even be a part of his ministry. It was Moses’ sister rather than his wife who eventually became the female leader of the Israelites with him (Ex 15:20). Through all their problems, Moses and Zipporah eventually separated (Ex 18:2).

Then, whereas in-laws often cause problems, in Moses’ case, his father-in-law actually helped. Sometimes our help comes from unexpected places and people. The priest of Midian showed Moses a solution to his family problems. It was suggested that Moses delegate some of the work that he was doing for God (Ex 18:14). Once he took the advice and did this, Moses had more time for his family, and he and Zipporah were eventually re-united.

However bad his marital problems were though, “...we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). The marital problems that Moses faced did work for good. They helped him greatly with his later roles as judge and leader, and promoted his own spiritual growth, and that of the people of Midian.

And marriage helps us all to grow: Even when only one of us is Christian. When we desire to stick at marriage as God has commanded, and when we look to God for help, not only our marriages, but our entire lives become fruitful, joyful, peaceful, and satisfied – these are some of the ‘fruits of the spirit’ that God promised we would receive.

In the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah (Gen 24), these two did both share the same faith. Yet their marriage included a striking difficulty: Isaac and Rebekah had not met each other before it! Their marriage was arranged, nevertheless, it worked.

Isaac was Abraham and Sarah’s child of the promised blessing; all his life he and his family had been aware of his special call by God. It was his purpose to have children and make Abraham the ‘father of many nations.’ Yet Isaac was 40 years old before he even married. At this time Abraham was very old, and Sarah had passed away. Abraham sent his servant to look for a wife for Isaac from among the people of the same family and faith.

Isaac neither rushed into marriage nor did he choose one of the women from the surrounding areas; Isaac married a relative who would be sympathetic to and supportive of his worship of God and of the call on his life.¹⁵⁰ Neither knew each other, but before their marriage, we can see that both Isaac and Rebekah and their families were godly people. Rebekah is even the first woman in the Bible that we see praying (Gen 25:22).

Isaac and Rebekah had their problems like any married couple. Isaac was a forty year old bachelor when they married. He tended to put himself first, and both he and Rebekah had favourite sons. Their first born son Esau married Hittite women, and this disgusted Rebekah. Rebekah deceived Isaac; and in turn she never saw her favorite son Jacob ever again.

However, Isaac and Rebekah loved each other, and made it through the long haul together. We see them fondling one another in public in Genesis 26. And after Rebekah deceived him, even though Isaac lived for twenty more years, we never see him rebuking her. In the end, Isaac and Rebekah were buried together (Gen 49:31).

Rebekah and Isaac's marriage lasted despite their differences. Why? Because they were spiritually compatible and of the same faith. Furthermore, as they were committed to God, they were committed to their relationship.

Now we compare the marriage of Leah and Jacob, to that of Rachel and Jacob. Leah was the first of four of Jacob's wives. Jacob had been tricked into marrying Leah, and he did not love her. Then Leah had Rachel, who was her sister and Jacob's second wife, competing with her for his attentions.

Although Leah must have been miserable at times in her marriage, she relied on God who heard her and gave her sons, while Rachel remained barren. Leah's fourth son was named Judah, which means 'praise.' Leah was an honest, prayerful woman of God. Her son Judah was the ancestor of David – the first king of Israel, and in turn King David became the ancestor of Jesus. We compare Leah then to Rachel who became a thief and a liar (Gen 31:34-35), and who doesn't seem to pray to God until after Jacob had twelve children to his other wives.

Then, while Rachel died in her youth, Leah was with Jacob through his old age. She was also the only wife who was buried with him (Gen 49:31).

Leah and Jacob certainly had their marital problems. They weren't planning on being married, they were never engaged, nor did they court. Their marriage started in deceit as Jacob was tricked. However, the marriage of Leah and Jacob worked. This was because they were both of the same faith. They loved God, and looked to Him to solve their problems.

On the other hand, the marriage of Rachel and Jacob was filled with romance. They enjoyed a long engagement. Rachel was physically beautiful and they loved one another. However their marriage was not a happy one. Rachel seemed always to feel

¹⁵⁰ Brummel Bloem, Diane "A Woman's Workshop on Bible Marriages" 1980 The Zondervan Corporation, Michigan, p. 51

unloved; perhaps this was because she was barren for a long time. She was constantly trying to earn the love from Jacob that she already had (see Gen 30:14-15 – mandrakes were a plant used as an aphrodisiac).

The Bible shows that when a person has faith in God, their marriage works and survives despite difficulties. The Bible shows that marriage encourages a faithful person to grow and reach their full potential in life and ministry. When a person does not love God, pray to Him and look towards Him, the Bible shows life in general, and their marriage in particular, to be much more difficult, especially for that person.

We've seen that unlikely marriages can survive well while a marriage like that of Jacob and Rachel's that followed a seven year engagement was not entirely successful. It goes to show that neither engagements, or lack of them, pre-marital counseling, or lack of it, guarantees the success or failure of a marriage.

The Bible shows that *any* marriage can be problematic (1 Cor 7:28). There are no 'perfect' marriages at all wherein everything works out well – we are all human, and have many failings.

The things that made marriages less problematic were firstly, monogamous relationships between a husband and wife – did you notice that when men in the Old Testament had more than one wife, they were blessed through the first wife? For example, blessings came through these Biblical first wives: Sarah, Leah, Hannah.¹⁵¹

The second thing that made marriages less problematic were the husband and wife being of the same faith (Mal 2:11-12, 2 Cor 6:14). Christians today should look for partners from the same faith, and from the same family of God. For couples in which both partners are committed to God will find it easier to stay together – monogamously – through the long haul of marriage.

These pieces of Scriptural advice are fine for those who have not yet married. Many of us however, are already in situations that don't meet up with the Biblical ideal. We must remember people such as Bathsheba, Gomer (the wife of Hosea) and the woman at the well from John 4. Likewise Abigail, Leah, Isaac, Moses and Zipporah can also give us reason to believe that our marriages, even if begun sinfully, can succeed! God does bless, forgive and restore.

As Christians we have good reasons to stay together with our partner. But even within the secular world, this question is asked: Why go from partner to partner? Secular sex and marriage therapist Dagmar O'Connor writes: "Obsessions with trying other lovers all too frequently end up in fiascos. The fantasy is usually so much sweeter and more romantic than the reality. And the question remains, why are we so willing to convince ourselves that sex with someone else is something we have to try? ... in the end,

¹⁵¹ Note also the many blessings among mankind that have come through God's first wife, Israel.

it is our own sexual responses which make the critical differences in the experience: Our 'Dream Lover' may come along, but if we are uptight we still will not enjoy it."¹⁵²

O'Connors book is titled "How To Make Love To The Same Person For The Rest Of Your Life And Still Love It." In it she tells the secular world that not only is monogamy beneficial to all concerned, she states that it is the only way to a truly satisfying and happy sex life. Just as the Bible teaches, she claims that the key to fulfilment in sex is not the other person – it's us.

As the Bible shows in many ways that marriage is a sacred relationship, Christians must continue to work at their marriages. This is often difficult, with the world's encouragement to divorce, and the open social acceptance of casual sexual relationships. However, we must see that this system will never work. Over and over we see that people who divorce and remarry only find that the second and subsequent marriages do not give them what they desire. How much better it would be for people to stay committed to their one sexual partner – for life – and to work out the problems which they would have with any partner.

Christians can be confident that God loves them personally (1 Peter 5:7, John 3:16, Jer 31:3). They have a faithful God to trust in and turn to when things go wrong – even in their marriages. They have a God who desires to teach them by His spirit how to live His way, perfecting and testing them to make them holy (John 14:26, 16:13, Heb 10:14-16).

Being a Christian doesn't *guarantee* any less problems, but it does give any person a much better chance at a happy and successful marriage, and a happy and successful life.

Whether your partner is Christian or not, treat them as exhorted in Ephesians 5:22-33:

"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church – for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery – but I am

¹⁵² O'Connor, Dagmar "How to Make Love to the same person for the rest of your life and still love it" 1985 Book Club Associates Great Britain. p. 129-130

talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”

Should wives submit even to non-Christian husbands? Yes! 1 Pet 3:1-2 exhorts:

“Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.”

Should husbands ‘Lord’ it over their wives? No! Husbands must love their wives as Christ loves the church, and even though Christ is our Lord, He was and is a servant to us all. He is also our savior – and men are obligated to treat their wives in a similar way that leads them to salvation.

The teachings in the Bible on the subject of sex and marriage can lead us to the type of marriage we see pictured in the Song of Songs. Here we see mutual attraction between the partners, both initiating sex, neither ashamed before each other. The partners show a deep and intense love for one another. They have open conversation between them and a lifelong commitment. The whole book is a picture of what a marriage in God can be like. Following the Bible, pray for your marriage, become close to God: This advice can and has led people to enjoy a blessed marriage.

Love your partner, be kind, patient and compassionate towards them. Look towards their interests rather than to your own. Respect your partner. If your partner is Christian, then remember the old saying, “the couple who prays together, stays together.” If your partner is not a Christian, don’t despair. Keep the faith, and with prayer you may win your non-believing partner over to Christ (1 Peter 3:1-6).

As life in general is better with God, so marriage is better with God, no matter what your circumstances.

“So be happy with your wife and find your joy with the girl you married – pretty and graceful as a deer. Let her charms keep you happy; let her surround you with her love. Why should you give your love to another woman my son? Why should you prefer the charms of another man’s wife? The LORD sees everything you do. Wherever you go, he is watching. The sins of a wicked man are a trap. He gets caught in the net of his own sin. He dies because he has no self-control. His utter stupidity will send him to his grave” Proverbs 5:18-23 (Today’s English Version).

Epilogue

There is a great deal of information about sex in the Bible. I hope that what I have included in this book has taught you, and given you much to think and pray about on the subjects of sex, marriage and sexual sin. Most of all, I hope you now have good reasons why it is best for people to stay with their one partner for life.

In this book, we have learnt the following meanings of some Biblical sexual terms:

- Marriage: A lifelong sexual bond, a covenant relationship started with sexual intercourse.
- Adultery: Sex with a married woman.
- Porneia: A rejection of a marriage bond created when a couple has sex.
- Divorce: The putting away of a marital partner – and an encouragement towards adultery.

Divorce and porneia are very similar sins. Both of them are a rejection of marriage and the marital partner – and sinful; they lead to adultery. Neither actually breaks a bond of marriage.

People who have sex with one another are bound for life, and neither should ever leave each other (as long as the relationship was not sinful, ie. adultery, incest, or rape). However, if a wife does leave her husband (committing porneia), he is allowed to marry another virgin woman – but then he has more than one wife. In most cases, if a wife leaves her husband, or is divorced by him, she should not remarry.

I realize that these meanings, and a lot of the conclusions that I have come to in this book are different from what a lot of other Biblical interpreters have understood the Scriptures to mean. And I wondered why. Heth & Wenham give an appropriate answer to this same question: “We, like the early Fathers, have been conditioned by the environment in which we live.” And to solve this problem they state: “We should do what we can to overcome the limitations that possibly may be influencing our exegesis of the Biblical text.”¹⁵³

In all the other modern interpretations of the ‘exception clause’ the scholars have started with general beliefs on what the words ‘marry’ and ‘porneia’ mean – and these

¹⁵³ Heth, William A. and Wenham, Gordon J. “Jesus and Divorce: Towards an Evangelical Understanding of New Testament teaching” 1984 Hodder & Stoughton

beliefs are different from my own and from what I believe the Bible to teach. They do not believe that ‘marry’ means virtually ‘to have sex,’ nor do they believe that ‘porneia’ is a rejection of the marital bond. These basic beliefs cause problems and differences in further interpretation. And these beliefs have definitely been conditioned not only by the environment, but the upbringing, education and personal biases that we have had.

Environment and culture has changed dramatically in this last generation. Perhaps it was because I myself was influenced by this, rather than the previous generation, that God has been able to teach me some very different things to what I initially expected to find in this study. When I started to learn the things that I have written in this book, I was extremely surprised, and almost could not believe what I knew God Himself was teaching me. However, the more I have looked into the Scriptures and other works on this subject, the more I knew that what God had taught me was the truth, and that this was truth desperately needed in this generation.

Heth & Wenham state that the teachings of the gospel divorce sayings “enshrine a revolutionary view of the marriage bond.”¹⁵⁴ The interpretations given in this book show just how clearly they do this. The teachings of Jesus harmonized the New Testament teaching with the Old, they upheld the sanctity of marriage and taught us how to respect sex today.

Will the teachings that I have presented here ever become that which is generally accepted within the Christian church at large? I know already that there are many people out there who wish that it would. However, I doubt that it will for at least these two reasons: The first is that people want more comfort – we are still like the Pharisees, looking for ‘loopholes’ in the word of God. Any excuse to divorce and remarry is better than having none at all, and the Bible really doesn’t give any.

The second reason goes a bit deeper than that... Adultery is a serious sin – it’s prohibited in the ten commandments, alongside murder. So, it’s something that Satan really wants us to do. The lies about sex and marriage that are commonly believed by many in this generation are those which actually promote adultery. Think about it – we live in a time where Christians believe that virgins who have sex are sinning (contrary to 1 Cor 7:28). When young couples ‘split up’ from one another, any further sex the female has with another partner is adultery. And the male is constantly committing adultery against her by not providing for her and treating her and keeping her as his wife. I’m sure that Satan loves the lies many believe about God’s precious and intimate gift of marriage.

The truth is that sex forms a lifelong marital bond. It’s only when we accept this perhaps uncomfortable teaching, that we can start reducing adultery and its effects in many lives.

Robert Peterson says that a common “ground for demon possession is the sin of fornication and adultery (Lev 20:10, Eph 5:3). No other sins have caused so much grief to the human race as these.”¹⁵⁵ By lying about what these serious sins are, Satan has been

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 47

¹⁵⁵ Peterson, Robert “Are Demons for Real?”, Overseas Miss. Fellowship, Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1968, page 121.

able to promote and encourage them – ruining lives everywhere as he gains footholds. It may be good to read Hosea 4:6, 10-12 at this stage: “...My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children.... They will eat but not have enough; they will engage in prostitution but not increase,¹⁵⁶ because they have deserted the LORD to give themselves to prostitution, to old wine and new, which *take away the understanding of my people*.... A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God” (emphasis mine). These are people of God! It is they that have rejected knowledge and the law of God, and are led astray by a spirit of prostitution (porneia).¹⁵⁷ Their understanding has even been *taken away* by their practice of porneia. This can and does happen to God’s people today.

There are many who will never agree with this teaching. I only urge those people to continue to ‘test everything’ (1 Thess 5:21), and to pray that if their understanding has been taken away, that God can restore it so that they will be able to repent. And if anyone still finds this teaching untrue, I would urge them to continue loving those whom they do not agree with. I do not think that the firm stand on monogamy and the sacredness of sex and the love and forgiveness of God presented in this book could be taken as leading people astray. I pray that this book encourages thought and debate and prayer on the subject of sex from a godly perspective. As I am continually learning, I hope you do also.

Thank you for reading my book, I hope you enjoyed it and were blessed by it. And next time you are faced with the question “why should I stay with my partner?” I pray you will know the answer.

¹⁵⁶ This may well refer to the use of contraception. Widely available and easily used contraception has also contributed to a low view of sex in this world – encouraging porneia, so that those who practice it are often those using contraception as well. I am not here saying that the use of contraception is always a sin, however, Christians should think very seriously before using or promoting the use of contraception.

¹⁵⁷ In the Septuagint, (ancient Greek translation of the OT Scriptures), we see that the people are led astray by a spirit of porneia.

Sometimes we *all* hear what we want to hear from God, and refuse to hear what we don't want to believe.

“Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons, and the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of their migration. But *my people do not know the requirements of the LORD*. How can you say, “We are wise, for we have the law of the LORD,” when actually the lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely? ... Therefore I will give their wives to other men and their fields to new owners. From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit” (Jer 8:7-10 emphasis mine).

When we don't hear the word of the Lord, He will give our wives to other men... This has happened to many. Please repent, please care for those with whom you are one.

Appendix to chapter 2

What Should have Shari done?

What should a person do when they are faced with a situation of knowing their young child is having sex willingly with another, or has conceived a baby?

As a parent myself I can understand how this appendix may make you laugh! I know how difficult it is to teach and guide young people. Situations are also many and varied, and these things I am about to suggest may not be best in your personal circumstance. Before anything, I would firstly advise much prayer. Secondly, teaching any person to follow Biblical guidelines is often useless if the person has no respect for or knowledge of God – however, teaching the truth of what the Bible teaches about sex may well lead someone to reach out for God, and that should be the first priority.

Please read these guidelines with an open mind – knowing your own situation, and prayerfully.

- Remember that this young couple have become one flesh and are not ever to separate (as long as their relationship is not incestuous or adulterous) (Matt 19:9, 1 Cor 6:16).
- Perhaps you should attempt to teach the young couple that this first marriage is the one in which they will be blessed. Remember that Jacob was blessed through Leah, the first woman he had sex with: She was the wife of his first four sons, she was the ancestor of Jesus, she was the wife he lived with in his old age, she was seen to be godly. Abraham was blessed through his first wife, Sarai (more has been said about these relationships in the book). This teaching is also found in Mal 2:13-16 – the people who were not receiving blessings were those who had forsaken the first woman they had had sex with in their *youth!*
- In becoming one flesh, this couple has become part of each other. The male partner should love his wife as he loves himself, making her holy, blameless and radiant (Eph 5:28), and the female partner needs to respect the man she has had sex with, submitting to him in love.
- They should be taught that to leave each other is sinful, and is an encouragement towards adultery. They are bound together forever, for *life*. It is in this relationship that they will have the greatest likelihood of finding fulfilment and enjoyment. It is also in this relationship that their children will greatly bless them, and not become rebellious (Mal 2:15, 1 Cor 7:14, cf. Rom 11:16).

- They should be encouraged to take responsibility for one another, in their own household preferably.

If your child is willingly having sex with another person, then this child is also probably old enough to think these things through himself. Allow the child time and freedom to make decisions based on these serious teachings from the Bible. Love your child whatever the decision, remembering that we've all made mistakes. Remember also that prayer really does make a difference – and often a greater difference than what you may make in other ways.

If your child understands the teachings of the Bible, and seems to respect them, and if they and their partner say that they are willing to follow God, then I would encourage them to stay in relationship as much as possible. If they are not old enough for legal marriage, then I would advise them to have a wedding party without the legalities, announcing their relationship to family and friends, and also celebrating the relationship and thanking God for it.

Yes, what I've said may seem totally ridiculous or even unfair. Or is it? Remember what the world has wrongly taught us. It is the world that says 'gain education and age before marriage.' It is the world that has taught us to take control of our lives, and rely upon our own selves rather than God for food, shelter and living. Remember that God teaches us that in having sex two do become one and should not be separated; it is only because the hearts of men are hard that it has ever been any other way (Matt 19:4-8).

When Jesus himself spoke words to this effect even the disciples said, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry!" (Matt 19:10). The disciples weren't saying that it is better to have casual sex rather than to marry. They were saying that it is better not to have sex at all – for this is marriage, this is eternal, this is binding.

If only young boys and girls were taught that sex was a lifelong bonding before they ever had sex, then perhaps they would think a little more seriously before 'experimenting' with what they think is only a little sin – or no sin at all.

Pray for the young people you minister to in this regard, and love them. Pray that you yourself are not tempted to go the easy way and teach that this couple can righteously separate. And if you are the parent of a pre-teenage child, who is yet to have sex, then pray for that child, and talk regularly with them about these things. This is the age when children *do* hear about sex and marriage, and when they do begin to form their ideas and opinions, and start to think about their own future.

If you can 'get in' there to your pre-teenage children and start to teach them about sex and marriage you will be doing a wonderful thing. Tell them that sex really will make a big difference in their lives, and that it really will affect them for many years to come. Perhaps then a child will have a better future marriage than many of his or her peers, and may not become so damaged by sexual misuse as so many others are today.

This eBook is now available in both paperback and hard cover.

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