

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.

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