

# The Marriage Bond

Words in all capitals are Greek words. For brevity, the scriptures for every point made are not always cited but are understood among mature Bible students in those cases. For the purpose of discussion, the divorce under consideration is only of those rightfully married by divine law.

## I. Discussion Scenarios

The discussion is best set forward by illustrations (which are not hypothetical by any means).

Scenario #1: A husband learns that his wife has committed adultery, but he expresses his decision to not put her away but to retain her as his wife and does so. Some time later, (the time is indefinite and without limits) he decides to change his mind and put her away for that adultery after all. Besides, she is no longer behaving in a godly manner, flirting with other men and talking inappropriately with them, but to his best knowledge she has not actually committed fornication again. Does he have the right to put her away?

Another scenario to consider comes up as a result of discussion:

Scenario #2: A husband learns that his wife has committed adultery, but he is undecided whether to divorce or keep her. He therefore does not express his intention either way, but he nevertheless continues cohabitating with her, participating in the sexual privileges as one who had fully decided to reconcile. Some time later, (the time is indefinite and without limits) he declares that he has made up his mind and expresses his intention to put her away for that adultery after all. Besides, she is no longer behaving in a godly manner, flirting with other men and talking inappropriately with them, but to his best knowledge she has not actually committed fornication again. Has he retained his right to put her away?

## II. The Nature of the Marriage Relationship

### A. Physical and spiritual union

Marriage is a physical, civil union between consenting adults. "Civil" does not necessarily mean with legal documents, unless such is available to them via secular government. It here means formally and publically acknowledged at human will, which will include papers if law allows. Likewise, divorcing is a physical, civil action executed by men: a legal dissolution of the marriage. Scripture indicates that what God does in this is a spiritual binding or loosing. God's binding or loosing does not necessarily conform to man's marrying and divorcing. However, when a couple, eligible by divine law, marries, God joins them for life, as of yoked oxen unable to free themselves, (SUZEUGNUMI), and they are not to put this asunder (CHORIZO, to separate, divide, depart). They are thus bound to one another (DEO): a fastening together as by shackles and chains (Acts 12:6) or as a corpse wrapped for burial (Jn 11:44).

### B. Covenant

Marriage is also a divine covenant. This covenant is a formal agreement between mutually consenting parties, ratified before God and men. Every covenant has tangible terms and conditions set forth. The covenant contains a description of rights, benefits, and privileges to which only those who have committed themselves to the terms, conditions, and regulations of the covenant have a right. In marriage, the terms established by divine ordinance are that the couple have the right to sexual intimacy with each other alone only if both parties have vowed to be committed for life. It is a package deal; you cannot have one without the other. The terms further state that this bond is broken by death. The terms also implicate that the innocent party in a marriage affected by fornication is freed from his bond and has the right to either reconcile the marriage bond or not reconcile the marriage bond. It is his choice.

#### 1. The unique privilege in marriage

The right to sexual intimacy is a unique privilege of the marriage bond. All other privileges of marriage, such as living together, eating together, travelling together, raising children together, and caring for one another are not unique to marriage but can be privileges of other wholesome relationships as well.

Unmarried people can lawfully do these things. However, scripture makes clear that, only when bound in marriage, the privilege of sexual intimacy is lawfully granted. Physical sexual intimacy is the one and only thing couples must be married and bound in order to lawfully partake, and it is the one and only thing that if unlawfully partaken can sever the bond.

## **2. The unique obligation in marriage**

Marriage is described in scripture as a one-flesh relationship: a sharing in all aspects of life to its fullest extent. However, other relationships in scripture are also described as a cleaving together, being soul-knit or wrapped up in one another: Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:14-17), David and Jonathan (1 Sam 18:1-4), Jacob and Benjamin (Gen 44:30). However, being not lawfully married, these had no right to sexual intimacy. Moreover, they entered their relationships with no divine bond, so their relationships could just as easily be ended at will. Marriage, however, is a unique oneness because a divine bond which cannot be severed is formed. This bond or obligation divinely appointed in marriage is this: commitment for a lifetime. Only when the couple vows to be committed until death, the honeymoon bed is permissible. There's no other kind of marriage relationship ordained by God; no temporary or trial arrangements are sanctioned.

Other New Testament language also compliments this. Jesus said a husband and wife are to "cleave" to one another (Matt 19: 5, 6). The word means to glue together or closely join. Since Jesus describes it as "one flesh," this joining is like a fusing or welding process where two distinct parts are no longer evident. He goes on to say of this divine joining, "Let no man separate." This edict is in the imperative mood, which means it is not merely a request, but man is indeed powerless to loose what God almighty would bind.

The apostle Paul makes a clear connection between the sex act and being "one flesh" in marriage (1 Cor 6:15, 16, 18). The man joining himself to a harlot has no intention of sharing a lifetime "one flesh" commitment with her. In joining to her, he has taken a thing that God has ordained to be exclusively part of a special one flesh lifetime relationship and profaned it. These scriptures indicate that sexual union is much more than merely an expression of love or gratification of the flesh; it is also a declaration from each to the other that they will remain committed to one another and cleave together until parted by death. Without such "one flesh" commitment in marriage, sexual joining is fornication, as would be done with a harlot. Moreover, lifetime commitment in sexual union is God's design to help ensure that children are born into stable homes (1 Cor 7:13, 14).

## **C. Difference between married and divorced, bound and loosed**

Since Adam, marrying and divorcing are the physical, civil actions of men and women alone at their own free will (Matt 24:38). Whether or not God approves does not change the fact that they really are civilly married or divorced (Mark 6:17, 18). Binding and loosing are the spiritual actions of God alone in accordance to His law (Matt 19:6) and do not necessarily coincide with the civil marrying and divorcing of men and women (Rom 7:2-4). Therefore, it is not correct to think that, if the couple are still legally married, they are still necessarily bound. Neither is it correct to think that if they are no longer legally married, they are necessarily loosed. One condition does not always necessarily imply the other.

## **III. Responsibilities in Marriage**

### **A. Domestic responsibility**

Marriage comes with many responsibilities on both parties. In summary, the wife is obligated to love, respect, care for, and obey her husband. The husband is obligated to cherish, honor, protect, and provide for his wife. These mutual responsibilities are designed to help meet the physical, spiritual, and psychological needs of each. However, these things have nothing to do with the covenant bond. The bond is formed whether or not these responsibilities are met. The covenant stipulates that failure in these things is not a lawful cause for putting away and therefore does not loose the covenant bond.

## **B. Sexual responsibility**

The mutual responsibilities of sexual union in a marriage are unique in this regard: scripture indicates that failure in this matter can become a lawful cause for divorce. 1 Corinthians 7:2-5 touches on this responsibility. The instruction is for the couple to not hold back sexual contact from each other, except by mutual consent for spiritual purposes. Moreover, this period of sexual separation is to be limited so that neither one is tempted to fornicate, which would normally be lawful cause for divorce. In essence, it says not to separate, because it will lead to fornication.

## **C. Sexual responsibility suspended**

Matthew 5:32 touches on this responsibility as well. Note that if the exception clause is temporarily removed from the Lord's statement (a legitimate linguistic method for examining exception clauses), then when one party puts the other away, he causes her to commit adultery, due to the fact that, as sexual relations between them cease, if she would sexually join another, adultery occurs because they are still bound before God (Rom 7:3). Now, when the exception clause is put back in, he is clearly not responsible for causing her to commit adultery, if she has committed fornication. Jesus says the innocent party has the right to put the other away. Since she has committed fornication, violating the covenant in such a way that has been stipulated as being just cause to end the marriage, he no longer has the obligation to fulfill her sexual urges. She forfeits that by her iniquity, since Jesus said he can "put away his wife."

### **1. "Putting away"**

In this passage, many earlier English translations say, "put away," but other, later versions say "divorce." The word "divorce" has the primary English meaning of a legal dissolution of marriage, which such specific a meaning Jesus might not have intended. However, our English word "divorce" also means, more generically, a separation, as in divorcing oneself from an idea or teaching. Interestingly, the word here used by Jesus, ΑΠΟΛΥΟ, has the meaning, "1) to set free 2) to let go, dismiss, (to detain no longer) 2a) a petitioner to whom liberty to depart is given by a decisive answer 2b) to bid depart, send away 3) to let go free, release 3a) a captive i.e. to loose his bonds and bid him depart, to give him liberty to depart 3b) to acquit one accused of a crime and set him at liberty 3c) indulgently to grant a prisoner leave to depart 3d) to release a debtor, i.e. not to press one's claim against him, to remit his debt 4) used of divorce, to dismiss from the house, to repudiate. The wife of a Greek or Roman may divorce her husband. 5) to send one's self away, to depart" (Thayer). In 26 verses in the New American Standard, ΑΠΟΛΥΟ is translated "divorce." In the remainder of the 63 verses where the word is used, it is translated "send away," "release," or the like. It is said to be used of divorce (assuming the legal aspect) but not that the word actually means legal divorce. Nothing in the context forces us to conclude that Jesus uses this word in the specific and limited meaning of divorcement in the legal sense. (Certainly, if any would want to remarry, all the legal matters would need to be executed to abide by civil law to the extent it does not conflict the divine). Moreover, if Jesus had intended only the specific, legal sense, the word ΑΠΟΣΤΑΣΙΟΝ, meaning "1) divorce, repudiation 2) a bill of divorce" (Thayer) was at His disposal, as He used in verse 31.

The message of Jesus seems to be simple enough. He is not merely saying not to get a legal divorce, but He is saying not to put away or send away in any manner, and that includes legal divorce, living separately, withholding sex, legal separation, or any other like thing; don't do any of it. In all practicality, the legal document is not what tempts a man to fornicate but the withholding of sex.

### **2. Harmonizing scripture**

Therefore, 1 Corinthians 7:2-5 and Matthew 5:32 with their exception clauses removed say essentially the same thing: do not separate, because it will lead to fornication. In order to harmonize all scripture, the exception clause of Matthew 5:32 must be applied to Mark 10:11, 12 and Luke 16:18. Likewise, it must also be applied to 1 Corinthians 7:2-5 as well. Otherwise, the scriptures are in contradiction. By the same rights, the exception clause of 1 Corinthians 7:5 must also be applied to Matthew 5:32. In other words, if the couple mutually agrees to separate for a limited time for fasting and prayer, they have not violated the Lord's instructions in Matthew 5:32.

The significance of all this is that the innocent party in a marriage affected by fornication is relieved of his responsibility to continue fulfilling the sexual needs of his adulterous wife. The instructions of 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 are not applicable for the innocent party if fornication is known. The situation is

certainly cause for pause and prayer to help him make the right choice, but the mandate to come together again is not in force upon him due to the exclusion allowed in Matthew 5:32 for her fornication. He can indefinitely withhold sexual contact with no time limit.

## **IV. Creating the marriage bond**

When a couple marries, they openly vow before God and men to such an undertaking, conforming to the social norms and civil legalities as secular law would avail, which is technically ratification of the marriage covenant, and God automatically and immediately binds them. They are already bound for a lifetime commitment, even before they reach the honeymoon bed. Fundamentally, sex does not consummate a marriage union. (It is possible for couples to be nonetheless lawfully married who, due to physical deformities, are incapable of sexual intimacy). Marriage is consummated when they, among the other things, have given their solemn word. The right to sexual union is the result and the evidence of the lifetime bond already in place, not the cause of it.

### **A. The true meaning of bondage**

The original word, DEO, according to Thayer, means "1) to bind tie, fasten 1a) to bind, fasten with chains, to throw into chains 1b) metaph. 1b1) Satan is said to bind a woman bent together by means of a demon, as his messenger, taking possession of the woman and preventing her from standing upright 1b2) to bind, put under obligation, of the law, duty etc. 1b2a) to be bound to one, a wife, a husband 1b3) to forbid, prohibit, declare to be illicit." It is the opposite of LUO, which means, "1) to loose any person (or thing) tied or fastened 1a) bandages of the feet, the shoes, 1b) of a husband and wife joined together by the bond of matrimony 1c) of a single man, whether he has already had a wife or has not yet married 2) to loose one bound, i.e. to unbind, release from bonds, set free 2a) of one bound up (swathed in bandages) 2b) bound with chains (a prisoner), discharge from prison, let go 3) to loosen, undo, dissolve, anything bound, tied, or compacted together..." (Thayer).

#### **1. Unable to become free**

Mentioned earlier, the word for the marriage bond is used of prisoners locked up in shackles with chains. Being able to free oneself from a bond is legitimately and scripturally illustrated as being given the key (KLEIS) to the binding shackles (Matt 16:19). A prisoner with the key to his cell door is not actually restrained. There is a profound and undeniable practical difference between one bound with shackles but he holds the key and another so bound without the key. A fundamental principle of this binding, (DEO) by definition, is the inability to free oneself. If he has the ability to set himself free, he is not truly bound (DEO) in any practical sense.

Let's examine the usage of DEO in scripture. When Lazarus came out of his tomb, he was bound with burial wrappings. Jesus told those standing by, "Unbind him, and let him go" (Jn 11:44). Lazarus was obviously unable to free himself. An infirmed woman "could in no way raise herself up" until Jesus loosed her from that bond (Luke 13:11-16). Peter needed divine assistance to become free from his prison bond, as he was unable to do it on his own (Acts 12:6-7). Also, a demon-possessed man is described as one who could not be bound, not even with chains (Mark 5:3). Sure, they could fasten the chains on him, but he always had the ability to break himself free, which is why Mark explains that, even with the fetters in place, he still was not actually bound in any meaningful or practical sense (vs 4).

#### **2. Used metaphorically of the marriage obligation**

When used metaphorically, as is the case with marriage, the word indicates an obligation and duty as under law. By this word, Paul expresses his unwavering commitment to go to Jerusalem (Act 20:22). He was not "kind of" committed but fully committed. Similarly, Paul explains that marriage comes with irrevocable obligations to which those bound must be fully devoted (1 Cor 7).

Let's see what is further said about the marriage bond.

- In Romans 7:2, 3, Paul explains that if a married woman marries some other man, she is an adulteress. That is because she is married to one but still bound to another. However, if the first husband dies, she is free from that law and therefore not an adulteress. That is because, by necessity, she is no longer bound to him. Death immediately and automatically severs that bond.

- Likewise, Matthew 19:9 states that, if a man puts away his wife and marries another, he commits adultery. Again, that is because he is married to one but still bound to another. However, if the reason he put her away was because of her fornication, he does not commit adultery. Similarly, it must be that, because of her fornication, he is likewise no longer bound to her.
- Furthermore, Matthew 5:32 states that, if a man puts away his wife, he causes her to commit adultery. That is because he is under obligation to fulfill her sexual needs, and if he doesn't, he shares her guilt (1 Cor 7). However, if the reason he put her away was because of her fornication, he does not cause her to commit adultery. It can only be that, because of her fornication, he is no longer under obligation to fulfill her sexual needs.

### **3. To bind is to make illicit**

Another notable aspect of DEO, according to Thayer is "to forbid, prohibit, declare to be illicit," that is, to make unlawful. DEO indicates restricting, making illicit; LUO indicates liberating, setting free. For example, in Matthew 16:19, Jesus explains that, in the kingdom, Peter will declare some things to be permitted or lawful (LUO) and some things to be illicit or unlawful (DEO). Things illicit in the marriage bond is for one to put the other away (Matt 19:6) and that one would withhold from the other the sexual privilege (Matt 5:32; 1 Cor 7:3-5). However, Jesus stipulates that, for the cause of fornication, such putting away is not illicit. If putting away is no longer illicit, then it must be that he is no longer bound.

## **V. Breaking the marriage bond**

### **A. The effect of fornication**

Conclusively, the very moment he obtains knowledge of her fornication, he is immediately at liberty to put her away (with or without legal action), and he is at that moment no longer under binding commitment to her. Therefore, it must be that the known fornication immediately and automatically looses the bond. It is equally valid to consider the one able to lawfully put away in Matthew 5 as being civilly married but not bound and to consider the one not able to lawfully put away in Romans 7 as being civilly divorced but not loosed.

Therefore, if the innocent party simply has the ability to free himself, he is not actually bound (DEO) in any real or practical sense. Otherwise, a type of hybrid marriage would be the result, where one would be "sort of" bound. To be under commitment until he decides to be no longer under commitment is "kind of" commitment but not real lifetime commitment. God's word does not indicate the possibility of any probational, contingent, temporary, or experimental bond of commitment in a marriage.

Moreover, if a man is truly bound in marriage by divine law, then he MUST fulfill the sexual needs of his wife (1 Cor 7:3-5); it would not be his possible option but his duty. However, if we agree that God's law permits him, even while still civilly married, to so withhold sexual contact with her because of her fornication (Matt 5:32) rather than only for consensual fasting and prayer (1 Cor 7:5), then we must agree that he no longer has this obligation. If he no longer has this obligation, he is no longer bound; the bond is the obligation. Otherwise, he is only "kind of" bound. Scripture indicates no other conclusion.

### **B. Knowledge required**

For clarification, consider the possible time lapse between the actual committing of the fornication and when it becomes known to the innocent spouse. All reasonable law must have practical applicability. For example, if a parent gives his child a prohibition, that child is subject to punishment the moment he disobeys. However, it is impossible for the parent to justifiably punish unless he knows. Once the parent knows, then things really change, and what the parent actually does or does not do about it right then speaks volumes (1 Sam 3:13). Now look at God's law: "...whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery" (Matthew 5:32). It is intrinsically impossible to put your wife away for the reason of fornication unless you know she committed fornication. You cannot divorce on a hunch. Jesus did not say "saving for the cause of suspected fornication" or "saving for the cause of probable fornication." The moment the fornication is committed, the innocent party would have the right to put away, if he only knew. The forced conclusion is that this right must be known before it can be exercised. If the innocent party does not know, he is by no means consenting. God cannot justifiably hold us accountable for something that has not been revealed. This is a basic principle of law

well developed in the epistles (1 Cor 2:9-16; Eph 3:2-5 Col 1:25-28; 2 Pet 2:21). If he suspects that she is unfaithful or thinks the probability is likely, he has good reason to investigate more closely, but he does not have the right to defraud or divorce (1 Cor 7:3-5). Once he knows, however, he is accountable for his actions.

## **VI. Reconciling the Marriage Bond**

### **A. Definition of reconciliation**

Reconciliation (KATALLASSO) by definition is the restoration back to the original state of harmony in any relationship damaged by some offence that produces enmity. Implied by this definition are several unavoidable conclusions:

- In order for reconciliation to occur, enmity must have been introduced and must be removed.
- Some kind of action must take place to remove the enmity; it does not arbitrarily go away on its own.
- The many differing relationships and modes of enmity among men will all have differing terms and conditions, hence the action which removes enmity in one relationship is not necessarily that which removes enmity in every relationship.
- When the enmity is removed and the original state restored, the enmity cannot be later reactivated, else the relationship is not truly back in its original state.

These points are illustrated by the following examples.

### **B. Examples**

#### **1. A business relationship**

Consider a business relationship between men where one party provides goods or services for which the other party is to pay. All may be harmonious until the one party does not pay as agreed; enmity between them is the result. The other party would justifiably not be willing to do business any further with him until the offender perhaps regains his trust or pays what is owed. Once the payment or some other restitution is made, the offended party might no longer have reason not to resume doing business, unless he somehow causes enmity again.

#### **2. Our relationship to God**

When we are newborn infants, we stand before God sinless and justified: in a good relationship with Him. When we become old enough to sin and do so, our sin separates us from God. Our relationship to Him is then characterized by enmity (Jas 4:4). Paul explains that the blood of Christ abolishes and puts to death the enmity, which allows reconciliation (Eph 2:12-19, Col 1:20-22). Scripture makes clear the necessary things we must do in this relationship to contact the atoning blood of Christ and be reconciled to Him: have faith, repent of sins, confess Christ, and be baptized. At that very moment, the enmity between us is utterly destroyed, never to be held to our charge again, and we are placed once more in the standing we had when we were infants. God's justice does not allow Him to arbitrarily change His mind and again hold sin against us once He has forgiven it, unless, of course, we again do sin, bringing enmity into the relationship once more.

#### **3. A marriage relationship**

Fornication is not the enmity itself but the cause of it. The enmity is the fact that the marriage is no longer as God ordained it to be: with an unseverable lifetime bond of commitment. There are many ways to violate trust or create enmity in a marriage, such as by neglect or abuse, but only for fornication does God cause the lifetime commitment to cease. This is enmity indeed. Such a marriage without commitment cannot move forward with God's approval until the commitment is restored and the enmity is removed. Moreover, even if the sin of fornication is forgiven and taken away, the innocent party could

still have the right to put away. As long as he maintains the right to put away, the relationship is not restored to its former state. If the relationship is not restored, the enmity is still in effect.

## **C. When does the marriage bond reconciliation actually occur?**

Once the bond is loosed, restoring the bond is simply the reconciliation whereby the enmity is removed and the relationship restored to exactly what it was before: an irrevocable lifetime commitment with accompanying sexual privileges. The right to sex is the effect and therefore evidence that one has already reconciled, renewing his commitment and thereby surrendering his right to put away. Otherwise, a perverted marriage is the result, where the God-ordained and unique privilege of the covenant is allowed without the God-ordained and unique commitment of the covenant. Scripture allows no such arrangement. The question is: when and how is the enmity abolished in such a marriage?

### **1. Abolishing the enmity**

There is undeniably emotional shock in the discovery of fornication. That which was regarded as trust, sanctity, and honor is now suddenly deceit, profanity, and insult. If the innocent party has any decency and regard for morality, such knowledge results in utter indignation, disgust, and disappointment for him. The very thought of sexual intimacy with her would likely be revolting, since such would be an expression of his lifetime devotion to her. If he does unite with her, therefore, it can only be evidence beyond doubt that her fornication is not an issue with him and that the enmity has been cast aside. If the enmity is removed, reconciliation has necessarily occurred. As stated previously, the enmity is the ability for one to free himself. If the enmity is put away, it must be that he has decided, for whatever reasons, that he can go on with her and is willing to again permanently commit to her for the remainder of this life, which is the divine nature of the marriage bond. Referring to a previous analogy, reconciliation is throwing away the key to the shackles! Only then is the bond truly back to what it previously was.

Note that the sex act itself is not what produces reconciliation; sex is the evidence of the reconciliation already accomplished. If they are lawfully participating in sex, it can only be that they are committed for life, or it would otherwise be fornication. As stated previously, lawful sex is not the consummation of a marriage in the first place but evidence of the lifetime bond; so also for the reconciliation of a marriage. As they enter the marriage bond when they give their solemn word, then they are also reconciled by giving their word. When the innocent party gives his word to reconcile, he is saying that he is putting to death the enmity and accepting the irrevocable bond of lifetime commitment as before. At that moment, even if sexual intimacy has not yet been performed, he is reconciled, since his "yes" is to be "yes," and his "no" is to be "no."

Our discussion scenario #1 concerns an innocent party who doesn't give his word to reconcile but says he is undecided, yet he assumes the sexual privileges of one who has decidedly committed. Remember that the sexual privilege is the exclusive right only for those bound for life in a one-flesh commitment. If a man says "I will reconcile," he must resume sexual privileges. If he says "I will not reconcile," he must not resume sexual privileges. If he says "I am undecided," he has no right to the privileges reserved exclusively for those who have decided to reconcile and commit for life.

### **2. Choosing a right and privilege with words or actions**

This is not a matter of choosing between one thing or something else of equal position with the reserved third option of choosing not to decide, like choosing between getting the chocolate ice cream, the vanilla ice cream, or none at all. The choice to reconcile or not reconcile a marriage bond is a matter of choosing to do something or choosing not to do that thing, like choosing to get ice cream or to not get ice cream.

For another example, a U. S. citizen has the right to bear arms. In this he also has the right to choose not to bear arms, like anyone else. If he is undecided whether or not to bear arms, he will not purchase a gun, because purchasing a gun is the action only of a man who has made the decision to exercise that right. However, by being undecided or by choosing not to bear arms, he has still not forfeited his right to bear arms. He can always make up his mind or change his mind at any future point and buy a gun.

However, it is absurd to consider a man who says he has not yet decided whether he will bear arms, but he then goes and buys a gun. He cannot have a gun and not have a gun at the same time. His actions contradict his words. What he actually does says more than what he merely says. Regardless of what

this man says, his actions are indisputable evidence that he has decided to exercise his right to bear arms. (The analogy would more perfectly fit a marriage option if civil law said once you begin to bear arms you must always bear arms. Most analogies break down at some point, but this does not negate the illustration; we must take simply the lesson to be learned).

## **D. When Actions Say Something Inconsistent With Spoken Words**

We recognize that the innocent party in discussion scenario #1 might at first lie about his feelings and hold on to the enmity in his heart. However, if he continues cohabitation with her, then he has assumed the role and privilege that belongs exclusively to those devoted to each other in a lifetime bond of commitment, which would preclude any such enmity. If he later expresses what he claims were his true feelings all along, he is absolutely no different than the man in scenario #2, who simply expresses his feelings of indecision from the beginning of the ordeal. Whether he expresses it later or sooner does not matter. In either case, we have a man whose actions reveal something quite different from his words.

Scripture makes clear that the actions of a man, not his words, reveal the truth within his heart (Matthew 7:20, 21; John 8:39; James 2:15-18; Titus 1:16; 1 John 3:17, 18). Note that Jesus does not say "you will know them by their words," but "by their fruits." Their fruits are their deeds.

Consider the parable of the vine grower with two sons to whom he said, "Go work today in my vineyard" (Matt 21:28). They each have only two choices that day: either they will work in the vineyard or they will not. Effectively, choosing not to decide is not an option. If one son says "I'm undecided," but the day expires with him never working in the vineyard, we know his true answer, regardless of his words. On the other hand, if he says "I'm undecided" and then goes and works, he is no different from the son who says "I will not" and then goes and works or a son who says "I will" and then goes and works. The teaching of Jesus is the same for us regardless of how we examine it: the actual doing of a thing is what truly reveals the intentions of the heart, not mere spoken words. As the adage goes: "actions speak louder than words."

To apply these principles in reconciling a marriage, that which the innocent party actually does is more significant than what he says or refuses to say. In essence, if he takes her back, it says he has made his choice, regardless of what words come from his mouth. To assume the privilege is to assume the commitment; they are inseparable. If he says one thing but does another, his actions are the true indicator. Contradictive reasoning in this matter is abusive, and God will have no toleration for it.

If men deal deceitfully with men, God knows, and God judges for sure, but this does not excuse us from acting as God directs us on the basis of what is revealed. Otherwise, we could never judge righteous judgment, and we would be at the mercy of manipulative men. Conclusively, if a man shows evidence that he has reconciled by his actions, assuming the sexual privileges, which are an exclusive manifestation of such, then he actually has reconciled. Mere words on his part cannot change this fact.

### **1. Consider the alternative**

If the doctrine is true which says the innocent party retains his right to put away regardless of his actions until such time as he speaks the words "I put you away" or the like, then it would be best for the innocent party to simply never say he has decided. This way, he goes on with his marriage privileges indefinitely, yet he has a get-out-of-marriage-for-free ticket for the rest of his life, which he can use at any future time as he would consider to be to his favor. This is absurd, and it defies God's divine design of lifetime commitment in marriage.

## **VII. Repentance**

The role of repentance in reconciling a marriage needs to be examined, because the innocent party in most adultery situations among Christians will not be willing to reconcile unless he is convinced his fornicating spouse has a change of heart and is sincerely sorry for her actions. Notwithstanding, scripture nowhere indicates that a person's penitence, sincerity, or lack thereof have any effect on the permanence of the divine bond placed upon them in marriage.



## A. Penitence in marriage

To illustrate, suppose a man is considering to marry a woman with a sinful past. Perhaps she had been sleeping around with different men but now appears to be changing her ways. He might state that he would be willing to marry her if she would repent of that lifestyle. If he decides to marry her, he is bound to her regardless. If he starts feeling like he has made a mistake, he cannot go back and utilize her former fornications (which he has already disregarded) as grounds for divorce. Even if she starts running around drinking and dancing at night clubs, her apparent insincerity and failure to produce fruits of repentance does not give him the right to change his mind about being married to her and put her away. Only for fornication committed again can he do that.

## B. Penitence in marriage reconciliation

The same is true in reconciling a marriage affected by fornication. The innocent party might say he would be willing to keep her as his wife if she will repent. He may even wait as long as he wants before cohabitating with her to see if she produces fruits of repentance before reconciling. He has a right to do this. However, if he decides to keep her and goes on with her as before, he is bound to her as before, regardless. If her actions begin to indicate she has no desire for him or that she is insincere, he cannot go back and utilize her former fornication as grounds for divorce. Only if she commits fornication again would he have the right to put her away, but even that would not absolutely prove she was insincere in her former repentance. Scripture simply does not allow him to place additional exceptions and conditions beyond what God has ordained.

The point is this: as a man can marry in the first place any woman who will have him, regardless how vile, ungodly, insincere, and impenitent she may be, he can also reconcile with such a woman, and he is stuck with her just the same.

## C. Scriptural example

There are some things to be learned from the example divorce in 1 Corinthians 7:10, 11. First, we know this woman is divorced, because she is instructed to otherwise remain unmarried. Also, though she is the one doing the departing, she is being forced to do so. We know this because the word "depart" (CHORIZO) is passive voice in both verses, which indicates she is the recipient of the action. We would use this in English of a man being forced to depart from his burning house; he has no real choice about doing it. This is the same word and voice used of Aquila and Priscilla being made to depart from Rome by imperial command (Acts 18:2). The true import is revealed in English with the addition of the necessary helping verb (underlined):

*<sup>10</sup>And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife have to depart from her husband: <sup>11</sup>But and if she have to depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.*

The final instruction for the husband to not put away (APHIEMI) is active voice and is a statement of the same import but addressing the husband and his actions in the matter. Nevertheless, if she is no longer his wife and is made to depart, the forced conclusion is that he has divorced her. Whether or not he does this with lawful cause (her fornication) is not revealed but is beside the point; she must remain unmarried either way. Her only other option is to be reconciled to him. Is repentance required for this to occur?

Consider that he divorced her without lawful cause. She would have nothing to repent of, and he would not have to repent of unlawfully divorcing her to be reconciled to her. Perhaps he realizes his life without her is worse than before and remarries her just to have someone to cook and clean for him. There's no godly sorrow in that, but they are reconciled nonetheless.

Now consider that he divorced her for her fornication. If she repents, he still has the right to not reconcile with her; her repentance does not take away the enmity. Notwithstanding, even if she refuses to repent, he still has the right to dismiss the enmity and reconcile with her, no matter how ill-advised that may be.

Repentance is conclusively not a requirement in reconciling a marriage affected by fornication.

## VIII. Circumstantial Concerns

### A. No special law for non-Christians

God's law for marriage is the same for non-Christians as for Christians. We cannot claim that since repentance is required to reconcile our personal relationship with God that it is also required in reconciling a marriage. Besides, there is much more required of us than repentance to be reconciled to God. If repentance is made to be a requirement in reconciling a marriage, then faith, confession, and baptism must also be part of that process. Then, the only way a non-Christian can reconcile in marriage would be to first become a faithful Christian. This requires more than the relationship demands.

Moreover, we are not to assume the elders of a church have the responsibility to work through all the interpersonal dynamics and analyze the circumstances and situations unique to each case and make a ruling. If the husband and wife are not Christians, they will have no elders to perform this task for them. The same is true if they are Christians, and their church has no elders. Anyway, this is not the job of elders, instead, God has performed the binding, and He will determine the loosing.

### B. Emotions involved

In fact, there is truly nothing to analyze. The Holy Spirit indicates through the scriptures the following simple facts to be true without doubt or uncertainty:

- If the innocent party has evidence of fornication, he is freed of his obligation to her and may put her away,
- Nothing else gives him this right,
- If he reconciles, he reconciles, and his right to put away is ended.

It doesn't matter if he later regrets his decision, or if the reconciled spouse starts making his life miserable, or if he feels he cannot emotionally cope with the situation, or anything else other than fornication. Domestic harmony or disharmony in the home is not what determines the permanence of the marriage bond. Commitment in marriage as ordained by God demands that he sticks to it, unless fornication again occurs. There is nothing uncompassionate or uncaring in this; abiding in the law of God is always in the best interest of all parties involved.

### C. Personalities involved

Note the follow-up remarks Jesus makes concerning adultery and the marriage bond:

*Matthew 19:9-12 "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." His disciples said to Him, "If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry." But He said to them, "All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given: For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it."*

When Jesus says, "All cannot accept this saying;... he who is able to accept it, let him accept it," he does not mean we have the option on the basis of our own viewpoint, personality, experience, or opinion to accept or reject that the marriage bond is a lifetime commitment (Jn 12:48). Instead, He is saying we all have the option to choose whether or not to commit ourselves in marriage in the first place. Marriage is a free will choice, but that kind of commitment is not for everyone. It was not for Paul, but it was for others (1 Cor 7:7-9). Herein is the scriptural application of the role of individual mannerisms and personalities. However, Jesus undeniably makes the mutual connection between lifetime commitment and partaking in the sexual privilege. If a man feels like he can't handle the commitment, celibacy must be his lot; if the sexual privilege is to be lawfully accepted, it comes with a price of lifetime commitment. Once accepted, there's no turning back. There are no other scriptural choices. Jesus' disciples picked up right away on

the serious life-long consequences in making a bad choice of whom to become bound to in marriage (vs 10).

By the very same principle, reconciliation is not for everyone. The innocent party has the free-will choice to reconcile or not reconcile. As we previously discussed, that doesn't mean he doesn't forgive her or perhaps no longer loves her. If, because of his unique personality, mannerisms, and experience, he does not feel comfortable accepting again that kind of commitment, he should simply not reconcile. If he so chooses, celibacy with her must be his lot. If he would wish for some reason not to be celibate with her, lifetime commitment must be his lot. God's law simply makes no allowance for one without the other, and once accepted, there's no turning back. The scriptures indicate no secondary law to govern a reconciled marriage bond differently from any other marriage bond. God has only one arrangement for the marriage bond.

## **IX. Summary and Conclusions**

The following primary points are reiterated:

There is no lawful right to mutual sexual intimacy unless the couple are both married and bound. To be bound means to be under obligation, unable to put the other away. Once fornication is known, the innocent spouse can put away, meaning he is no longer bound nor under obligation. Only when his marriage bond is restored and his right to put away removed, the right to sexual intimacy is restored.

If the innocent spouse chooses to put away, he can always and forever change his mind and reconcile. However, once he chooses to reconcile, he can never change his mind and put away. Resuming sexual privilege is clear evidence of reconciliation, since the privilege is only for those with lifetime commitment. If they are committed for life, they cannot lawfully put away. If they cannot put away, the original conditions are restored. If original conditions are restored, the enmity is abolished. If enmity is abolished, reconciliation has occurred.

The matter is illustrated by the diagram that follows:

