

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

The “Fornication Dilemma”

I believe that properly defining terms is of the greatest importance. It has been said that a proposition well defined is half-argued. A good debater will always define the terms of the proposition at the beginning of his first speech.

“Fornication” Defined

The word “*fornication*” is from the Greek word *pornea* and defined by *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* in the noun form: “(a) of illicit sexual intercourse...(b) metaphorically, of association with pagan idolatry...”

This word is defined as, “*Prostitution, unchastity, fornication, of every kind of unlawful intercourse*” by *Walter A Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament and Early Christian Literature, p. 693*. Thayer says, “*properly of illicit sexual intercourse in general*” (p. 532).

The word “*fornication*” is found in at least 32 verses in the King James Version of the Bible. In the New Testament, this word is used numerous times in referenced to sexual immorality (Rom. 7:1-2).

Of the few times the word “*fornication*” is found in the Old Testament, it is used as an allusion to idolatry (2 Chron. 21:11; Isa. 23:17; Ezek.16:16, 26).

“Dilemma” Defined

Dictionary.com defines the word *dilemma* as: 1) a situation requiring a choice between equally undesirable alternatives; 2) any difficult or perplexing situation or problem.

Abstain from Fornication

There are many passages in the New Testament that warn children of God to avoid this sin. The early Christians were commanded to abstain from fornication (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). Paul rebuked the Corinthian church because they were tolerating a sinful brother among them, saying, “*...and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife*” (1 Cor. 5:3). Paul reminded these same brethren that those who practiced the sin of fornication or any other of the listed sins would not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

The Dilemma

In the article titled, “Divorce and Remarriage: Is It A Church Dilemma?” by brother Dennis C. Abernathy, the point was made that many churches are accepting into their fellowship couples who are in living in adultery. As brother Abernathy so ably pointed out, the only scriptural cause to divorce your mate is for the cause of fornication (Matt. 19:9). Brother Abernathy wrote, “*Realize, too, that there may be children involved and if these people are turned away from the church, the children, more than likely, will grow up alienated from the church. Facing the reality that not many will cease from such a relationship, many of our brethren feel this choice and course of action is too harsh, being void of love and mercy, and is legalistic, therefore unacceptable.*”

Well, the dilemma is more serious now that the “Supreme Court” ruled on June 26th, 2015 that same-sex marriage is “lawful.” When we consider the correct definition of “*fornication*,” all sexual immorality is included, even same-sex marriage. Never forget that God is over man and “*...Peter and the other apostles answered and said, we ought to obey God rather than men*” (Acts 5:29). God is Supreme, not a group of men and women dressed in black robes!

The Principle of the “Whole”

In Galatians 5:3, the apostle Paul set forth an important principle when he wrote, “*For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.*” In this case, some were trying to bind a portion of the law, specifically circumcision and make it a requirement for salvation. To attempt to selectively bind circumcision was condemned by Paul. Likewise, some brethren will try to selectively justify and accept a couple who is living in adultery while condemning and rejecting other forms of sexual immorality.

Attempts to Justify Adulterous Marriages

Many excuses have been made in an attempt to justify couples living in adultery. Some of the failed objections to ending unscriptural marriages are as follows:

“The issue is not that black and white” – What is unclear? The sin of adultery (Matt. 19:9)? Repentance of sins (Acts 17:30, 26:20)? What baptism cleanses (Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:1-3)? What is expected after conversion (Rom. 6:4-6)?

“We can’t be sure” – This was the conclusion of a preacher who was asked the following questions: 1) Do you believe God’s law on marriage is universal in application to believers and unbelievers? 2) Do you believe one put away for the cause of fornication may scripturally remarry? 3) Do you believe repentance demands separation for those unscripturally married? 4) Do you believe 1 Corinthians 7:15 constitutes authority for one who is deserted by an unbeliever to remarry?

The preacher who was asked these questions replied in part by saying, *“I don’t know whether to envy or pity those who are so sure of themselves on this subject...I don’t want to appear rude, but I won’t be specifically answering your questions.”*

So, if we can’t be “so sure” on the questions posed to this preacher, can we be “so sure” on such passages as...

- **Amos 3:3** - **“Can two walk together except they be agreed?”**
- **Matthew 5:20** – **“For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”**
- **Matthew 18:3** – **“...Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”**
- **Luke 13:3** – **“I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”**
- **John 3:2-3** – **“The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”**
- **John 3:5** – **“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”**

How is it that we can be “so sure” and accept and agree on the meaning of the word “except” in the passages above, *except* when we come to the word “except” in Matthew 19:9? Why will you accept “except” in all other Bible passages but will not accept “except” in this “hard saying” of Jesus? Why? Remember, Jesus said, **“...Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.”**

“No one in Acts 2 was told to end their marriage, so we should not do so today” – This quibble is based on silence, so, if some want to go on silence then one could argue on the same basis that those “shacking up” or those in same-sex marriages can stay together since they are not mentioned in Acts 2? The correct definition of repentance explains the same need of all sinners - **“...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...”** (Acts 2:38).

“We can’t undo the sins and mistakes of the past, just move forward from here” – Israel was expected to “undo” sinful marriages in Ezra 9:1-2, 14; 10:1-4, 11-12; even when children were involved (Ezra 10:4). Sinners in Ephesus could “confess” and cease their sinful actions (Acts 19:18-20). God requires every sinner to renounce all sins for Christ (Lk. 14:33; 9:23). And, Paul commanded the Corinthians, who put asunder their marriages to **“remain unmarried, or be reconciled”** (1 Cor. 7:11)!

“Abide in the same calling in which ye were called” – 1 Corinthians 7:20 – Those who make this quibble need to be consistent and apply this rationale to 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. God calls sinners out of sin and not into sin by the Gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). The context of 1 Corinthians 7:20 is non-sinful relationships – **“...as God hath distributed to every man...”** (vs. 17); a righteous marriage to an unbeliever (vss. 12-14). This writing is in the context of keeping the commandments of God (vs. 19). Therefore, one cannot abide in the “calling” of adultery (vs. 20) and adulterers cannot **“abide with God”** while abiding in adultery (vs. 24).

“This is forbidding marriage and commanding divorce” – 1 Timothy 4:3 – The apostle Paul commanded, **“Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband”** (1 Cor. 7:2, emphasis mine). God, by the mouth of John, condemned the marriage of Herod and Herodias because Herodias was **“his bother Phillip’s wife”** and **“he had married her”** (Mk. 6:17-18). Had Abimelech touched Sarah, the wife of Abraham, he would have sinned (Gen. 20:3, 6-7, 14). Was God then forbidding marriage? No! He was forbidding sinful marriage!

Christians are “new creatures” in Christ and must **“put off the old man with his deeds”** and **“put on the new man”** (2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 3:5-10). Christians are to **“walk in newness of life”** and therefore cannot **“continue in sin”** (Rom. 6:1-6). Consequently, adulterers must cease their sinful marriages in order to be saved—repentance demands it (Acts 26:20).

The “Fornication Dilemma”

This is the real dilemma – the “fornication dilemma.” When brethren *accept* and justify one form of fornication, they are obligated to accept all forms of fornication (the principal of the “whole”). So, my brethren, especially those who make numerous quibbles and excuses to justify those living in adulterous marriages, you can’t accept one without accepting the others, even same-sex marriages and all other forms of sexual immorality. So, when you are faced with a homosexual or those in a same-sex marriage, desiring to obey the gospel, what will you say? Will you teach them to cease their sinfulness? If they use the excuses we studied, how will you answer? Remember, you have used them yourself. So, you must *accept* them to be consistent; consistency demands it! But, those who hold to error are not known for being consistent; other than being consistently inconsistent and consistently wrong! — ***tgm*** ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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