

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage: “Bound” and “Loosed”

By Jerry Fite

To be “*bound*” is to be restricted or tied up. Herod physically “*bound*” John and put him in prison (Matt. 14:3). Figuratively, Paul was “*bound in the spirit*,” in the sense that apprehension of the unknown had him tied up (Acts 20:22). By contrast, to be “*loosed*” is to be set free from that which restricts us. The disciples were to “*loose*” the ass which had been tied up (Mk. 11:2, 4). In raising Jesus from the dead, God “*loosed the pains of death*,” for He was not to be “*holden of it*” (Acts 2:24).

The Scriptures speak of husbands and wives being “*bound*” and “*loosed*.” By whom or what is a husband and wife bound? How long are they bound? If two people are not married any longer, are they no longer bound? Can one mate be “*loosed*” while the other mate “*bound*?”

All binding and loosing is done by God in heaven. Jesus promised Peter and the apostles, “*whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*” (Matt. 16:19, 18:18), meaning, the binding and loosing the apostles did in their role as presenting the word of the kingdom, had already been done by God in heaven. All binding or loosing comes first from God and is communicated by law to man.

One is bound by God to a mate in marriage by law. Paul writes, “*For the woman that hath a husband is bound by law to the husband...*” (Rom. 7:2a). Two people may agree to marry one another and enter into a marriage covenant with one another. But God is the third party in the marriage who witnesses the marriage and joins two people who, according to God’s law, have a right to marry one another (Mal. 2:14; Matt. 19:6). Through His law, God obligates the husband and wife to further restrictions. The wife is not bound to the husband only for as long as she wants to consider him her husband, for Paul’s full statement is, “*For the woman that hath a husband is bound by law to the husband while he liveth; but if the husband die, she is discharged from the law of the husband*” (Rom. 7:2). The two are bound by law to one another for life, not just till one or both get tired of one another and desire a new mate.

We sometimes hear people speak of the “marriage bond” in a way that equates marriage with the bond. Some reason that when one ceases to be married to his mate, he also ceases to be bound. Such thinking is unscriptural. For Paul further instructs his readers, “*So then if, while the husband liveth, she be joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if the husband die, she is free from the law, so that she is no adulteress, though she be joined to another man*” (Rom. 7:3). Here is a case in which a woman joins herself in marriage to another man, while her first husband is still living. While she is joined to another man in marriage, she is called an adulteress. Why? Because she is still bound by the restriction of law to her first husband. We know Paul is speaking of being joined in marriage here, and not speaking of some sexual fling, because the woman can be joined to another man and not be called an adulteress. When? She is only loosed from the restrictions of law or ceases to be bound by law to her first husband when he dies.

Even though Herod and Herodias were married to each other, Herodias was still the wife of Philip, and the law condemned Herod having his brother’s wife (Mk. 6:17-18). Herodias was bound to Philip, but married to Herod. Being bound or restricted by law to Philip had not ended just because Herodias left that marriage to enter a new one.

The two Christians in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 are no longer married to one another, for Paul commands the wife to “*remain unmarried*.” But they are still bound to one another or restricted by law to their mate, for they are to “*remain unmarried, or be reconciled*” to one another. They are not married to one another but they are still bound to one another by God’s law.

Others reason that when one is scripturally divorced, being put away for committing fornication (Matt. 19:9), and since God frees the innocent partner, no longer binding him or her for life to the fornicating mate, then, to whom is the guilty fornicator bound? Since the marriage has now ended “*scripturally*,” then so has the “*bond*,” and both parties are free to marry.

Such thinking fails to see that further restrictions of law continues, even after a marriage has ended scripturally. Jesus does allow one to put away or divorce his fornicating spouse, releasing him from being bound to that person till death, and freeing him to marry another (Matt. 19:9). But even after the divorce, the one put away is restricted or bound by law by not being free to marry another, for Jesus adds, “*...and he that marrieth her when she is put away committeth adultery*” (Matt. 19:9b; cf. Matt. 5:32; Mk. 10:11; Lk. 16:18). The reason that the new sexual relationship in marriage would be adultery for the one put away for fornication is not because the first marriage has not ended scripturally, for it has, but because the one put away is still under the restriction of law, and is not loosed to marry another. Seeing we are bound by law even after the marriage has ended, we can understand that one can be “*loosed*” from the restrictions of law and be free to remarry, while the one put away for fornication is still “*bound*” to his mate, in the sense he is not “*loosed*” to marry another while the one to whom he is bound is still alive.

Failing to see the scriptural distinction between being bound and married, some have tried to justify the guilty fornicator's remarriage by appealing to 1 Corinthians 7:27-28: "**Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from wife? seek not a wife. But shouldest thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned.**" Hasn't the marriage ended, and hasn't one been loosed from his wife when she put him away for fornication? Yes, the marriage has ended, but the wife's action in ending the marriage does not determine if one is loosed or bound. Remember, we are bound "by law" to our mates, and that law continues to bind or restrict one or more of the spouses even when they are no longer married to one another.

In 1 Corinthians 7:25-40, Paul is discussing marriage in the context of virgins and widows. Even though Paul advises against people entering into marriage during trying times for the Christian (1 Cor. 7:26), he makes it very plain that if the virgin and widow enter into marriage they have not sinned.

Paul says if you are "**loosed from a wife, seek not a wife.**" Those "**loosed**" would include the male who has never been married, and a widower. Thayer, in his Greek-English Lexicon comments about the term "*luo*" (loosed), as, "*spoken of a single man, whether he has already had a wife, or has not yet been married, 1 Cor. 7:27*" (p. 384). Certainly the context would allow for the man who has never married, because the virgin is referred to as "*she*," and the one who would be talked about just preceding her would quite naturally be the "male" counterpart of a virgin, or a man who has never married and therefore is "**loosed from a wife.**" Also, in verse 39, the widow is referred to: "**A wife is bound as for so long time as her husband liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is free to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.**" So, certainly the male counterpart, the widower, would be loosed from a wife by law, and therefore free to remarry. But where in this context do you find the person who has been put away or divorced? Since the binding and loosing is done by God, and communicated to us through His law, where in God's law does God loose the put away person to marry another? Remember, only the person who is loosed according to God's law can marry. Nowhere does God free the put away fornicator to marry another while the one he or she is bound to by law still lives.

Certainly, Paul does not speak of the guilty fornicator in 1 Corinthians 7:15 when he writes, "**Yet if the unbelieving departeth, let him depart: the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us in peace.**" But someone might say that the person here is divorced, and because he or she is "**not under bondage**" then the divorced person is free from the restrictions of the law in marriage, and can therefore remarry.

It is apparent here that the unbeliever no longer wants to be married to the believer, because the believer has begun to serve the Lord. In order that peace be accomplished, the believer is commanded to let the unbeliever go. You were never to become enslaved to man by giving in to his demands, which involve compromising the faith, but you must remain a bondservant of God. In order to ease the Christian's mind who quite naturally would be working to save a mate's soul, Paul writes, "**for how knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband, or how knowest thou, O husband, whether thou shalt save they wife?**" (1 Cor. 7:16).

The word translated "*under bondage*" is from the root word, "*DOULOO*" and is found in 1 Corinthians 7 and elsewhere in the New Testament characterizing one who is a bondservant or slave. God said, in referring to Egypt who had enslaved Israel, "**And the nation to which they shall be in bondage will I judge...**" (Acts 7:6). In Corinthians 7:23, the root word "*DOULOS*" is used where Paul concludes, "**Ye were bought with a price; become not bondservants of men.**" Yes, there is the concept of being restricted in the word bondage, but the term is consistently used in scripture to convey the concept of being enslaved to something or someone like Egypt, or the Lord, or as verse 15 teaches, not "**under bondage**" to the unbeliever.

Two words may have similar root meanings, but when they are used consistently in conveying distinguishing thoughts, that distinction must be acknowledged. Paul, when conveying the thought of being bound by, restricted by or obligated to God's law regarding marriage, he uses the root word "*DEO*" (Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:27, 39). When he conveys the thought of being in the state of bondage, enslavement, or servitude, he uses the root term for bondservant—"DOULOS" (1 Cor. 7:15, 23). The believer is reminded in verse 15, that he or she has never in the past, nor now been in a state of enslavement to the unbeliever in marriage, but must be a bondservant of Christ. The verse does not teach that God has loosed the believer or the unbeliever from the restrictions of law that binds him or her to a mate as long as that person lives (Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:27, 39).

By keeping in mind the distinction between being "*married*" and being "*bound*" by law, we can avoid the confusing terminology sometimes used, such as "*married in the eyes of God*" or "*married in the eyes of man, but not in the eyes of God.*" People begin to speak of a "*real*" marriage in contrast to just a "*legal*" marriage. If God approves, it is real. Otherwise one is not really married, but only married in the eyes of men. The same confusion is seen when people talk about divorce. Divorce is only real if it is approved of God, otherwise the two are not really divorced, but only divorced in the eyes of men. Such confusion allows for the false teacher to pervert God's clear message regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage, and loosen the restrictions of law where God has not so allowed.

By keeping "*marriage*" and being "*bound*" by law distinctive in our minds, we can see that two people can be bound and scripturally married to one another (Matt. 19:5-6; Rom. 7:2). One can be unmarried, but bound (1 Cor. 7:10-11). One mate can be unmarried but bound, while the other mate is free to remarry (Matt. 19:9). And, One mate can be bound to his first mate, while unscripturally married to another (Mk. 6:17-18; Rom. 7:2-3). ■

"But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband..." (1 Corinthians 7:11a).

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

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