

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Questions Demanding an Answer Regarding Marriage & Divorce

By Chris Simmons

There is much discussion today about the issues of marriage, divorce, and re-marriage. In regards to these issues, discussion and dissension normally revolve around three fundamental questions that we must answer, not on the basis of human wisdom, but based on what God has revealed of His will to us. Contrary to what some may suggest, God's revealed will on this subject is understandable and involves the matter of sin and whether or not souls will be saved or lost. Thus, it is essential that we honestly and truthfully know and apply God's word in regards to these three questions. The questions we need to address are: who is accountable to God's laws regarding marriage? Second, how does one “*repent*” when one is guilty of violating God's laws concerning marriage? Third, what is “*adultery*”?

The first question is whether God's laws are applicable only to members of the church or are they applicable to all mankind? Is man accountable to God in regards to issues of marriage and divorce even if they are unaware of God's will?

We must consider the following passages that deal with this question including Matthew 19:9 in which Jesus states, “*And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.*” Christ addresses his law regarding marriage and divorce to “*whoever.*” The context of this verse is important. Beginning in verse three of that chapter, Jesus begins to address a question of the Pharisees and by His authority states what is the rule under His reign in His kingdom in which “*all things*” and all people are in subjection to Him and His authority (Eph. 1:20-23). Christ simply addresses this command to, “*whosoever.*” Christ does not address this to the Jews, to “*believers*”, or to “those in a covenant relationship to God”, but rather simply states “*whosoever.*” All people are under Christ's authority whether we choose to submit to His will or not.

In order to be consistent, if man is subject to the authority of Christ in one realm of the law of Christ, then man is subject to all realms. If man is not subject to God's will in one subject (such as marriage and divorce), then man is not subject to any part of the law of Christ. I can not say that man is accountable for telling the truth and not stealing, but is not accountable to God for marriage. The application of that consistency is found in the following passage.

An important passage in understanding that all men are accountable to the law of Christ, is 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, “*Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.*” This passage mentions what the brethren in Corinth (who were primarily Gentiles) were prior to their obedience to the gospel and their becoming Christians. In short, they were sinners. Specifically, Paul states that some of them were guilty of: fornication, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, thievery, covetousness, drunkenness and swindling. Whether or not they were ignorant that such conduct was sinful in the eyes of their creator, they were indeed guilty of them. “*Such were some of you.*” We know from passages such as Romans 4:15 (cf., Rom. 5:12-13) that states “... *where there is no law, neither is there transgression ...*” that the only way these Gentiles could be guilty of such sins before God is if they are under law from God. Since committing those sins, those people had been “*washed*”, “*sanctified*”, and “*justified.*” Specifically, one of the sins listed was that of “*adultery.*” Some in Corinth had committed adultery before becoming washed, sanctified, and justified and needed to be “*washed*” of their sins through repentance and baptism. Another example of one who was guilty of an “*unlawful*” marriage, who was neither a Christian nor a Jew, was Herod. We read of John's condemnation (according to the law of marriage which Christ had set forth to “*whoever*”) in Mark 6:17-18, “*For Herod himself had sent and had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her. For John had been saying to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.’*” Herod and Herodias were under the law of Christ as it related to marriage and divorce and thus their relationship together was “*not lawful.*”

The second question is if one is guilty of the sin of adultery, how does one repent of it? Repentance is stated in the scriptures as what precedes one being baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38). To repent is to make the necessary changes to correct what is contrary in one's life. The word literally means "to change one's mind or purpose" (*W. E. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*). Paul gives a inspired definition of Biblical repentance in 2 Corinthians 7:9-11, ***"I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter."*** This passage helps us to understand that Biblical repentance is not just feeling sorry and regretting what we did that was wrong! It also involves the idea of making things right and ***"avenging"*** the ***"wrong"*** and thus vindicating ourselves.

Again, the issue of consistency must be addressed here in that each sin that man commits must receive the same definition of repentance. For example, in the list of sins the Corinthians were engaged in, as recorded in 1 Corinthians 6:9ff, the homosexual, the adulterer, the fornicator, the thief, the drunk and the swindler all had to repent. Repentance and the ***"avenging of wrong"*** must fit the sin. If you've stolen, to repent, you must return what you have stolen. If you're a drunk, you must stop being in a drunken condition in order to repent. If you're a homosexual, you must stop being in a homosexual relationship if you are to repent. And if you are an adulterer, you must stop being in the relationship that makes you an adulterer. This leads me to a passage that I had to deal with in my understanding of this issue. As noted earlier in Mark 6:17-28, it is recounted how John the Baptizer lost his life. ***"For Herod himself had sent and had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her*** (though he had married her, the inspired Mark still refers to her as 'the wife of his brother Philip, CS). ***For John had been saying to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death and could not do so."*** Indeed, he did succeed in killing John because John had told him that it was not ***"lawful for you to have her"***. I must then consider, if it was not lawful for Herod to ***"have her,"*** if he were to repent, what must he do? In this context, according to the scripture, he must stop ***"having her"*** for in the eyes of God, she was still the wife of Philip. I'm impressed by the fact that John was willing to lose his life over stating the truth to Herod about his marriage to Herodias. In the Old Testament, we read of the Israelites becoming involved in marriages that were unlawful according to the law of Moses. In Ezra chapter 10, we read that such unlawful marriages were considered to be acts of unfaithfulness to God and that to do God's will, they were to repent by separating themselves from their foreign wives and thus the people did as they considered it their duty before God to do. ***"Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, 'You have been unfaithful and have married foreign wives adding to the guilt of Israel. Now, therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers, and do His will; and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.' Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, 'That's right! As you have said, so it is our duty to do'"*** (Ezra 10:10-12).

The third question I have heard raised is that of "what is adultery"? Some today state that adultery is simply "the act of marrying someone you ought not" or the saying of the "I do's" to someone you shouldn't, and thus, to repent, you are only repenting of the act of marrying someone and not of an unlawful relationship. First, the word ***"adultery"*** in the New Testament is from the Greek word which means "one who has unlawful intercourse with the spouse of another" (*W. E. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*). Adultery is not the act of marrying someone but rather it is the sin of continuing in unlawful intercourse with someone else's spouse. This definition can be seen in John 8:3 where the Scribes and the Pharisees bring a woman to Jesus who had been ***"caught in adultery"*** and then add in verse 4, that she had been caught ***"in the very act."*** What she had been caught in the act of doing was not signing her marriage license but rather in unlawful intercourse. So, to repent of ***"adultery"*** is not to repent of signing the marriage certificate, it is to repent of the unlawful sexual relationship one is continuing with another. Such a sexual relationship must not continue.

This indeed is an issue before God that is full of emotions. Our respect for God's authority in passages such as 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Matthew 19:9, 2 Corinthians 7:9-11, Mark 6:18, and John 8:3 among others must lead us to conclude that all mankind is subject to God's laws and Christ's rule including that on marriage and divorce. Also, that to repent from an unlawful marriage requires that I "stop having her" who I am not lawfully wedded to. – ***Fifth Street East church of Christ bulletin***, October 6, 2002. ■

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

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