

ADULTERY - FORNICATION

By Waddell Moore

After reading several preachers' views on divorce and remarriage - their trying to justify receiving adulterous people into the fellowship of, and retaining them, in the church - I feel led to write about what constitutes marriage, and the difference between adultery and fornication. And to see if the church can scripturally receive and retain adultery in her fellowship. It is appalling when the majority of elders, deacons, and members of Primitive Baptist churches do not know the difference, and worse, if they deceitfully misinterpret the Scriptures. Some want to call unlawful sex between married persons "*fornication*" to justify receiving and retaining *adultery* in the church. The Great head and Saviour of the Church, and the chief apostle to the Gentiles certainly made a difference between the two.

Of course the *act* is the same, but the application is not the same, and we hope to show the difference by the Scriptures and language. Jesus in reprimanding the Pharisees said, "*For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, ADULTERIES (moicheia), FORNICATIONS (porneia), thefts, false witness, blasphemies:*" (Matt. 15:19). The apostle Paul writing to the church at Corinth says, "*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither FORNICATORS, nor ADULTERERS, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*" (I Cor. 6:9-10.) Also, in admonishing the Galatian brethren, he said, "*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; ADULTERY, FORNICATION, uncleanness, lasciviousness, etc.,*" (Gal. 5:19). None of these things ought to be harbored in the church, when known, for the church is neither a harbor for criminals, nor a penitentiary (for

reform). When the decorum of Scriptural faith and practice is followed, it is the House of God.

The meaning of words never really change from their original coining, but evil men, to suit their case often add, modify, or alter the original meaning. One of the axioms that I was taught in accounting was that "figures do not lie, hut liars will figure," that is, in order to arrive at the answer they desire.

Merriam Webster's *Collegiate Dictionary*, 3rd Ed., and the same *International Unabridged Dictionary*, 2nd Ed, give the following definitions: "*Adultery*, voluntary sexual intercourse by a married man with another than his wife, or by a married woman with another than her husband." If it had not been voluntary it would have been rape. "*Fornication*, sexual intercourse on the part of an unmarried person." This was the only definition of the two for fornication. However, the Greek and Scriptural use of adultery is the same as above; while that of fornication is inclusive of all sexual uncleanness or pollution.

Many elders and churches in trying to justify adultery in the church misinterpret *fornication* in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 to mean *adultery*. But to do this is to err, as there is a time element involved. Married persons cannot commit *fornication* in this act, but *adultery*. Single persons cannot commit *adultery*, but can commit *fornication*.

The Scriptural example of *adultery* is, "*For the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and adulteress shall surely be put to death.*" (Thus, no divorce and remarriage possible on the grounds of *adultery*.) The Scripture is plain that each of these persons were married to another person. (Lev. 20:10) Now, for an example of *fornication*: and "*If a man entice (persuade) a maid (an*

unmarried woman, a virgin) *that is not betrothed* (engaged to be married) *and lie with her* (for sexual gratification), *he shall surely endow her to be his wife.*" (Ex. 22:16) In this case, it is specifically stated that he may never put her away. The maid is an unmarried virgin, for a married woman is no more a maid or virgin, but a wife. In this situation, the two persons had committed *fornication*.

We said there was a time element that distinguished between *adultery* and *fornication*. Here is the Scripture, "*When a man hath taken a wife, and married her and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found SOME UNCLEANNESS in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it into her hand, and send her out of his house...*" (Deut. 24:1) The phrase, "When a man hath taken a wife," means, when he has wooed her and asks her to be his wife, and she agrees. They then perform the marriage rite, and vow before God and man to live together until death parts them. They are now bride and bridegroom, but not man and wife. The phrase, "and married her," tells us *when* they become man and wife. That, when the marriage is consummated by their first intimate union, she is no more a bride, but a wife, and he is no more a bridegroom, but a husband.

For him to put her away according to the sufferance of Moses, *what* must she be guilty of, and *when*? The cause is "*some uncleanness,*" but in our English translation this is too vague. (Editor's note: In a future issue, we shall deal very thoroughly on the Hebrew text of Deut. 24:1, for in that very phrase, is the key to understanding Matthew 19 where Christ is answering it for the adulterous Pharisees who taught a man could put away his wife "*for every cause.*") If we examine the words *some* and *uncleanness* in the Hebrew, we find *what* the *cause* was. *Then if we refer to Deut. 22:13-14, we find when* the uncleanness was contracted. Translating our word *some* from the

Hebrew, we find the word to be *dabar*, with its meaning to be "act, affair, matter or thing" and translated over a thousand times as "words about, spoke, commanded, reported, etc." The word *uncleanness* is *ervah* which means nudity, or nakedness, and used forty-nine times as "uncovered the nakedness" of someone. So we find that the cause of "some uncleanness" to be the report, words of, or the matter of exposing her nakedness. And this exposure is for the act of *fornication* before marriage, which act is a specific form of fornication, or *pornea*, and the only form which does not carry the death penalty under the law except that which may legally be redeemed by marriage as given above. That this is so, Moses says: "*If any man take a wife, and go into her (first intimate union), and hate her, and bring an evil name upon her, and say, I took this woman, and when I came to her, I found her not a maid (virgin).*" (Deut. 22:13-14). If the charge is true, she had intimate union with another before her marriage, and was guilty of fornication, and she was stoned to death. Again, in this situation, divorce and remarriage is not possible under the law. But, if the charge was untrue, he must live with her until death. If he were a good (*sic*) man like Joseph, when he found Mary, the mother of Jesus, pregnant with Him; he could have written her a bill of divorcement, and sent her out of his house, and not have her stoned to death. "*And Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.*" (Matt. 1:19) He could, as a *justified* man, have only done so according to Deut. 24:1.

Many professed Christians think that if their spouse is unfaithful, that Matt. 19:9 gives them the right to divorce them and remarry, without themselves committing and living in adultery, and thereby retain fellowship in the church. But, how deceived they are. Unfaithfulness does not void the contract, and marriage is a contract, one that cannot ever be broken. God speaking through Adam said,

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave (be glued, welded, and united into one) unto his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh." Jesus says that Scripture cannot be broken, (John 10:35) and, *"Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder"* (divorced). (Matt. 19:6). The apostle Paul said, *"The woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives."* (Rom. 7:2-3, and I Cor. 7:13) He gives NO grounds for putting away, for this is one thing God says he hateth, *"For the Lord, the God of Israel saith that He hateth putting away..."* (Mal. 2:16) and this in the context rebuking Israel who dealt treacherously against *"thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant."* Certainly Paul does not contradict His Master and Teacher. The contract can be violated, but not broken or made null and void. *"Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto."* (Galatians 3:15) The marriage covenant or contract is formalized when there is a meeting or unity of minds and vows are taken, and the covenant or contract is consummated by the *harmonious* union of the man and woman in the flesh. Consider commercial contracts. Neither buyer nor seller is free from their promises until every stipulation is fulfilled by both parties. *"Unto death"* is the last stipulation, and with its occurrence the marriage is finally dissolved.

Jesus was answering the hypocritical Pharisees and their question in Matt. 19:3 and Mark 10:2 *"Is it LAWFUL for a man to put away his wife? tempting him."* And in the house His disciples asked Him again. To them Jesus said, *"Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery."* (Mark 10:10-12) *"Whosoever putteth away his*

wife committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.”(Luke 16:18)

Can a true disciple of our Lord put away his or her spouse for any cause and marry another, and retain fellowship with Christ Jesus and his family? The answer is an emphatic no! One might ask, “What am I to DO if my spouse is unfaithful, or puts me away? What must I do to retain fellowship with the church?” Jesus gave the answer to His disciples when they said, *“If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is good not to marry. But Jesus said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom IT IS GIVEN. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have MADE THEMSELVES eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake (as Paul). He that is able to receive it, let HIM receive it.”* (Matt. 19:10-12). If the above case should be our lot, and if we love the church and righteousness, we must remain unmarried and pure.

Shall we follow Moses and the Pharisees and their carnal traditions, or shall we follow and serve Christ? If our god is self and self-gratification of the flesh, then we must go with the Pharisees, but if God is our God, we must say with every true child of God, and Joshua of old, *“But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,”* (Jos. 24:15), by following Christ and His teaching. Marriage is a type of union between Christ and His church. The union of a marriage is for life and can only be broken by death, when time no longer exists for us. The union with our spiritual Husband cannot be broken in time or eternity, for God is eternal.

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