

Doctrine of Biblical Adultery

1. The Scriptures, and not scholars, should define the meaning of “adultery” in spiritual matters.
2. When the Bible is examined it is revealed that a word may have more than one definition.
3. To say that adultery is nothing more than “the voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a partner other than the lawful spouse”, is to be uninformed of biblical texts that contradict this narrow definition.
4. The scriptures reveal that sometimes the term “adultery” is used metaphorically, not literally, in order to describe a variety of actions committed by an individual or by a group of people.
5. When a person commits “adultery”, physically or metaphorically, the action that is taken is contrary to, and detrimental to, the covenant vows of the marriage agreement.
6. The prophet Jeremiah spoke of adultery being committed by the nation of Israel with “stones and with rocks.”
 - *Jeremiah 3:9 And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks.*
7. The conclusion of Jeremiah 3:9 is that biblical adultery is not something that is of necessity physical. Rather, biblical adultery is when a foreign object receives a person’s affection in an inappropriate manner.
8. Even though God hates divorce, the Bible says that God divorced His “wife” (Israel).
 - *Jeremiah 3:8 And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.*
 - *Jeremiah 3:14 Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion:*
9. It is important to understand the concept of biblical adultery for even those who are not capable of having sex are able to commit adultery by being unfaithful to their spouse, by acting as if the marriage does not exist, and taking up with another person thereby “putting away” the spouse of one’s youth.

10. It is instructive to not that a person may break the terms of a covenant; yet, if repentance and forgiveness follow, the covenant remains intact. A marriage is ended, destroyed, or over, when one or both parties have legally declared the marriage to be over. The Jewish Law, like the law in America, requires a “bill of divorcement” or divorce certificate. When one who is divorced, and therefore “unmarried,” is unable to resist sexual temptations, he may marry another (Robert Walker).
- *1 Corinthians 7:8 I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. 9 But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.*
11. Foy Wallace Jr. summarizes the concept of biblical adultery. “The word adultery in New Testament usage does not necessarily refer to the sinful physical [sexual] act, it is not restricted to the one way of violating the bond. In the four passages in Matthew, Mark and Luke the term adultery is given the sense of ignoring the bond, of which a man is guilty who formally puts away his wife unjustifiably and regards himself unhitched" (The Sermon on the Mount and the Civil State; p. 42).
12. For many, the story of the woman taken in adultery seems to confirm the traditional understanding that adultery is basically a physical acts.
- *John 8:4 They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.*
13. It is true that when a married woman is sexually unfaithful to her husband she is committing adultery, and she is breaking the vows she has made to her husband.
- *Ezekiel 16:38 And I will judge thee, as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy.*
14. Those who define adultery as have a sexual relation outside of marriage are not in error. What is misleading is that biblical adultery always involves physical sex. That is not the case.
15. Biblical adultery is more expansive than sexual immorality but certainly does include it.
- Biblical adultery is a sexual act committed outside of a marriage relationship and against the marriage. *John 8:4 They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.*
 - Biblical adultery is the act of "putting away" and marrying another “for any cause”, which cause may have nothing to do with sexual activity. *Matthew 19:9 And I say unto you, 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.*

- Biblical adultery is a sin against one's spouse, which is contrary to the marital vows. *Mark 10:11 And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her.*
- Biblical adultery, within the scope of marriage, is the display of improper affection for another. *Jeremiah 3:9 And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks.*
- Biblical adultery is ignoring the bond and considering oneself unmarried. *1 Corinthians 7:15 But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.*

16. Some who find themselves in a second marriage, for a reason other than a physical act of sexual impropriety and come to believe they are living in a state of adultery may think they should terminate the second marriage even if it has produced children.
17. Question: "If you have been faithful to your spouse but he/she divorces you, for whatever reason, what sin would you have committed? None! Any conclusion that has God punishing innocent people for the sins of another cannot be scriptural. God has never established a decree that calls for the innocent to be punished" (*Put Away But Not Divorced*, Robert Waters).

Many passages warn against punishing innocent people. Consider the following examples:

- *Jeremiah 22:3 Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.*
 - *Job 4:7 Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?*
 - *John 7:24 Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.*
18. "It is not righteous judgment to punish a person not charged with sin. Do not cut off the righteous by insisting they must remain celibate because of something their spouse has done.

When desertion, separation, or a "putting away" occurs and at least one person marries another without first completing a legal divorce (composed of three parts according to Deuteronomy 24:1-4), adultery is committed by at least one of the parties in the original marriage. Innocent individuals who are legally divorced by their spouse do not sin by marrying.

- *1 Corinthians 7:8 I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. 9 But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.*

- *1 Corinthians 7:36 But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry.*

Conclusion:

“We have no scriptural support for breaking up legal marriages between men and women or for the idea that certain people have no right to marry. It is against justice to suggest that innocent persons must be punished for the sins of another. It is against reason to conclude that someone is still married and/or “bound” or in some way martially obligated to a person who has a legal divorce. It is against scripture to argue that one is not eligible to marry in cases where he obviously is not married (1 Corinthians 7:2; 8, 9). It is against a direct command of God to “forbid” marriage (1 Timothy 4:1-3) for those who are "unmarried" or have no marriage, because the apostle Paul said “let them marry.” It is against proper hermeneutics to construe what Jesus taught to mean something that is against what is elsewhere taught in various ways and in numerous passages throughout the Bible” (Robert Waters).