

UNSCRIPTURAL MARRIAGE COVENANTS

It is sometimes argued that people in unscriptural marriages should remain in them because they have made a covenant to do so. It is said that a person in an unscriptural marriage should not get out of it because to do so would be to break his marriage bond. Such a person should preserve the sanctity of his family relationship rather than become guilty of covenant breaking, we are told. This view is in error for several reasons.

When God Does NOT Join Them

God ordained marriage and He joins people in marriage only if it is according to His will ([Gen.2:24](#)). “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” ([Matt.19:6](#)). God does not join two homosexuals in marriage no matter how many vows, ceremonies, and covenants they participate in. Their immoral relationship may be called “marriage” only in an accommodative sense, i.e., they profess and pretend to enter the relationship of Genesis 2:24 known as marriage. Their “covenant” is a farce and a fiction. There is no true “marriage bond” joining them together in the sight of God. There is no “sanctity” to a “family relationship” not sanctioned or sanctified by God.

The same objections stand against polygamous marriages, according to plain statements of God’s law in the gospel age. The Lord, who ordained marriage and who joins people in marriage, said, “Let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband” ([1Cor.7:2](#)). God did not say, “Let every man have his own wives, and let every woman have her own husbands.”

Likewise, the same objections stand against other unscriptural marriages, according to plain statements of God’s law in the gospel age. The Lord, who ordained marriage and who joins people in marriage, said, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery,” and, “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” ([Matt. 5:32](#); [19:9](#)).

When people marry contrary to God’s law, God recognizes it only as sin and rebellion against Him. Yes, Jesus spoke of people entering such relationships as marrying, for that is what they profess and pretend to do, but he also pronounced it to be nothing more or less than “adultery.” Such people do not go to the bed of purity in true marriage but go to the bed of impurity in adultery ([Heb.13:4](#)). In other words, such a relationship is unscriptural, unauthorized, impure, immoral, and an abomination in God’s sight!

There is no “sanctity” to homosexual, polygamous, or other adulterous relationships—even when they are put under the name of “marriage.” To attempt to give them the aura of “sanctity” is bold, brazen, highhanded rebellion against the authority of God. Such is the spirit of the “man of sin..., the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” ([2Thess.2:3-4](#)).

“Fruits Meet for Repentance”

To enter such immoral relationships is to defy the God of heaven, and to continue in them is to persist in defying God. The Bible teaches consistently that people in unscriptural marriages need to repent and to “bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance” by getting out of them ([Matt.3:8](#); [Acts 26:20](#)). For instance, when the Jews married Gentile wives contrary to the law of Moses, Ezra as God’s prophet demanded this very thing: “Now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do his pleasure; and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives” ([Ezra 10:11](#)). In order to come to the Lord, they had to get out of their unscriptural marriages. The marriage of Herod to Herodias was incestuous adultery. John told Herod to repent and get out of this marriage: “It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife” ([Mk.6:18](#)). Herod could not have come to Christ while remaining in this adulterous marriage. When a brother at Corinth persisted in marriage with his father’s wife, Paul commanded the church “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan” ([1Cor.5:1-5](#)). The church erred by tolerating this man. In fact, the brethren were proud to have him – perhaps he was a good song leader or could make impressive talks at the Lord’s table. This man could not come to Christ and find forgiveness unless he got out of his union with this woman, no matter what vows, ceremonies, and commitments had occurred.

Breaking a Covenant with Satan

But, someone protests, if people get out of unscriptural marriages, aren't they "breaking a covenant?" Yes, they are breaking a covenant witnessed and sealed by Satan rather than God. When the commitments of marriage are made to form an unscriptural and adulterous union, they are vows and promises to live in sin. A person sins by making such vows and commitments, not by breaking them. Saul vowed with letters representing civil authority to cast Christians into prison—he promised to sin. Had he refused to break this promise, he could not have come to Christ in baptism ([Acts 9:1-2, 18](#)). After his remarkable conversion, forty Jews "bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul" ([Acts 23:12](#)). These men needed to "repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" ([Acts 26:20](#)). To have kept their covenant would have been sinful, to break it righteous. Vows and promises to live in sin, even those made before legal authorities and friends, ought not to be kept. "We ought to obey God rather than men" ([Acts 5:29](#)).

Promises, vows, commitments, and covenants to sin are themselves sinful. To vow to live with someone as a mate in marriage when God forbids it is to vow to live in sin. It is a covenant committing these two people to live in immorality and rebellion against God. What ought to be done about such a promise? To ask is to answer. Such a covenant is "a covenant with death, and with hell," i.e., a deal with the devil, but it shall not stand nor deliver people from the wrath of God. The only hope for deliverance through Christ is in forsaking such a covenant ([Isa.28:14-20](#)).

Separating Valid Obligations from Sin

Someone may ask what should be done about financial and moral obligations which were created while living in sin but which can be fulfilled without committing sin. For instance, suppose Saul had borrowed a coat or rented a donkey when he went in search of Christians to imprison. Must he return the coat and pay the rent? Yes, no sin is involved in meeting such obligations.

Suppose a polygamous man obeys the gospel. Can he continue to live with several wives? No, sin is involved in maintaining unscriptural and adulterous marriages.

Suppose a man like Herod obeys the gospel. Can he continue to maintain his unscriptural marriage? No, sin is involved in maintaining unscriptural and adulterous marriages.

Might it be possible to provide some association, moral training, and material needs to the children born through adulterous unions? Yes, a person should try to fulfill such obligations to the best of his ability without participating in anything sinful. That is true even of children fathered outside any pretense of marriage, as often happens. The father will find his efforts to fulfill his duty to the children fraught with difficulties and constant, painful reminders of his sin. A father who walks away from such children compounds his sins, but occasionally a mother prevents the father from performing his duty. The mothers of children born of adulteries sometimes leave the area and cut off all contact between the father and the children. While that is painful for the father and the innocent children, all must realize that this pain is the tragic result of his committing adultery, not of his obedience to God. Had he obeyed God from the beginning and avoided adultery, he would not be facing the bitter fruit of his sin. Had he continued in an unscriptural and unsanctified marriage, he ultimately would have reaped an even more painful and shameful harvest from his sins.

Consequences and Complications

Many temporal consequences afflict the adulterer and the adulteress even after they seek and find forgiveness of their sins. At times, it seems only a Solomon could unravel all the tangled complications which may follow. The knotty problems and unutterable sorrows which attended David's life after his sin with Bathsheba are instructive in this regard. Such consequences are not limited to the sin of adultery. When Paul remembered his past sins against God's people, he thought of himself as the very chief of sinners, though he knew God had forgiven him ([1Tim.1:15](#)). There must have been times when he saw, perhaps even in his dreams, the relatives of people he had mercilessly persecuted, and found his heart throbbing in his throat. God warned long ago, "Good understanding giveth favor: but the way of the transgressor is hard" ([Prov.13:15](#)).

Let those who are weary and heavy laden with the weight of sin in adulterous marriages know that God will forgive the sinner who forsakes his sin ([Matt.11:27-30](#)). Let them know it was a sin to enter such a marriage, which is no marriage at all under divine law, but which is the moral equivalent of adultery and an abomination to God. The alien sinner must come to Christ by faith, repent of every sin, confess Christ's name, and submit to him in baptism for the remission of sins ([Gal.3:26-27](#)). But, he cannot maintain an unscriptural marriage. The Christian who errs by entering an adulterous marriage must repent of it, confess it, and seek God's forgiveness in prayer ([Acts 8:22](#)). But, he cannot maintain an unscriptural marriage. Let the sinner know that as a result of his sin, he will reap temporal pain, including the pain of seeing the innocent suffer from his sin, but know too that God can bind up his wounds. Let him come to God with a poor, humble, contrite heart, trembling before God, and He will forgive and guide us all to a home in heaven ([Ps.51:17](#); [Isa. 66:2](#)). Do not be deceived by those who say the sinner can come to Christ while maintaining the sinful covenant of an unscriptural marriage. (*Truth Magazine* XLII, 17 [3 Sept. 1998]:526-28)