

The Harvester



Preparing Souls

To Serve The Lord



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Does Baptism Make An Unscriptural Marriage Scriptural?

By Brian R. Kenyon

God created marriage on the sixth day of creation (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:18-25). After His special creation of the woman, God set in place a special relationship, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). The God-authorized marriage relationship was designed by Him to be a monogamous (heterosexual) relationship ("a man ... his wife"); a companionship relationship ("help meet," Gen. 2:18); an interdependent relationship ("leave ... father and ... mother"), a commitment relationship ("cleave"), and a permanent relationship ("one flesh") (adapted from Jones). There was a time during the Mosaic age that God "lowered the standards" of His ideal will for marriage because of the "hardness of your [the Jewish people's] hearts" (Mt. 19:8). However, Jesus and the rest of the New Testament make it clear that God's "from the beginning" will for marriage has been back in place for all humanity since Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament and took it out of the way (Mt. 19:3-9; Eph. 5:31-33)!

As history, sacred and secular, testifies, people are not always content with God's plan. People sometimes do what works for them, and then seek to justify it with "spiritual excuses" (cf. 1 Sam. 15:1-23). The subject of marriage is no exception (see Baird). Jesus said, "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" (Mt. 19:9). The only

Scriptural divorce and remarriage is when a spouse puts away his or her guilty of fornication spouse and remarries another Scripturally eligible person (i.e., one who has never been married, one whose spouse has died, or one who is the innocent of fornication spouse in a Scriptural divorce). According to Jesus, any other divorce and remarriage is an adulterous relationship.

One of the ways people discontent with God's plan seek to justify keeping their current spouse, even though he or she had no Scriptural right to marry, is to claim that if the unscriptural marriage took place before the couple were baptized into Christ, then no matter what the circumstances of the marriage, it now becomes a God-approved marriage. The argument is based on two faulty lines of reasoning.

"Abide in the Same Calling"

Paul wrote,

But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches. ¹⁸Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised ... ²⁰Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called ... ²⁴Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God. (1 Cor. 7:17-24)

According to the proponents of the "any marriage before baptism becomes Scriptural after baptism"

doctrine, Paul was here teaching that if a couple were in an adulterous marriage when they were taught and obeyed the Gospel, they were to remain in that marriage.

In answering this contention, it should be obvious that “so let him walk” must be limited to those vocations that are not sinful (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14; 1 Thes. 5:22). Suppose two homosexual men are “married” according to civil law. Can they continue walking in that relationship after baptism? Certainly not (cf. Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Jude 7)! One may respond by noting that homosexual practice has always been sinful, to which it would be agreed. However, the same word of God that teaches homosexual practice is sinful also teaches that adultery is sinful (cf. Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 6:9; 2 Pet. 2:13-14)! A person cannot remain in a sinful vocation just because he or she has been baptized. People must repent of their sins before being baptized (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30-31), not continue in them (Rom. 6:1-4)!

“Baptism Washes Away Sin”

A second way the “any marriage before baptism becomes Scriptural after baptism” doctrine seeks legitimacy is by appealing to the fact that Scriptural baptism washes away sin (Acts 2:38; 22:16 cf. Rev. 1:5). While on the surface, this seems a rational point because baptism does contact penitent souls with the blood of Christ that does result in forgiveness of sins (Rom. 6:3-4). However, it should not be forgotten that repentance is re-

quired before Scriptural baptism. To illustrate this principle, consider John the Baptizer. His basic message was, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt. 3:2). However, when some Pharisees and Sadducees came to be baptized of him, he refused to baptize them, saying, “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance” (Mt. 3:8). Luke’s account sheds light on what John meant.

And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? ¹¹He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. ¹²Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? ¹³And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. ¹⁴And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages. (Lk. 3:10-14)

The lesson was clear: if a person is to be Scripturally baptized, he or she must repent of sins. Even though the soldiers and tax collectors could remain in those vocations (because they were not inherently sinful), they had to repent of the sins associated with their individual practice of those vocations. As this is applied to unscriptural marriages, what sin is associated with these marriages? Jesus said “adultery” (Mt. 19:9 cf. Mt. 5:32). How does a person repent of

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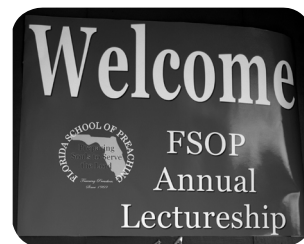
adultery? Obviously, get out of the adulterous relationship! There is no scenario where one can willfully sin and be in a right relationship with God (cf. Heb. 10:26-27)! "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. 6:1-2).

Conclusion

Marriage is the foundation of all human relationships! When God's will is not respected in what constitutes marriage, the home, society, and the church inevitably suffer! People certainly get themselves into marital messes, but changing God's law to fit an individual's particular situation is not the answer. Rather, follow God's will, even if it means remaining unmarried (Mt. 19:10-12). Eternity with God is too valuable to lose over an adulterous relationship!

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