



LIBERTYHEIGHTS
CHURCH

BEAUTIFUL MESS: Marriage Is Messy Q & A

MAKING DISCIPLES WHO
GATHER, GROW, GIVE & GO



Marriage is Messy Q & A

Marriage is biblically defined as being between one man, and one woman, who come together and through the power of the Holy Spirit become one flesh. God intends it to be a lifelong covenant that should never be broken.

1. Is interracial marriage a sin?

No, unless one is an unbeliever. If we take a literal view of Genesis, then in reality there is only one race – the human race, that all have descended from Adam and Eve. Acts 17:26, “He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth.” In Deuteronomy, God forbid the intermarrying of tribes because He was afraid they would have their hearts turned away from God. Deuteronomy 7:3-4 says, “You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods.” (Was not racial issue, but religious one. Unequally yoked issue.)

2. If your spouse passes away and later you remarry, which partner do you spend eternity with? Or do you even spend eternity "with" someone?

Matthew 22:23-33 answers this question. In Heaven there will be one marriage, not many. That marriage will be what earthly marriage symbolized and pointed to: **the marriage of Christ to his bride**. Earthly marriage ends because its procreating purpose is not needed in the resurrection, according to Luke 20:35-36. Earthly marriage ends because all its pleasures are preludes and pointers to something so much better than the human heart can even imagine (1 Corinthians 2:9). When the perfect comes, the partial passes away.

Marriage ends in order to put the married and the non-married on the same footing for enjoying the fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11). However, it is highly likely that people who have had important roles in each other's lives will continue to be friends—and that would include a lot of people who've been married. If a woman was married to a man, he died and she married another man, I think she could have a meaningful deep friendship in Heaven with both.

3. At what point should we talk about forgiveness for divorce vs discipline?

Church discipline happens for sin that is serious, habitual and unrepentant. When a person is in the midst of pursuing an unbiblical divorce, the fruit of repentance would be to end the pursuit of divorce and reconcile. At that point, there is no need for church discipline. To continue to pursue divorce with no Biblical grounds would be sin that is serious and unrepentant. If someone previously pursued a divorce but has since come to the place of repentance, we offer forgiveness for that. Discipline is for active, ongoing sin, not past sins.

We would encourage them to pray for and be open to reconciliation should their previous spouse still be living and has not remarried.

4. If you've lost a young spouse, what does the Bible say about remarriage? Why do I feel guilty?

1 Corinthians 7:39 answers this as well as Romans 7:3-4. The guilt is understandable due to the love for a spouse. However, be careful not to allow false guilt to overtake you. False guilt is feeling guilty for something Scripture does not prohibit – such as remarriage when a spouse has passed away.

5. Is it always necessary to receive pre-marital counseling before marriage? I've heard conflicting viewpoints and am not sure what to do.

Our pastors would hold to the position that it is unwise to enter marriage without Biblical counsel and outside perspective. Proverbs says there is safety in the multitude of counsel. We believe so strongly in this, that LHC pastors will only perform marriages if we conduct pre-marital counsel with the couple. So many times in marriage counseling, issues arise that need to be corrected that could have been prevented with pre-marital counseling.

Book Recommendation: Tying The Knot: A Premarital Guide to a Strong and Lasting Marriage

6. If someone realizes through this series that their prior divorce was sinful but they are already remarried to someone else, what would you say to them now?

Since they are now remarried, the only thing that can be done is to repent of their sinful past divorce, and receive God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9). 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 tells them three times to remain as they were (marital state) when they were called to salvation.

7. What if neither of you are Christians when you get married but become Christians later? When would the Holy Spirit enter your covenant?

The Holy Spirit dwells in each believer. If a marriage is made up of two believers, the Holy Spirit is in your covenant.

8. Is it a sin for a divorced single parent to have sex in the context of a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship?

The only context for sex is within marriage, according to 1 Cor. 7:1-2. Paul says clearly "It is not good for a man to touch a woman". "Touch" is a euphemism for "sexual contact". We cannot call "good" what God has called "bad".

9. If two Christians are married, one decides to leave while you are still married and enters a relationship with another person, would that be considered an affair? Would this give you biblical rights for a divorce?

Yes – to enter into a relationship with someone you are not married to is the very definition of adultery. In cases of adultery, divorce is not required, but it is permitted, according to Matthew 19.

10. If both partners are in agreement, is watching pornography sinful?

What is Pornography?¹

The first part of the word pornography, “porné,” means immorality and the second part, “graph” means to write, draw, or portray. Pornography is about picturing, imagining, and fantasizing about immorality . . .

Fantasizing Immorality is Wrong

Perhaps you have been told that fantasizing immoral images and actions isn’t really wrong. It’s true that it’s a different kind of wrong than having an actual affair, but it is still sin. Jesus made this clear when he said, “anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). It’s important for you to acknowledge that what you are doing is wrong, because you won’t fight well unless you are able to say, “This is an enemy. When I do this, I sin.”

The Bible emphasizes that one negative effect of the curse of the fall was awareness of one’s nakedness and the need for modesty. (Gen 3:7; Gen. 9:20-23; Lev. 18; Ezek. 16:1-8)

*Proverbs 5:15-21 tells a man to “drink water from his own cistern.” (**His own marriage, the one permissible context for fulfilling sexual desire.**) This is describing being satisfied sexually with your own spouse. In verse 17, he tells him not to share this pleasure with strangers. Pornography is the exact opposite of this.*

11. If someone never engages in a physical sexual act with someone other than their spouse, but fantasizes about being with someone else, is it considered adultery?

Perhaps this question should be rephrased: Does it please the Lord for a married person to sexually fantasize about someone other than their spouse?

Matthew 5:28 & Proverbs 5:15-21 from above would certainly help answer this. While it may not be adultery in deed, it is most definitely adultery in desire (one’s heart). Clearly this does not please the Lord. It also is coveting (Ex. 20:17)

¹ Breaking the Pornography Addiction, David Powlison, (<https://www.ccef.org/breaking-pornography-addiction-part-1/>)

12. If one spouse finds out about infidelity from years ago, then works for years to fix their marriage, but it never gets fixed (the trust is broken) is there a "statute of limitations" on permitted divorce?

No statute of limitations within the Bible. Allow church leadership input in order to help navigate through these difficult circumstances with wisdom. However, to constantly raise the previous infidelity in every argument and use it for manipulative leverage would be a clear signal that forgiveness has never truly taken place.

13. I persuaded a woman to have an abortion. I knew the child was mine but I wanted out of the relationship and the responsibility of a child. Where do I stand with God for doing such a thing?

Repent of selfish, sinful desires and deeds, and receive God's forgiveness. 1 John 1:9. There is no sin that has stained so deep that it cannot be washed clean by the blood of Jesus Christ. Grace is for sinners.

14. Can married couples have or keep friendships with members of the opposite sex? I see this struggle in young couples and see it as a potential problem. I recommend new married couples make friendships with other young couples of faith as an opportunity to have strong friendships going forward. This discussion came up in the office and I was surprised to hear that these young people, 20's and early 30's, thought it was ok to have lunch with a friend of the opposite sex or go out to an event if the spouse was working. Sounds dangerous to me...and they thought I was outdated.

Relational intimacy always precedes physical intimacy. The goal of dealing with temptation is to minimize and reduce it, not entertain it. Proverbs says, "Who among you can take hot coals to his chest and not be burned?" In other words, if you consistently pick up temptation, you are going to be burned by it. While it may not be sin, my counsel would be that it is incredibly unwise. Sharing lots of time leads to sharing joys and frustrations. A listening ear is often the catalyst for a longing desire.

Also, under the banner of avoiding and reducing temptation, and because of the Scriptures warnings to flee from sexual temptation – it is incredibly unwise for people in a relationship to travel overnight together. This would be the exact opposite of minimizing temptation. It would be a case of putting our confidence in the flesh (willpower) which Scripture tells us not to do.

15. Common law marriage - is there such a thing? I think NO. What if they already have children together and decide to get married? Can they continue living together until they get married? It gets complicated with children already living in the home.

The Bible makes no mention of a "common law" marriage. God created man and woman, and God created marriage. Therefore, God defines what marriage is to be in

Genesis 1-2, the problem with marriage in Genesis 3, and the ultimate purpose of marriage in Eph. 5:31-32 and Rev. 19:6-7.

16. When there has been infidelity, how long before regular intimacy should return?

There is no single answer to this question. There could be numerous dynamics to consider. Seek wisdom alongside of the church leadership. An offending spouse has the duty of seeking forgiveness of an offended spouse. The offended spouse has the right to know and decide whether to forgive and be reconciled with the offending spouse. While God requires the offended spouse to forgive the offending spouse from the heart, He does not require the offended spouse to reconcile the marriage covenant breach caused by the offense (adultery). While Hosea provides the ideal example for the offended spouse to receive the offending spouse back, Matthew 19:9 allows the offended spouse the freedom to do so. This may not happen, or it may require an undetermined amount of time for it to happen.

17. How can I determine if my marriage to a non-believer is a covenant or contract? I believe prayer changes people but am I supposed to wait for change and live unhappily for the remainder of my life? I can't believe God would want me to be so unhappy.

- a. Perhaps we should ask a question that we can answer more definitively. From 1 Corinthians 7, let's ask: "If I am married to an unbeliever, does God want me to stay in my marriage?" If you are married to an unbeliever, who consents to live with you, you already know God's will—do not send your husband away (1 Cor. 7:13). If you are in an undesirable marriage, don't continue going down this road alone. Let someone with biblical wisdom walk beside you and help you assess the situation.*
- b. We must also ask a question that is often difficult to ask. Did you marry an unbeliever as a believer? (i.e., are the consequences you have experienced the result of marrying outside of the faith?) Prov. 19:3; Gal. 6:7. [Is reaping & sowing principle at play?] If you did marry an unbeliever, as a believer, why? Did anyone counsel you not to? How did you meet? How long were you dating? How long have you been married? What specifically is wrong with the marriage? Why do you want out? What have you done to help the marriage? What have you done to hurt the marriage? Whose help have you sought? What has your spouse done to hurt the marriage? What has your spouse done to help the marriage?*

Let's assume the person did willingly marry outside of the faith. Have you acknowledged your error (sin)? Repented? Received forgiveness and cleansing from the Lord (1 John 1:9). Have you owned the part of the harvest you are responsible for (i.e., the seeds you planted, watered, and cultivated)?

Either way, whether you did or did not marry outside of the Lord, you need to know: The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Psalm 34:18. And we will walk alongside of you as well to provide comfort and counsel.

- c. *Are you now seeking to please the Lord by living according to his word and will? (Prov. 3:5-6) Are you sinning to get what you want? Are you sinning because you are not getting what you want? The path to pleasing the Lord never travels down the path of sin. Will you trust in the Lord, or continue to lean on your own understanding?*

Let me say first, no one had more joy than Jesus. Jesus' joy came through doing his Father's will. Even at great pain and suffering. (John 14:31; John 15:11; Heb. 4:15-16). He is your example of walking in difficult circumstances by faith in obedience. Don't grow weary in doing good (Gal. 6:9).

- d. *Have you sought Godly input and counsel through your church leaders and pastors? Have you mined the depths of the biblical wisdom God has provided in his word for helping you and your relationship improve? It is true, you cannot change another person. But God can change you and help guide you wisely in your relationship with your spouse, where change becomes more possible through applying the commands and principles found in His Word.*

18. If a spouse has dabbled in pornography, and even been addicted, would that be considered infidelity? (answer from Newheiser)

Matt. 5:28 makes the point that lust is adulterous and dangerous, but Jesus does not teach that every spouse whose partner lusts has a right to divorce as if one had committed the act of adultery. Similarly, when Jesus teaches that anger is murder (Matt. 5:21–22), he is not saying that everyone guilty of anger should receive the ultimate penalty that God has prescribed for murderers (death).

. . . there is a difference between a spouse who fights against lust but occasionally stumbles and a person who relentlessly pursues sexual sin through pornography and masturbation without apology or effort to change.

[There are] men who have no interest in their wives sexually because of their willful addiction to private sexual sin (which may also constitute the sin of abandonment).

Some men [have] pornography habits [involving] bizarre (or illegal) perversions, including child pornography and torture. [Some men] are guilty of porneia through acts of voyeurism (by installing hidden cameras in the shower [or bathroom or bedroom] by which [they] view female houseguests and family members).

While every effort should be made to save a marriage affected by sinful lust, I believe there are rare cases so severe that they may qualify as porneia and would be grounds for divorce.²

² Newheiser, Jim. Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage: Critical Questions and Answers (pp. 240-242). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

19. We were always told growing up that if you have sex with someone you are "married" to them, because that is what biblical marriage was (I think they gave the Isaac/Rebekah tent example)? So that would mean that if you have sex outside of marriage, you would be "married" to that person until you have sex again and are married to the new person? That line of thinking always confused me.

While sex is the physical union God designed between a man and woman to express the spiritual union (as well as the means for procreation), it is not synonymous with covenant marriage (Gen. 2:24). Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well seems to dispel this belief.

John 4:16-18

*He *said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here." ¹⁷ The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus *said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly."*

While it is certainly possible, the woman was not participating in a sexually inappropriate relationship, the fact she had been married 5 times, and Jesus asked her to bring her husband back to him, seems to imply she was living with him. About man # 6, Jesus said: the one whom you now have is not your husband.

20. I was discussing these sermons with a few friends. One question came up: Do you have a specific scripture reference for your policy not to marry a couple who is signing a prenup?

No, there is not a verse in the Bible that says it is wrong for people to have a prenuptial agreement prior to marriage. That's why I worded it the way I did when I referenced it by saying, "I will not officiate a wedding where there is a prenuptial agreement." So, that is Brad's preference, not Scripture. And because it is simply a preference, we have no church policy that says we will refuse to officiate weddings where there is a prenup. I would not have an issue if another one of our pastors felt differently. They could exercise their Christian liberty and feel comfortable officiating a wedding where the couple did have a prenuptial agreement.

But, Scripture says in Romans 14:23, "But if you have doubts about whether or not you should eat something, you are sinning if you go ahead and do it. For you are not following your convictions. If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning." In that context, Paul is talking about eating meat that had been offered to idols. Some could not do it in faith, or with a clean conscience, and some felt they could exercise their Christian liberty and choose to do so. By the way – the person who could not do it in faith is called the "weaker brother". Not less spiritual, they simply cannot strongly exercise their liberty. And so Paul says, for the weaker brother, to do something that would violate his spirit informed, Word saturated conscience, then for him, it would be sin. So some things are sin to some and not to others. I recognize that if you are a black and white person, you don't like that! So, for me, to officiate a wedding where there was a prenuptial agreement, would violate my conscience.

Here is why – a prenuptial agreement is a contract mentality and Christian marriage is a covenant mentality. A prenuptial agreement is a pre-negotiated divorce and marriage is intended to be an unending covenant. A covenant marriage is two becoming one flesh – a prenuptial agreement is guaranteeing certain parts of the union would never become one. I even counsel couples who have been divorced and are getting remarried to not keep separate finances. The majority of those in Christian financial ministries and Dave Ramsey agree with me on that principle, but a lot of couples do not like that counsel. It is hard to say “we are one flesh” and “this is mine” at the same time. A disagreement over finances and assets is a great opportunity to grow in humility and mutual submission as you work through it.

There could be some rare exceptions where someone was left money to provide for some type of unique medical care or other scenario where I would feel different. As a general rule though, I could not do it in faith, due to the reasons listed above. I do not think it is sin if others choose to do that.

21. What does it mean if you are married to someone now, who you knew was divorced, but after you are married you find out that the reason for their divorce was not Biblical?

Lots of questions need to be asked. What are the circumstances of your spouse’s divorce? How did you find out? Why are you asking? Are you asking for the purpose of trying to get out of your marriage because you don’t want to be in it, or because you are concerned and want to please the Lord?

Did you marry your spouse...

- 1. Out of ignorance (you were ignorant because you did not investigate the circumstances of his/her divorce, or because you were ignorant about what the Bible says about divorce and remarriage)?*
- 2. Out of deception (your spouse lied to you about his/her divorce which influenced your decision to marry him/her)?*
- 3. Out of disobedience (you chose to marry your spouse knowing that it was wrong)?*

How did you meet? How long did you date? How long have you been married? Did you go through pre-marriage counseling? Did you receive counsel from anyone who tried to deter you from marrying your spouse?

Were you a Christian when you got married to your spouse or have you become a Christian since marrying him/her? What about him/her? Christian before your marriage, or since the marriage?

22. I got a woman pregnant but I left her before the child was born. She did not pursue child support. I saw the child one time years later. I asked her to forgive me but I still struggle with my decisions. Am I living in sin for not marrying her, now that I am married to someone else?

No – having a baby with someone you are not married to is not a sin. How it got there is. Sex outside of marriage is fornication. This is something I have seen many times over the years and I am sure Pastor Scott has as well – somehow, people think having a child out of wedlock is a sin that is remedied by the couple getting married. It's not. Marriage is not the answer to sexual sin – repentance is. And to divorce your current spouse now – assuming there are no Biblical grounds to do so – would actually be a sin. Then, to remarry this other person would be adultery. However, Scripture says in 1st Timothy 5:8, "But those who won't care for their relatives, especially those in their own household, have denied the true faith. Such people are worse than unbelievers."

So, based on that truth, Christians have a responsibility to take care of those in our family. So, even if child support was not pursued, based on 1st Timothy 5:8, I would counsel that it should be offered in some form. Now, a word of caution – I have seen this situation before where the current spouse throws a fit because she does not want her spouse to have any contact whatsoever with this child out of fear that he will have contact with the other woman or man who is the other biological parent. My counsel would be this, the primary fear that should be adhered to is the fear of the Lord, which is the fear of disappointing Him. And for a husband to take 1st Timothy 5:8 into account and be convicted to obey that truth, is an incredibly Christ honoring thing. Especially if it has been a significant amount of time. And, when the reason given to do this after all these years is to honor Christ – that could be an incredibly powerful witness to the people on the receiving end.

So, even though it might be hard and there needs to be wisdom in how that contact is initiated, if a woman's greatest desire is to have a husband who honors the Lord, and it should be, she should be encouraged, not fearful that her spouse would desire to do a hard thing in an effort to please the Lord by obeying 1st Timothy 5:8. But again, there needs to be wisdom and mutual agreement and outside counsel on how to initiate that contact.

23. How do I rekindle the romantic love in my heart for a spouse that now appears to have changed to now show romantic love?

In order to answer this question, I think we would have to ask numerous questions. How long have you been married? What did the romantic relationship look like in the past? Were you both on the same page at one time? Did it fade over time? If it faded, when did it start? Any significant events in the past that could have contributed toward it changing (if it faded)?

When did your spouse's interest and favor toward you begin to change? Was it sudden or progressive? Why the changes in your spouse now, if you know? What are your current thoughts, expectations, desires, fears, frustrations about your romantic relationship? What were your past thoughts, expectations, desires about your romantic relationship? Are these the same?

What are your spouse's current thoughts, expectations, desires, fears, frustrations about your romantic relationship now? Past? What have you done (are you doing) to rekindle the romantic relationship with your spouse? What has your spouse done to rekindle the romantic relationship with you? What about the rest of your relationship? How would you rate your marriage on a scale of 1 to 10 (one being terrible and 10 being great) Why did you assign this number to your marriage? How would your spouse rate your marriage? Why? Have you discussed your concerns about your romantic relationship with your spouse? Have you sought counseling currently, or in the past? What would you like to see change in your marriage? Etc.? Lots of questions to better understand the situation and gain insight are necessary to answer the question.

24. You stated that when a couple is married, each person's body belongs to the other. Does this mean a husband can never be accused of rape since his wife's body is considered his own?

This question is addressed in the first link below. But, the additional links will provide helpful information to many seeking answers regarding abuse. We greatly utilize and appreciate the ministry of ccef.org at Liberty Heights Church.

<https://www.ccef.org/sexual-abuse-in-marriage/>
<https://www.ccef.org/sexual-abuse-in-marriage-the-power-of-confusion/>
<https://www.ccef.org/sexual-abuse-in-marriage-12-ways-to-help-victims/>
<https://www.ccef.org/spiritual-abuse-in-marriage/>
<https://www.ccef.org/spiritual-abuse-in-marriage-part-2/>

25. This question was asked to me by a friend, and I was unable to give a biblical answer. If divorcing a spouse without biblical grounds does that curse the children? My friend feels that since she divorced her husband, her children now carry her sins. She called them sins of the Father. I don't know how to answer this question. Her divorce was not from adultery or abandonment. It is questionable emotional abuse, if there is such a thing. Neither of them have remarried or pursued relationships. I have listened and feel they should reconcile but both are stubborn. Help

26. If I divorce without grounds for doing so, are my children cursed for my decision?

We will include questions 25 and 26 together. The Bible does not say that the children of an unbiblical divorce are cursed. There are a few places in the Old Testament that say the sins of the father are visited for three and four generations on the children. John Piper offers a nice succinct explanation to this issue:

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-god-visits-sins-on-the-third-and-fourth-generation>

While there is not a curse specifically passed down through unbiblical divorce, there certainly can be unjust suffering experienced by children from an unbiblical divorce. There is also the ungodly influence modeled by a parent's example that can shape the desires, decisions, and direction of a child's life. Whereas Proverbs 22:6 is most often read from a positive perspective (i.e., how parents are supposed to train up their children), it also could be applied from a negative perspective (i.e., how parents are not supposed to train up their children). Certainly everyone knows of families where it seems the sins of the father or mother are repeated in the lives of their children. But, there are numerous examples of children who have not followed in the footsteps of their parents and faithfully follow the Lord as well. It would probably be helpful to remember 2 Corinthians 5:17: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. While parents can have a tremendous influence in their child's life, Christ offers believers the power and resources to live a life pleasing to God no matter what has been modeled for them.

27. Is emotional abandonment a reason to divorce?

It would be necessary for the one who submitted this question to define emotional abandonment before we truly can unpack this question as specifically as we would like. But, we can say that 1 Corinthians 7:10-15 explicitly deals with intentional, physical abandonment by an unbelieving spouse toward a believing spouse.

That being said, the marriage covenant involves more than a physical union (outer man) of husband and wife, it is also a covenant of the heart, soul, mind (inner man). While the Bible does not specifically address emotional abandonment in marriage, it does address the responsibilities of one spouse to another.

- a. Both spouses are to live with the objective of not only pleasing God, but one another (1 Cor. 7:32-34).
- b. Part of pleasing one another is coming together physically (1 Cor. 7:3-5). More than likely where sustained emotional abandonment has occurred by one spouse toward the other, it is difficult to conceive that the physical union is functioning the way God intended it to.
- c. The Apostle Paul tells us in Rom. 13:10 that "love does no wrong to a neighbor." Emotional abandonment would certainly seem to violate this principle.
- d. Husbands are supposed love their wives as Christ loves his bride, the church. Husbands are called to honor, nourish, cherish, and live with their wives in an understanding way (Eph. 5:25-29; 1 Pet. 3:7). Emotional abandonment would seem to violate these passages as well.

While emotional abandonment is not biblical grounds for divorce explicitly, the problem is still significant and needs to be addressed. It violates God's revealed will for marriage. Wise, biblical help needs to be sought. Dealing with the presenting problem of

emotional abandonment in marriage may also uncover more sustained and significant issues which violate the marriage covenant.

Recommended Resource: *Renewing Marital Intimacy: Closing the Gap Between You and Your Spouse* by David Powlison
(This mini-book is available through our Biblical Counseling ministry)

28. How does a couple/family proceed in healing when one spouse, who has claimed to be a Christian in the past and a current member of the church, won't allow the church (beyond sermons) to speak into their marriage?

Church leaders and church members have responsibilities to believers (both husbands and wives) to help reconcile and restore marriages to God's intentions. Our objective is to do what we can to help both spouses fulfill Rom. 13:10 for the benefit of each other, children, the church, and the watching world.

In marriage, one person's sin (and neglecting, can bring a great deal of unjust suffering to the other, and vice versa. And, not even always intentionally or consciously. Our goal is to help both spouses live in a way that pleases God (2 Cor. 5:9-10), and one another (1 Cor. 7:3-34).

For the spouse who desires the marriage to change:

- 1. Through God's Word, God's Spirit, God's church, your situation can change when you trust the Lord with your situation. Determine to trust in the Lord, and not to lean on your own understanding any longer. You cannot change your spouse. You can change and apply God's truth to your marriage. God's word will help you define your biblical responsibilities, your spouse's biblical responsibilities, and your church's biblical responsibilities.*
- 2. Humbly admit your contribution (no matter how small) in the marriage struggles (Matt. 7:1-5).*
- 3. Own your contribution that is not pleasing to the Lord. Take responsibility for your specific contributions.*
- 4. Repent of your sinful desires and deeds. In faith, seek to please the Lord. Put off (the sinful desires & deeds you have committed that do not please the Lord) and put on (fruitful desires & deeds you have omitted that please the Lord.) You are commanded to love your neighbor. Love will require you to "add" and "remove" motives, words, and actions to your life.*
- 5. Work through instruction God has provided in his word. Start with Matt. 18:15 and keep Rom. 12:18, Eph. 4:15, and 1 Thess. 5:14 in sight as well. Move through Matt. 18:16 and Matt. 18:17 as necessary. If the issues are longstanding, you may need to seek the counsel and wisdom of your church leaders to gain help in how to move forward.*

29. How do you counsel a family member who has left his wife, and moved in with another woman. Now his ex-wife seems much happier and more at ease, indicating that perhaps there was some mental abuse or at least stress from the spouse. Obviously, this is not a Biblical divorce but do you tell people who are happy that they should go back to being miserable, when you know they won't work on their marriage or change? Do you tolerate it? Shun the person? Something else?

If we understand this question accurately, there are multiple layers to this question. So, let's answer the parts of this question that the Bible addresses directly. The husband has left his wife and is now living with another woman. What he has done is prohibited in 1 Cor. 7. Not only has the husband abandoned his wife without biblical grounds, he has moved in with another woman (and most likely in a sexual relationship with her) he is not married to, nor is he free to marry biblically. He has broken his marriage covenant through adultery and abandonment. While the wife is not required to divorce her husband, she is certainly free to do so. She should seek the counsel of her church pastors and elders.

The goal in marriage is to please the Lord, and one another (1 Cor. 7). Often couples experience prolonged problems and pain because they do not address the issues of the marriage biblically. Matthew 18:15-17 provides a path forward for struggling marriages. Serious marriage problems often remain in verse 15 or 15-16 for an extended period of time allowing the marriage problems to get more compounded and complicated.

30. How can Ezra 10 and 1 Corinthians 7 be reconciled? One tells the Israelites to abandon their unbelieving spouses and the other tells Christians to remain married to their unbelieving spouses?

The context of Ezra 10 is quite different from 1 Corinthians 7. Ezra was written under the Old Covenant to the Jews. It addresses the issue of unfaithfulness and rebellion toward God's authority through unequally yoking oneself to an unbeliever (Ezra 10:2).

First Corinthians was written to converted Gentiles living under the New Covenant. The marriage took place between two unbelieving Gentiles. One of them is later converted to Christ, and needs counsel on how to please God regarding the marriage. The counsel was to help believing spouses know how to proceed if the spouse chose to leave, and if the spouse chose to stay.

According to Ephesians 5, the model for marriage is the relationship of Christ and the church under the new covenant, not God's relationship with Israel under the old covenant. The relationship of Christ and the church is prescriptive for marriage under

the new covenant. The relationship of God with Israel would be descriptive of what took place under the old covenant and God's unique relationship with Israel.

HOMOSEXUALITY

These next two questions may seem like they are a little outside the scope of what we covered, especially the second one – but we did say that when Jesus defined what marriage was in Matthew 19, he also clearly defined what it was not. So, that statement probably led to someone to asking this first question. I am glad that they did because it allows us to continue to reinforce what we have stated before. I think the church in America has done a poor job of articulating a consistent position.

31. Where does the church stand with homosexuality? Society is becoming more open with accepting it. Do we accept homosexuals at Liberty as members?

This is not a subject we have shied away from and we have addressed it clearly on multiple occasions. The starting point is not to define what is "sin". The starting point is to define what is righteous in the area of Biblical sexuality. To sin means "to miss the mark". So, we have to clearly define what "the mark" is when it comes to sex before we can say that someone has missed the mark. And we have clearly done that in the first message in this series when we stated that sex is a gift to enjoy in the context of Christian covenant marriage. The week after we defined Christian covenant marriage the same way Jesus defined it in Matthew 19 when he described marriage between a male and female who entered into a binding covenant union with each other and the Lord that was intended to be unending, even though there are some times where divorce is permitted but not required.

That is the mark when it comes to sex. So – anything, and that is an important word – anything, that is outside that definition, is missing the mark set by Scripture and to "miss the mark" is to sin. But, what about if that couple is married? Marriage in the Bible is between a man and a woman. That is the only example and definition given in Scripture and ordained of God. God recognized in multiple places the union of Christians and non-Christians as marriage in 1st Corinthians 7. It may not be a Christian, covenant marriage, but Paul clearly defines it as marriage in that passage among others.

So, if someone is in any kind of relationship outside of the God ordained definition of marriage, and engages in sexual activity, openly, habitually and unrepentantly, we would not receive them as members whether that sin was homosexual in nature or heterosexual in nature. I have said this on many occasions, so let me say it again. God's standard is not heterosexuality, God's standard is holiness. And since 97% of the population identifies as heterosexual, heterosexual sin is a far, far greater problem in our church than homosexual sin and God is just as grieved by it.

And what the church has been guilty of is beating the pulpit when it comes to homosexuality and but then turning a blind eye to pornography, fornication, adultery and unbiblical divorce. You cannot say with integrity that you hold a high view of marriage

and therefore do not recognize homosexual marriage and then at the same time watch people get unbiblically divorced and not practice church discipline. Let me let you in on a little secret – there are all kinds of sexual sinners who attend Liberty Heights Church and we are grateful to God they are here because repentance comes by holding the Word of God up as a mirror.

Our by-laws do not allow for couples who are not married but living together to join the church because it hurts the collective witness of the church before everyone who assumes, and is almost always right, that the couple is guilty of sexual sin. So, can people engaged in open, unrepentant, habitual sexual sin join our church? No – and it doesn't matter if it is homosexual or heterosexual in nature. Can a person who has been guilty of sexual sin in the past, but is waging war against it and is asking for an open to accountability able to join the church? Of course! That includes people who are same sex attracted but believe it to not be God's design for Biblical sexuality and are therefore waging war against it and asking the church to help them. Are all sexual sinners welcome to attend LHC? You better believe it.

32. Does LHC support/endorse conversion therapy, which is banned from use with minors in many areas, being used on those identifying as homosexual.

This is a little outside the boundaries of the series but it does deal with sexuality, so let me address it quickly. If you don't know what conversion therapy is, it's the idea that you can convert a person's orientation. The slang for it used to be "pray the gay away" in Christian circles. We do not support or endorse conversion therapy. Now, does God at times, remove that attraction from a person upon conversion, just like He does other temptations? Yes – you don't have to search too hard to find numerous testimonies exactly like that.

However, what we hold to is that God, through sanctifying grace, empowers those who want to honor Him when it comes to sexuality. Let me throw a name out there for you to look up later – Sam Alberry. Sam is a same-sex attracted pastor who has written extensively on the subject and how God has empowered Him to live for His glory, despite being same sex attracted for as long as he can remember.

33. If a gay married couple (with children) became Christians and were seeking repentance, what would you advise?

We would advise them to end their sex same relationship as evidence of repentance for pursuing a marriage outside of the pattern and picture of Christian covenant marriage (covered in the first message in the Marriage is Messy series). As a believer, they would both still have a Biblical mandate to care for their children, as was referenced in an earlier question. The most important thing a parent can model for a child is pursuing holiness for the glory of God.

AGE TO MARRY

Let's put several biblical principles into play:

1. 2 Cor. 5:9-10 – Ambition of life: to please the Lord in all things. **This is the real question: Is my ambition to please the Lord? Is my earthly ambition or aim aligned with God's overarching, eternal ambition for me? Does my ambition serve God's? Or do I have it the other way around? This verse applies to heaven and earth.**
2. 1 Thess. 4:1-7 – We know sexual immorality does not please the Lord.
3. 1 Cor. 7:1-5 – Satan tempts many through singleness, sexual desire, and a lack of self-control. God provides only one permissible context for gratifying sexual desire that pleases the Lord: marriage.
4. 1 Tim. 1:6-11; Heb. 13:4-5 (Mark 4:18-19; Luke 12:13-21) – Satan tempts many through the desire and deceitfulness of riches as well. It is at the root of all sorts of evil. Judas, would be a great example.
5. Deuteronomy 8; Proverbs 30:7-9 (Little and plenty can tempt sinful hearts)
6. 1 Cor. 7:28, 32-34 – marriage comes with many blessings, but also much responsibility and trouble as well. Marriage, like all areas/circumstances of life, can tempt us and reveal sinful desires (e.g., just like money, work, and health).

34. When is the right time for two believers to get engaged/married? How important are finances in this decision? What's the most important thing to consider?

There is not a set time. I stated publicly and will answer questions in a minute about Christians getting married young, but not everyone is spiritually and emotionally mature enough to do that. I have counseled with 30 year olds who are not ready to be married. Finances should be discussed, but in the sense that you both have a Biblical view related to money and you are able to at least provide for a family. The most important thing to consider is shared conviction, not common interests.

35. 1 Cor 7:9 says "but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion." What about a relationship with a non-believer if there is a struggle with self-control? How do you reconcile "unequally yoked" vs "burn with passion"?

This and the next few are pretty easy, quick answers. God has forbidden believers to marry unbelievers. You can flee sexual sin and you can repent of if it has already happened. Once you enter into a marriage, that is not something that God intends to be stopped once it has been started like He does when it comes to sexual sin. Marriage is binding, sexual sin can be forgiven and avoided by fleeing.

36. What do you advise if your teenager (16 or 17 years of age), who you believe to be a Christian, has a "burning desire" for someone they are in a dating relationship with that may not be a Christian? The individual claims they love this person that they are in this relationship with. We realize the Bible warns against marrying someone who is not a Christian.

They should end that relationship for two reasons. If they are "burning" the Bible has a clear solution when marriage is not a wise option – flee from sexual immorality. And since that other person is not a believer, a future marriage is not an option so there is no positive possible outcome. The Bible doesn't warn against marrying an unbeliever – it forbids it.

37. Do you think it is dangerous or inappropriate to say that Christians should get married young and always avoiding long engagements? While sexual immorality can be an issue in relationships, rushing into a marriage people may not be ready for also seems risky. If someone is struggling to refrain from sexual activity outside of marriage, marriage doesn't seem like the best or only solution. (Examples: counseling is a viable option)

38. I know God's will for sexual purity but I struggle with the sermon preached regarding getting married young if you cannot remain sexually pure. Young people are often immature and have mixed up priorities. Can you clarify or expand on this because I am not against getting married young, but there is more to this than just the inability to remain sexually pure?

I am going to answer question 37 & 38 at the same time, because they are essentially the same question, with some different angles to them. I told our pastors when I preached the message that suggesting Christians should get married young would be a controversial statement. And here is why I knew that. I interviewed here for 9 months in some fashion before I was hired. The church had a history of doctrinal disunity over Calvinism, they had enormous staff turnover. They were getting ready to get foreclosed on. They had had multiple ugly business meetings. They had never practiced church discipline and had very little commitment to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture in their actual practice. But despite all of that being true – the very first question I was asked when I came before all the leaders of the church had nothing to do with any of those serious issues.

The very first question I was asked was, "why did you get married so young." In communities that are highly educated and highly compensated, marrying young can be seen as controversial because it does not resonate with the values of that culture at times. So, I knew it would be controversial, despite an overwhelming amount of Christian leaders who have written the exact same thing. As a matter of fact, I think it is telling that in a sermon that was about sex, that is the only thing that stood out to some! Lol. But, I did not say it to be controversial. Listen closely, I said it because that is what the Bible says in 1st Corinthians 7:9. So, I think a good question all of us need to wrestle with is this, "Is what Paul said under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wise

counsel, or is this an area where we have “leaned unto our own understanding” as Proverbs 3 warns us not to?

And I want us to have a Biblical worldview in every area of our lives and to not take our cues from cultural values because that is exactly what the Corinthian church was guilty of doing. But, because it was only an illustration against the backdrop of a sermon on sex, there are some things that were left unsaid, so let me expand. Wanting to have sex is not a reason to get married. But, if a couple has a desire to be married, has the spiritual and emotional maturity to get married, and has a Biblical view of marriage, they have a way to support themselves, and they have sought pre-marital counseling, I don't think getting married young is unwise.

And, if you do a little research, you would find that a great deal of Christian leaders would be of the same opinion. Al Mohler, one of the leading Christian thinkers in America published an article called “The Danger of Delaying Marriage”. Russel Moore, the leading Christian ethics voice in culture, got married at 20 and said, “The only thing I regret is that I am celebrating my 20th anniversary and not my 21st.” John MacArthur has written similar sentiments about Christians marrying young. Pastor Scott married when he was a little older, but our six other pastors were all married before the age of 23.

If you were not here, I shared in that message that Tosha was 17 when we got married and we will be celebrating our 22nd anniversary this Spring. Now, do I think every 18-22 year old is ready to get married, even if they are both committed Christians? Of course not! I have met 30 year olds not ready to get married. But, for those who are ready, if the choice comes down to honoring the Lord by not committing sexual sin, or being habitually guilty of sexual sin but waiting until you get a degree or can obtain a certain level of income or career positioning before getting married, I am casting my counsel where Scripture counsels in 1st Corinthians 7:9.

Now, here is what we want – we want both. We want everything to be in place, including sexual purity. But apparently, that is not always wise counsel or else Paul would not have written verse 9 under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The first step is to flee sexual immorality. I counsel engaged couples not to go on overnight trips as a part of that. But, here is what I would argue – a 20-21 year old who wants to please the Lord more than anything has more wisdom and is more ready to get married than a 29 year old (the average age for marriage) who has their education and career in place and a 401k set up, but has been guilty of fornication for 10 straight years. Here is why I say that, even though culture would disagree, the Bible says clearly, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

Wisdom doesn't come from age or life-experience. Wisdom comes from a heart that fears disappointing the Lord. I have met 60 year old fools and I have counseled lots of people in broken marriages who waited to get married, but had no Biblical understanding of what marriage was despite being older. Here is what I am against. Christian parents who are willing to turn a blind eye to sexual sin over a 3-4 year period

for a Christian couple who desire to get married for the sake of education and career achievement. And I am not against education. Pastor Scott and I have six degrees between us. And in nearly 20 years of pastoral ministry, I have yet to meet a couple who had an extended, multi-year engagement who were also not guilty of repeated sexual sin. And when I have questioned them why they don't get married, on more than one occasion, I have heard, "Because my Christian parents have threatened to not pay for my school or wedding if I do".

The clearest indicator that something has turned into an idol is that it moves from a desire to a demand that I am willing to punish you for if you do not meet. I am not against waiting to get married until you are done with school as a goal. I am against it becoming a god. I am against behaving as if our education and careers are our source of provision and not God. I am against valuing our own human wisdom or cultural wisdom above the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. I am against valuing anything above holiness.

SEXUAL

39. What do you do if your spouse has no desire for sex? What if both spouses have no desire for sex (older, disabled)? Is it wrong for a married couple to not have sex if they are not tempted into sexual immorality?

40. Is masturbation a sin if sex is physically painful for my spouse?

41. Is sexual intercourse limited to the vagina only?

42. Is watching pornography together, considered adultery?

43. I take anti-depressants that cause me to have no sexual drive or desire. If I have communicated this to my husband and he is understanding, is this still abstaining from my husband?

Because all these questions are related to sex, and build upon the same foundational truth, we have included links to various topics that have been addressed by a biblical counselor we respect. The list exceeds our submitted questions but we believe these would be helpful to have as a resource.

<https://kevincarson.com/2019/02/06/what-do-you-need-to-know-about-sex-and-why/>

<https://kevincarson.com/2019/02/07/what-is-the-ultimate-purpose-of-sex/>

<https://kevincarson.com/2019/02/08/what-is-the-motivation-for-good-sex/>

<https://kevincarson.com/2019/02/09/what-are-the-benefits-of-good-sex/>

<https://kevincarson.com/2019/02/12/what-is-the-connection-between-sex-and-communication/>

<https://kevincarson.com/2019/02/12/understanding-the-struggle-of-a-mans-desire-for-sex-in-marriage/>
<https://kevincarson.com/2019/02/14/how-should-a-husband-deal-with-his-desire-for-sex/>
<https://kevincarson.com/2019/02/21/wife-are-you-cheating-your-husband/>
<https://kevincarson.com/2019/02/23/husband-are-you-cheating-your-wife/>
<https://kevincarson.com/2019/03/01/what-does-the-bible-teach-about-sex-sex-in-marriage-is-pure-and-holy/>
<https://kevincarson.com/2019/03/05/what-does-the-bible-say-about-how-often-a-married-couple-should-have-sex/>
<https://kevincarson.com/2019/03/07/what-is-a-christian-allowed-to-do-in-sex-what-is-permissible/>
<https://kevincarson.com/2019/03/09/what-does-the-bible-say-about-anal-sex/>
<https://kevincarson.com/2019/03/16/copy-what-does-the-bible-teach-about-oral-sex/>
<https://kevincarson.com/2019/06/13/what-does-the-bible-teach-about-masturbation/>
<https://kevincarson.com/2019/07/12/what-does-the-bible-teach-about-sexual-aids-including-bdsm-pornography-and-x-rated-videos/>
<https://kevincarson.com/2019/11/13/a-better-question-than-do-you-want-to-have-sex/>
<https://kevincarson.com/2019/11/22/what-do-i-do-when-my-spouse-does-not-want-to-have-sex/>
<https://kevincarson.com/2020/02/20/no-sex-tonight-again/>