

# OpenTheo

## What Constitutes a Marriage?

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### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about what constitutes a marriage, at what point God considers a committed relationship to be a marriage, whether the freedom to pursue marriage is a natural right (and what restrictions would be inappropriate), and how to decline an invitation to an unbiblical wedding.

- \* What constitutes a marriage?
- \* At what point does God consider a committed relationship to be “marriage”?
- \* Is the freedom to pursue marriage a natural human right, and are there any inappropriate restrictions that should not be placed on marriage?
- \* Should I explain my reason for declining an invitation to a marriage ceremony that doesn't reflect the biblical order or just address it when asked?

## Transcript

This is Amy Hall. I'm here with Greg Cogle and you're listening to the hashtag STRask Podcast. Yes, you are.

Okay, Greg. Oh, man, we're starting off. We're already laughing.

This is going to be too much fun. Today we have some questions about marriage. And I know a few weeks ago it was on March 4th.

I just checked the date. We had a question about marriage and, you know, how to defend what marriage is. So we have talked about this in more depth.

But I wanted to start with this question just to set up the other questions about marriage. And this question comes from Jeremy. What constitutes a marriage? Well, if we go to Matthew 19, where Jesus is questioned about divorce and remarriage, Jesus lays it out in a clear fashion by going back to the creation order.

Let me just say something about creation order. The creation order doesn't simply reflect a bunch of rules God decided to make arbitrarily. It reflects what I'm talking about is the way God has structured reality.

He has made the world a certain way. All right. And if you think about, say, a vehicle, so you're making Henry Ford made the first automobile.

And he made it to function a certain fashion. And when it all was working just the way he had in mind, it was a good car. It did what he intended it to do.

And it was all working. All the parts were fitting together. All right.

And so that's what good means in that case. And it's also what good means in Genesis when it says God saw everything he made. And it was good.

That means it was just the way he wanted it to be. It was functioning really well to accomplish a particular round in the end that it was meant to accomplish is human flourishing. So you have human beings made the image of God who will be functioning in the world in a particular way.

So they will flourish in the world that God made for him, for them. And that entailed a particular and peculiar kind of relationship. And remember all the animals were there.

And Adam named all the animals. And there was not a suitable help made for him. And so then God fashioned Eve from his rib.

So he made someone like him to be by his side. Okay. And what Jesus does is goes back to that creation order.

And he says, have you not read that from the beginning, he made the male and female. So immediately, we know that the foundation for marriage from God's perspective is binary gender. And the reason is because males and females fit together in a particular way, designed that way, in order to be fruitful and multiply.

Okay. And subdue the earth is a work ethic kind of thing. And they're working together in partnership to do that.

Now, what Jesus identifies is that this whole system is something that God made. It doesn't mean that every person who gets married knows that God made it and God is responsible for the way the world is. But the cultures understand the way the world is, because it just takes a reasonably observant person to see how this all functions and that marriages are male and female, and they make families and families of the cornerstone or the foundation of all civilizations.

And so civilizations are protecting that unique kind of relationship and privileging it and regulating it for the good and the flourishing of all human beings. All right. So this is a

kind of a common sense element.

What Jesus says is what God has joined together, let no man separate. So Jesus identifies first by looking at the creation order, what marriage is, and the summary that I use, which is easy to remember, but it captures all the important details. Jesus' summary would be one man with one woman becoming one flesh and that sex.

So the sexual relationship, it's more than sex, but it entails sex, is reserved for that kind of relationship and not any other kind of relationship for one lifetime. So it's to be durable. Okay, this is what what God has joined together.

Jesus said, let no man separate. So that's God's definition of marriage or it specific clarified with detail with Jesus going back to the creation order. Okay, so with that foundation, let's go on to a question from Rich.

Sex outside of marriage is a sin. Not every government gives a marriage license. It can't be as simple as a church ceremony.

Having sex itself can't equal marriage. If that were true, then the act itself would end in marriage. At what point does God consider a committed relationship to be marriage? Well, I guess the key here is in this word committed relationship, all right, because the kind of commitment that God has in mind is a is a lifelong commitment.

That's the between a man and a woman. It's a lifelong commitment that is secured by the consummation, the sexual union that consummates the marriage. And by the way, from almost from the beginning of time in ancient times, the idea that the sexual consummation was there.

I let me back up and put it this way. From the from ancient times, there has been the idea that the marriage is not completely consummated until the sexual union is complete. Okay, usually on the wedding night or something like that, that it's all part of the same package.

There is a there is a commitment. And there is which God intends to be lifelong and consummated in a physical union. So these things are all part of that package.

But the commitment characteristically has been a public commitment. And though the text doesn't specify that, I mean, there wasn't much public in the first marriage, right? Adam and Eve, nevertheless, all the way back to antiquity, these relationships or these these unions were celebrated publicly. And part of the benefit of the public celebration is that you are you are making this commitment before your entire community in many environments before God as well.

And that is meant to publicize the fact of and the gravity of the commitment you're making. Now, of course, in present times, that's just so many words. It doesn't mean

anything, you know, until death do us part kind of thing to have a new hold to love and to cherish until death do us part.

This is just noise that people make it to alter in many cases. But this is indeed what God has in mind. So I guess you could have some circumstances where two people, let's say post-nuclear, and here are two people, a man and a woman around no one.

And they're the only ones that are left within the region or whatever, and they could get married, I guess, after a fashion if their commitment was this kind of commitment before God, even though there's no public ceremony. But nowadays, this is what I think is required. Anything else is just having, I think, results in a cavalier characterization of the commitment.

If you're not willing to stand before people, a community and family and friends and make this public commitment, even if you're an atheist, you're not going to stand in your own mind, at least before God, you're still standing before others to express the depth of the conviction or the commitment that you're making. Okay, that's a marriage. I remember, right around when I became a Christian, there was a young couple, I knew, I mean, they were like in their early 20s, a guy and a girl, and it was like, hey, man, we weren't married before God, we're committed before God, you know, that's cool, then we can do our thing and all that other stuff, you know, and they identified themselves as Christians.

Well, that didn't last. I mean, it just disappeared after about a year. There are different directions, whatever, you know, and because if you are so-called committed before God in the kind of commitment that God has in mind, why wouldn't you make that public and bring the rest of your community in with that commitment? The whole purpose of it is to secure, I think, the integrity of that commitment.

So this is why I think a public ceremony, though, in the sense not strictly necessary, if circumstances make it impossible, post-nuclear, but certainly, certainly the way it ought to be done, and that's the only kind of commitment, I think, that justifies sealing the union sexually after the event. And I think even a secular society understands that even with the marriage license, you have to have witnesses. You can't just go home and sign it and then come back.

So one of the things here, when is a committed relationship a marriage? People use the word committed relationship to mean, I don't know, we really like each other. We spend all our time together. That is different from vows.

That is different from public vows that people will hold you accountable to. And so I think, like you said, Greg, your friends who just kind of wandered away, that's just leaving a backdoor open. You need to have that public pressure helping you to stay together.

And I think that's part of what is expected here. Interestingly, even with public vows and public pressure, the divorce rate is, you know, in the culture in general is just astronomically high. So even with all of that going on, given the ethic that we face today, it still is, you know, there's still problems with divorce, obviously.

Okay, so let's go to a question from Andy. Would you describe the freedom to pursue marriage as a natural human right? It seems like the gay marriage debate has clouded the question of what are appropriate restrictions. Are there any notable restrictions that should not be placed on marriage? Yeah, I'm never thought about this question as such.

Is it a natural human right? It seems to me it would be a negative right. There's a difference between, there's a distinction between positive rights and negative rights. And simply put negative rights are the rights to be is the right to be left alone.

It provides liberty. Okay, positive rights are rights to have something to be given something. So health care is a positive right.

That means someone else is obliged to give you health care without you doing anything to deserve it. Yes, you're breathing, so then you ought to get it, you know, and this is where rights have gone crazy. All these things you have a right to do this, you have a right to do that, blah, blah, blah.

And so, but negative rights are different. Negative rights are rights to have the freedom. And you think of the Bill of Rights.

Those are all negative rights in this sense. It's unfortunate word because it makes it sound kind of negative, but it just means that it's the freedom to be left alone and to pursue. And so consequently, I think marriage is part of that we ought to be free to have appropriate unions that are real marriages.

Okay. And so miscegenation, I think that's the right word is when when, you know, races were not allowed to intermarry that happened in the right that happened also in the United States, those laws were actually repealed, but because race is irrelevant to the issue of what a marriage is. Now, sex is not irrelevant.

Gender made us the wrong word sex. I mean, I'm trying to think of a political word here, gender sex male female, that kind of thing that's not, that's not irrelevant to marriage because marriage just is the joining of a male with a female, female under a particular set of circumstances. And if it's not a male and a female, then it's not even a marriage.

So, to say that gays have a right to be married to, that men have a right to be married to men, and women have a right to be married to women, it is nonsense. Because the word that's like saying a man has a right to a, I'm chuckling now because I used to use, let me just say it and I'll tell you why I'm laughing. It's like saying a man has a right to a hysterectomy.

Well, this worked like 10 years ago, it doesn't work anymore because men can get pregnant according to the way people think about gender now. But the idea is a male has no right to a hysterectomy because hysterectomies don't even apply to males. It's nonsense to talk about, I am a right, I'm a male, but I have a right to, you don't have a uterus.

So, you can't have a hysterectomy. So, it's a similar kind of thing here, when we think of same sex marriage, the word doesn't actually apply. Now, can same sex couples live together, have the freedom to live together or make arrangements, cultural, social, domestic arrangements that, you know, okay.

But when we talk about same sex couples getting married, if we're going to use the word marriage to describe same sex couples, then the word has lost all of its meaning. Because then the question becomes, what is a marriage? And I don't think that can be answered. Well, it's when two people do what? Walk down the aisle and say stuff because they want to live together? Well, you know, all kinds of people can walk down the aisle and say stuff because they want to live together.

Why restricted to two? Why not three, four, five? Or whatever. Why not? Why does it have to be a person, a human? You see, and so if the term is so flexible that it can kind of entail anything, then it doesn't have any real meaning at all. And that's, I think, what's happening to the word marriage.

As one person put it after Obergefell decision, the Supreme Court in 2015, all marriage is a list of names on a piece of paper. That's all it is. What I always said at the time is that we're not arguing about rights.

We're so when you say, should everyone have the freedom to pursue marriage? Yes. I mean, no Christian was ever interested in saying that certain people could not get married because of their sexual orientation. No Christian ever said that.

What we said was that marriage is a particular thing. Marriage is a man and a woman. And there are, as we said before, non arbitrary reasons for that.

That actually explains why we have only two. We have a male and a female because that union creates children. It's completely unique.

We have one male and one female because that's all it takes to create that union. And we have permanence because, again, this is to protect the children who are created from that union. You have a long gestation period for human beings, nine months, and then then you have a long period of time, roughly 20 years in our economy where those children are growing up and need to be taken care of in a stable environment.

So anyone who wants to enter into that, that's, that's the definition of marriage, not that we made up. It's not arbitrary. It's actually tied to reality.

So anyone who wants to enter into that can. It's not a cultural convention or construction either by the better word. Now the fact that some people don't want to enter into that doesn't give them the right to change the definition.

And this is what was happening. Now what happens is once you remove the male female designation for marriage, now everything is arbitrary. Why are you even joining two people together? What is the point of that? They can't create children.

Why only two? What is the point of that? There's not the two sexes coming together. And as you can see now that it's been, they arbitrarily changed it to two people who love each other. There's no reason to keep it there.

That definition is meaningless and it's arbitrary. So there's no way to stop it from changing something else. By the way, it's never even, so what about all these arranged marriages where love is not the motivation? Is that not a marriage anymore? Now that they change it to two people who love each other? See, the whole reason for this is just, and we've argued this particular point for 20 years.

I mean, right when this got up, came up on the radar, same sex marriage. We've made these kinds of points. This is all about social engineering.

That's all it's about. It's about the government, which is the people through the government being forced to say that there is no difference between a male and a female. There is no fundamental difference, and therefore you can join two males together, two females together, just as you can join a male and female together in this kind of union, because they're interchangeable.

Of course, that has all kinds of other ramifications that we see happening in our culture. The mutilation of young girls now is the legion. And in fact, I'll probably talk about it on the show today, the state of Indiana just took a child away from its parents because the parents were not gender-affirming.

And the child wanted to be called by a different name and by different pronouns. The parents who are religious folk, but that shouldn't matter. It shouldn't matter.

It's not a religious issue. It shouldn't be. But in any event, they were opposed to that, so this was considered child abuse, and the state of Indiana took the child away from the parents.

Why? Because this distinction between male and female is completely blurred in arbitrary, and has become an issue now of civil rights. So to sum up the question, what kind of restriction should not be placed on marriage, and you already touched on this grade, but I just want to underscore this. Any restriction that's not related to the nature of marriage is illegitimate.

So that would be skin color, height, whatever it is, whatever it is, it's not related to, right, exactly. Anything like that is not related. Now, what people tried to do was say that those restrictions were the same as saying it's between a man and a woman.

But as you can see, if it's related to the nature of marriage, then it's totally legitimate to have that restriction. Well, Greg, I'm going to throw one more in. I never going to go over.

But since it's so related, this one comes from Timothy. After declining an invitation to a marriage ceremony that doesn't reflect the biblical order and offering to get together at a later date to honor the relationship, should I explain my reason for not attending or just bring it up when asked? Well, I guess my immediate response, and maybe you feel differently about this, is just to not bring it up unless somebody asks why why stir things up right at the beginning. You're going in on a friendly basis to renew the relationship or strengthen the relationship or maintain the relationship.

And so why then throw this, you know, throw this cog, what do you call it, this stick in the spokes or whatever, you know, why create this problem, why bring it up at all, just ignore it. Just be sociable and friendly and loving whatever is appropriate for the circumstance. And if they bring it up, then you could just explain why this is okay, but you couldn't participate in that.

In other words, you can visit and have fellowship or have a meal, whatever, have a friendship, but you could not participate in the celebration. Well, just to clarify one thing, I don't think the offering to get together at a later date is to honor the relationship. I mean, if we were going to honor the relationship, we would go to the marriage.

But I was thinking when they say honor the relationship between that person and the other person, not between the two so-called married people. Oh, it's unclear. It's unclear what these are referring to.

Yeah. So, yeah, if you're referring to honoring the relationship of the people who are having the ceremony, then I would say, no, that's not why. I mean, you would do it because, you know, if you want to have them over, because you care about them and your relationship with them.

Right. And that's our point. It's down the reason.

You can continue the friendship that you have with them, but that doesn't mean that you are somehow promoting the marriage relationship, which isn't really a marriage. And that's why you didn't go to the ceremony. Now, I think whether or not you explain probably just depends on how close you are.

If it's somebody that you know is going to ask you, you might want to explain when you say no. If it's someone that's just, you know, a friend and you just... The problem, of



course, is that it's going to be really hard to avoid it later because they're going to talk about it in front of you. So, then how do you respond if they're not aware of what you think? So, you might head off future issues by saying something at the beginning, but I've never been in this situation.

So, I'm not really sure what would work better. How is it that people turned down? I mean, this just occurred to me now, but when you think about it, in most cases, how is it that somebody turns down the invitation? They just don't RSVP. And the only persons that are going to stand out in that circumstance, why didn't you RSVP... Aren't you coming to my wedding? People that are going to be really close to the couple, really close.

A lot of people just don't RSVP because it's that schedule doesn't work. So, you never hear from them again. Now, if it's a family member, that's more difficult.

You say, dad, why aren't you walking me down the aisle? It says, because I can't. That discussion that has already had, it probably has already been part, has already been taking place. But afterwards, is what we recommend is that, okay, you can still maintain the relationship with your kids or your siblings or what a nephews, you know, as that personal relationship by having them over or whatever, but you're not celebrating the particular immoral relationship.

Well, thank you. We got through four questions, Greg. Thank you, Jeremy, Rich, Andy, and Timothy.

We appreciate hearing from you. Send us your question on X with the hashtag STRS. Or go to our website at [str.org](http://str.org) and look for our hashtag STRS page.

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So, if you all know somebody that you think would enjoy the show, please share it with them. We'd love to increase our reach so that we can help people with their questions and help them understand all the difficult things happening in our culture and the objections we get and all the sorts of questions that we answer. You benefit from Amy's response, because the other show is just me.

So, thank you for listening. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.