

**Willie Ramsey – Herbert Russell
Religious Exchange**

**Does “*For Fornication*”
(Mt. 19:9) Apply Today?**

Russell denies; Willie Ramsey affirms

(When a religious exchange under the above title with a reader from Gallipolis, Ohio was printed in the June and July, 1984 issues of *The Somerset Sower*, the church’s bulletin where I preach, two other readers sent us a copy of a published tract which also denies that “*for fornication*” in Matthew 19:9 applies under the New Testament. One was the tract’s author, *Herbert Russell* (passed away since the exchange), from Liberty, Kentucky. I reprint here quotations from his tract which establish his position and my reply, from the August, 1984 issue of *The Somerset Sower*. – Willie Ramsey)

**Herbert Russell’s Tract,
“FROM THE BEGINNING It Was Not So”,
Scripturally Examined and Answered
By
Willie Ramsey**

**RUSSELL’S POSITION BRIEFLY
STATED**

(quotations are taken from his tract):
Mr. Russell believes that “*Fornication means ‘illegitimate sexual relations on the part of an UNMARRIED PERSON,’*

whereas adultery means ‘illegitimate sexual relations on the part of a MARRIED person’”. Accordingly a wife or a husband (married people) cannot commit fornication. Only unmarried people can commit fornication. Therefore, he reasons, “It was the act of fornication on the part of a betrothed ‘wife’ ... to which Jesus referred in Matthew 19:9 as a cause for terminating a betrothal contract which had not yet been consummated by the marriage ceremony which would then have made the two ‘one flesh’ until death parted them.”

Another argument Russell makes is that Jesus instructed His disciples to teach those they baptized to “observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). And “*nowhere in the apostles’ doctrine is there even a HINT of divorce and remarriage FOR ANY CAUSE WHATSOEVER. Yet the apostles declared the WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD. Acts 20:27. Therefore, we are forced to the conclusion that the ‘whole counsel of God’ DOES NOT INCLUDE DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE FOR ANY CAUSE.*”

**RUSSELL’S POSITION SCRIPTURALLY
EXAMINED AND ANSWERED:**

The position taken by Mr. Russell is found to be Scripturally false because (1) he has failed to correctly define “*fornication*” (Greek — PORNEIA) in its Biblical usage in Matthew 19:9, (2)

because of which he then misunderstands and misapplies Matthew 19:9, and (3) because he holds a false understanding of Scripture which believes that the only teachings of Christ that are binding today, under the New Testament, are those that were repeated by apostles of Christ beginning at Pentecost (Acts 2).

(1) Mr. Russell failed to correctly define “*fornication*” by defining it from an *English* dictionary, which has given him that word’s *current English usage*. But that is not the issue here. The issue is “What does ‘fornication’ (PORNEIA) mean in its *Biblical usage* in Matthew 19:9?

Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon (dictionary) of the New Testament, on page 532, defines PORNEIA to mean, “a. prop. of illicit sexual intercourse in general” without reference to *unmarried* or *married* people being the guilty participants. I challenge Mr. Russell to prove from any reputable dictionary of New Testament Greek that PORNEIA applies *exclusively* to *unmarried* people. Even my unabridged Webster’s English dictionary gives a second definition of “fornication”: “2. in the Bible, (a) any unlawful sexual intercourse, *including adultery*” (Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary, Unabridged Second Edition, (U. S.: W. Collins-World Pub. Co. Inc., 1975), page 722. Emphasis mine – W.R.).

To “commit adultery” (MOICHAO – Matthew 5:32; 19:9) means “to have unlawful intercourse with another’s wife (Thayer, page 417). And “adulterer” (MOICHOS) “denotes one who has unlawful intercourse with the spouse of another” (W. E. Vine’s Expository Dict. Of N.T. Words, Vol. I, pages 32,33).

Therefore even a good English dictionary recognizes the New Testament’s use of PORNEIA to apply to illicit sex engaged in by *unmarried* or *married* people.

(2) Mr. Russell is correct in pointing out that the Bible uses “*betrothed*” or “*espoused*” to refer to a type of engagement between a man and woman (actually meaning “to be promised in marriage” – Vine, Vol. I, page 122). He is also correct in observing that it was an unconsummated marriage under consideration in such cases (*but* meaning not completed in sexual intercourse), as was the case with Joseph and Mary until Jesus was born (Luke 1:26-27; Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:4-5). Since I have already shown that Mr. Russell failed to properly define “fornication” and that “fornication”, properly defined, applies to any unlawful sex engaged in by *unmarried* or *married* people; therefore, Mr. Russell’s point that Jesus, in Matthew 19:9, was talking only of fornication committed by a *betrothed wife* must

also be regarded as false, because there is no reason for such a limited application. Too, every case I know of in both the Old and New Testaments where a man or a woman is a “betrothed” or “espoused” husband or wife, the context identifies them as being such. In cases where their marriage is consummated they are simply referred to as a “husband” or a “wife”. If there is an exception, I am not aware of it.

(3) Mr. Russell has also taken his false position regarding divorce and remarriage because of a false understanding of Scripture which believes that the only teachings of Christ that are binding today, under the New Testament, are those that were repeated by apostles of Christ beginning at Pentecost (Acts 2). All of the other teachings of Christ were not intended to apply under the New Testament and are therefore not a part of the “whole counsel of God” today. This understanding regarding Christ’s teachings is simply not true. Notice. In Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus Himself gives the proper procedure of action when one spiritual brother sins against another. If the brother who sinned remained unwilling to repent, the situation was to be taken to and acted upon by the local “*church*”. But the church [both universal and local] was not established until Pentecost (Acts 2). And nowhere does the New Testament ever record an apostle or anyone ever repeating this procedure. Yet Christ Himself said the

local “*church*” was to be *notified* and *must act* in such cases. Therefore, this procedure is a part of the “whole counsel of God” for individual Christians and churches of Christ today, under the New Testament, without any record in the New Testament of an apostle or anyone ever teaching it or repeating it afterwards. Nowhere does the New Testament teach that an apostle or anyone must repeat or teach any of Christ’s teachings, beginning at Pentecost, in order for them to be binding today, under the New Testament.

CONCLUSION

I humbly pray that Mr. Russell and all others who hold these views will faithfully study and consider what I have herein presented and that they will make the necessary changes in their beliefs and practices.

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