

The Meaning of the Words “Adultery” and “Fornication.”

For the last few years some have been defining these words as a breaking of the marriage covenant. Although one may break the covenant of marriage, in an unscriptural breakup, that is not the meaning of the words “Fornication” and “Adultery.”

The definition of Fornication:

1. “Prostitution, unchastity, fornication, of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse.” – Arndt and Gingrich, page 699, 700. (The foremost Greek dictionary in use today.)

They also say the word is used “of the sexual unfaithfulness of a married woman” and give Matthew 19:9 and Matthew 5:32 as references.

2. Strong defines this word, “porneia,” as “harlotry (including adultery and incest)” – Strong

3. “Used properly, of illicit sexual intercourse in general. Acts 15:20,29; 21:25” – Thayer

4. Kittel, in showing the background of this word in the Old Testament says, it “develops into the proper term for ‘to have intercourse with another,’ ‘to be unfaithful,’ ‘to play the harlot’” – Vol VI, p 584. He also defines it as “whoredom.” Vol. 6, p 584. “The NT is characterised by an unconditional repudiation of all extra-marital and unnatural intercourse.” – Vol. 6, p. 590

The definition of Adultery:

1. “From a religious standpoint adultery does not consist merely in physical intercourse with a strange woman; it is present already in the desire which negates fidelity (Mt. 5:28).” – Kittel Vol. IV, pp. 733, 734, a ten volume work of the history, meaning and usage of Greek words.

2. “to commit adultery with, have unlawful intercourse with another's wife: Matt 5:28” - Thayer

Some scriptures to consider:

1. John the baptizer told Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have her.” He was speaking of the woman he was living with who he said was his brother Philip’s wife. – John 14:1-4

2. Is there any question what the great harlot was doing in Revelation? I do realize this is a figurative use of the word.

3. In reference to the woman in John 8, it is said, “Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.” What was the act she was committing? She was bound to be doing something! What was it that they caught her in the very act of committing?

4. Ezekiel 16: In verse 15 a woman had played the harlot, and poured out her fornications. In verse 25 she is portrayed as opening her feet (ASV, “legs”) to every one who passed by. In verse 32 she is portrayed as a wife who commits adultery, who takes strangers instead of her husband. (Notice – fornication, harlot, and adultery describes what she was doing.)

5. The commandment in the Old as well as the New Testaments says, “you shall not commit adultery.” So, it is an act.

6. In Jesus’ teaching, not only does the one who is guilty of divorcing his wife (not for fornication), if he should marry again, commits adultery, but ALSO whoever marries him commits adultery. What covenant has the one marrying him broken?

7. Paul said we should put to death a list of things, among which is fornication. Later he says they at one time “lived in them.” Col. 3: 1-7. So it is possible to live in fornication.

These lexicons and dictionaries of Greek words that are used here are recognized by scholars everywhere as the finest in existence for defining words for us. It is interesting that, in none of these definitions, do the words mean “the breaking of a covenant.”