

Do Pastors Have The Power To Marry People?

In our culture, if you want to get married you must get a marriage license and then you have to find someone to marry you. The marriage ceremony is typically handled in one of two ways: people can go down to the courthouse and get married by a justice of the peace, or they can find a pastor and have him do the job. This procedure is so commonplace that many people don't even think about it. If you ask someone "Who married you?" they'll typically give you the name of their pastor, because people believe that pastors have the ability to take two people and join them together in marriage.

But do pastors *really* have that power? Stop and think about it. What gives pastors the ability to join people in holy matrimony? Who gave them that right?

You can check the Bible but you won't find it there. The Bible gives preachers several responsibilities: they are to preach the gospel, take care of their flocks, and baptize people. However, the Bible *never* tasks them with marrying people. Jesus Christ commanded His church to go into all the world, make disciples, and baptize people, but He *never* mentioned the idea that His church should be marrying people. He didn't even hint at it.

The apostles wrote a lot of letters to various churches that instructed them in how to follow the Lord, but they never mentioned the idea that churches ought to be involved in marrying people. The letters talked about feeding the poor, healing the sick, making converts, and even church discipline, but they never mentioned churches holding marriage ceremonies.

In fact, no church in the entire Bible is ever said to have performed a marriage. No disciple, apostle, or deacon ever performed a wedding in the Bible. There are no examples of a preacher taking two people and marrying them. *It never happened.*

What I'm trying to say is this: the idea that preachers have a magical ability to unite two people in marriage *doesn't come from the Bible*. There's nothing in the Bible which says that pastors have that ability. There's also nothing in the Bible that says churches ought to be involved in performing marriages. *It's not there*. I understand that churches have taken this role upon themselves, but God never gave them that responsibility.

This means that pastors *don't* have the power to unite people in marriage. Pastors have no more power to marry people than software developers or tax accountants. I understand that people commonly believe they need a pastor to get married, but there's no Biblical basis for that. It may be traditional, but it's man's tradition – not God's.

So who *does* have the power to marry people? According to Jesus Christ, only one person can do that:

Matthew 19:4-6: “And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore **God hath joined together**, let not man put asunder.”

Who takes two people and joins them together in marriage? *God does*. Only God has that power! It is God, not man, who does the joining. How does it work? Jesus said it's pretty simple: a man leaves his parents and cleaves to his wife, and God unites them into one. That's literally what the verse says. At that point they've been joined together. They are no longer two people; instead they're one flesh.

Here's what that means in practical terms. In the marriage ceremony, the marriage license itself means nothing. It may have meaning from a legal standpoint, but that piece of paper carries no

weight with God. Having a signed marriage license doesn't make you married, and *not* having one doesn't mean that you're unmarried. After all, Adam and Eve didn't have a marriage license but the Bible tells us they were husband and wife. There are many societies that never had marriage licenses but that doesn't mean those couples were living in sin. To God a marriage license is just a meaningless piece of paper. It carries no weight and has no authority.

Likewise, at the end of the ceremony, when the pastor says “I now pronounce you man and wife”, his pronouncement means nothing. Saying those words doesn't make the couple married, and *not* saying those words doesn't leave them unmarried. What the pastor says is irrelevant.

The key part of the marriage ceremony is when the man takes the woman to be his wife, and the wife takes the man to be her husband. They become a married couple when they make a covenant together in the sight of God – a lifelong covenant. When they do that, and exchange their vows, they become married because at that point *God* joins them together.

Now, the consummation of the marriage is important, but that's *not* what transforms two people into a married couple. We know this because Adam and Eve were referred to as husband and wife before they consummated their union. Take a look for yourself. This is Genesis 2:25:

Genesis 2:25: “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.”

Eve is referred to as Adam's wife *immediately* – as soon as she was created and given to Adam. However, their relationship wasn't consummated until later:

Genesis 4:1: “And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord.”

If that's not enough evidence for you, here's something else to consider. God has always been very clear that sex is only permissible *within* marriage. Sex within marriage is good, but sex outside of marriage is a serious sin. This means you must be married *before* you can have sex. The marriage must take place *first* – which means the act of the physical union can't be part of the marriage process.

Adam and Eve are a great example of how marriage actually works. God brought Eve to Adam, Adam accepted her as his wife, and they became a married couple. This is despite the fact there was no marriage license, there was no pastor to pronounce them married, and there weren't even any witnesses. (That being said, witnesses are a good idea because they'll hold the couple accountable to their vow). All it took to marry them was their covenant, made in the sight of God. That was enough.

The reason this matters is because people have come to believe that they are united in marriage *by other people*, instead of by God. This leads to the idea that since the marriage was *created* by people, it can also be dissolved by people. Since the State grants the marriage, the State can also grant the divorce.

But as we've seen, the State has *nothing to do* with uniting people in marriage. Likewise, pastors are *not* a part of the process (no matter what they claim). It's *God* who unites people in marriage – and only God can dissolve the marriage. You can go down to the courthouse and get a divorce, but all the State can give you is a meaningless piece of paper. The courthouse isn't what married you in the first place; it was God who did that. This means that *God has to grant your divorce*. If He doesn't then you don't have one; in His sight you're still married to your original spouse, and any new relationship you're involved in is an act of adultery.

Since I've already written about divorce elsewhere I won't repeat it all here. The point I want to make is that getting a divorce isn't as simple as people think. Since God is the one who united you in the first place, He is the only one who can separate

you. If you divorced your spouse for an unbiblical reason (which is too complicated a subject to get into here) then God doesn't recognize your divorce *and still considers you to be married to your original spouse.*

Should you decide to get married, keep in mind that the State and the pastor play no role in uniting you in holy matrimony. God is the one who is joining the two of you together – and He is doing it *for life*. Marriage isn't as easy to get out of as some people think. Just because you consider yourself to be divorced does *not* mean God agrees with you. If you didn't get divorced for a Biblical reason then God considers you to simply be having an affair and living in sin with someone you're *not* married to. That may not matter very much to you now, but on Judgment Day, when you stand before God and give an account for your life, it will matter a *great deal* to you then.