



Should Christian Couples Get Legally Married?

February 22, 2018 / in [2018 blogposts](#) [blog](#) / by [David Fowler](#)

I know that question sounds bizarre, but after what I wrote last week about whether Christian ministers should continue being agents of the state for legalizing marriages that state law defines contrary to God's law, a couple of thoughtful people asked me how the line of thinking used there applied to Christian couples wanting to marry. My answer may just change the way you think of marriage.

By way of background, last week I said the Supreme Court's same-sex decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* did not expand the list of people who could enter into the historic institution of marriage and have that kind of marriage recognized legally. Rather, the Court constitutionally jettisoned the male-female kind of marriage for *legal purposes* and replaced it with one in which the sex of the parties is no longer an

element of marriage.

The Questions the Law Raises

Applying these legal facts to the Christian couple who desires today to wed, this is the question the state now effectively asks them: Are you willing to agree to the state's new definition of marriage and sign our forms that reflect that new definition of marriage in order to have a *legal* marriage?

Given that question, the couple must then ask themselves this question: Do they want a marriage the law will recognize badly enough that they will sign the forms?

Is It Just 'Paperwork'?

Some may say that it's just a matter of paperwork, and it's what's in their hearts that matters. But, as noted below, that argument can backfire.

Hard Choices in Scripture

You may say, "David, what choice do today's Christian couples have?" Before I answer, let's put this, and all the other hard choices Christians are going to have to start making because of *Obergefell*, into a scriptural context.

In John Chapter 6, we're told that a number of people stopped following Jesus because some of His sayings were "hard." Jesus then asked His disciples, "Will you also go away?" Peter responded, "To whom shall we

go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68 KJV).

I picture Peter as being conflicted. Perhaps Peter didn't like what Jesus had to say any more than the other folks, but he realized he did have a choice whether he liked it or not: Reject Jesus' words or reject eternal life.

By sharing that story, I'm not saying one's eternal life depends on how one answers the question I've posed. I, too, often cringe over the fact that the Lordship Jesus claims over His followers is not dependent on whether the choices He asks us to make are hard or easy.

What Are Christian Couples' Choices?

So what choice do Christian couples have in this instance? The answer lies in the fact that there is nothing in the law that prohibits a man and woman from going before a minister and other witnesses and making public their covenant declaration of marriage.

In the eyes of God, is not their declaration before their minister and friends a binding marriage? Would not God hold them to their covenant vows, whether they had a certificate from the state or not?

You bet He does, and you bet He would. Just read what God says about marriage and divorce back before civil government started licensing marriages.

The point is religious covenant marriage ceremonies are not illegal. It's just that the law won't recognize that kind of marriage *as having any legal effect*.

This is where the it's-only-a-piece-of-paper argument comes back to bite us. If the paperwork doesn't "make" us married, but only what we do in God's sight (and before witnesses), then why do Christian couples get a state license to marry?

Why Do Christian Couples Get 'Legally' Married?

What I've begun to believe is that there probably isn't a real reason, other than our general call as Christians to obey the law. But obeying man's law when it conflicts with God's law is precisely the issue in this instance.

One reason we enter into a marriage that *man's law will recognize* is that it does bring along a host of other laws and benefits.

It was those laws and benefits that were at the heart of the lawsuits by same-sex couples in *Obergefell*. They complained that those benefits were real and meaningful and being denied them because they could not marry. The Court felt obliged to them, but now the "benefits" shoe is on the other foot.

The Really Hard Question

Should Christian couples be willing to forego those state-afforded benefits in order to avoid participating in an unbiblical marriage scheme created by the state? Not an easy choice to make. But if those couples think that question is tough, wait until they consider what kinds of questions they may face someday when they become parents. That topic is for

next week.

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- [A Really Hard Question: What Is Marriage Worth to You?](https://factn.org/really-hard-question-marriage-worth/) [https://factn.org/really-hard-question-marriage-worth/]
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- [Are Tennessee's Evangelical Pastors Licensing Same-Sex 'Marriages'?](https://factn.org/are-tennessees-evangelical-pastors-licensing-same-sex-marriages/) [https://factn.org/are-tennessees-evangelical-pastors-licensing-same-sex-marriages/]

David Fowler served in the Tennessee state Senate for 12 years before joining FACT as President in 2006.

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