

What Does “For Better or For Worse” Mean in a Marriage?

By Stephen Gola

“For Better or For Worse,” Conditions of the Covenant

What does it mean when the marriage vows (the *conditions* of the marriage covenant) are recited by the marriage partners committing themselves to stay together “for better or for worse”?

Does “for better or for worse” mean that you are married for life — regardless of the violations committed against you in the marriage? The answer is No! Nor has it ever meant that.

There are two separate and distinct areas from where attacks against the marriage covenant arise:

1. From **within** the marriage itself — *through* the partners of the covenant.
2. From **outside** the marriage relationship — *against* the marriage partners.

“For better or for worse” is a commitment by the marriage partners to rise-up together against those situations that would threaten the marriage covenant relationship from **outside** the marriage.

Many are bound in bad marriages and/or guilt because of misapplying this part of the marriage vow to violations that come from **within** the marriage covenant instead of its rightful application to attacks that come from **outside** the marriage covenant relationship.

Mistakenly applying this part of the marriage vow to attacks that come from **within** the marriage relationship automatically turns the marriage covenant into an indissoluble, unbreakable, unconditional covenant (a covenant without conditions — anything goes). Meaning, you have to stay married to that person no matter what abuses or violations they have committed against you in the relationship. Not even God makes unbreakable unconditional covenants with sinful man. Yet, we have accepted this mistaken application as truth thereby believing that a marriage covenant with two sinful people is supposed to be “unconditional” — without any conditions.

Within the very meaning of the name "covenant" lies the essential fact that there are *conditions* to a covenant. Violations that occur from **within** the marriage itself — by the partners of the covenant, are correctly applied to the *nurturing* parts of the vow: “To have and to hold, to cherish and to love,” EVERY covenant has conditions! The nurturing parts of the marriage vow ARE the *conditions of the covenant* to whereby a marriage partner commits not to intentionally bring harm in anyway to the relationship; but rather, builds it up. (The full article: Marriage Covenants Are Conditional (NOT Unconditional), can be read or downloaded from <http://www.divorcehope.com/marriagevowscovenantsagreements.htm>.)

Now we can see where all the confusion comes from. To further illustrate this truth, let’s apply the portion of the marriage vow: “For better or for worse” to attacks that come from **within** the marriage covenant. In doing so, we will re-write the vow to reflect this illustration.

“For Better or For Worse” **Mistakenly applied** to attacks from **within** the marriage covenant:

The man says, "I take this woman as my wife, to treat her *for better or for worse* — to abuse and ill treat her as I wish. To have her meet all my needs; to hurt her as often as I desire because she is now my wife and cannot escape; I own her. I can have sex with anyone I desire and do as I please in complete disregard to her feelings, till death do us part."

“For Better or For Worse” **Correctly applied** to attacks from **outside** the marriage covenant:

The wife says, "I take this man as my husband to have and to hold, to cherish and to love, in sickness and disease, *for better or for worse* — against any **outside** attacks that would threaten our relationship, always seeking ways to strengthen and grow our relationship till death do us part."

NOBODY would ever consider such a vow where “for better or for worse” is purposely applied to attacks that come from **within** the marriage covenant. However, this is exactly what is taking place when this portion of the marriage vow is wrongly applied — it automatically turns the marriage covenant into an unconditional covenant whereby the marriage becomes indissoluble no matter what violations have been committed against the other partner.

Love: The Commitment to Not Violate the Marriage Covenant

Scripture declares that a “marriage covenant” is likened to the covenant between “Christ and His Bride — the Church.” Which means that when we violate God’s covenant (His commandments) and choose not to change and turn away from our “wicked ways,” *our intimate relationship with God is broken*. The first thing God does is deals with us about *correcting the violation* of the covenant in order to *restore our intimate relationship with Him*. This is exactly what supposed to happen in a marriage relationship between a husband and wife.

We have been taught that love is “unconditional” in a marriage relationship. It is NOT, nor has it ever been. Only “non-relationship love” is unconditional. “Relationship love,” which is what we find in a marriage, is ALWAYS conditional.

Let’s briefly look at the differences between “unconditional” (non-relationship love) and “conditional” (relationship love):

1. God’s “**non-relationship love**” is what unconditionally draws us as “sinners” to a holy God to receive the conditions of salvation — the new birth.

For God SO LOVED THE WORLD that He gave His only begotten Son, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16.)

2. God’s “**relationship love**” is what conditionally offers us as “His children” an intimate relationship with God through continual obedience to His voice and commandments.

He who HAS MY COMMANDMENTS AND KEEPS THEM, it is he who loves Me. And HE WHO LOVES ME will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him. (John 14:21.) In “relationship love,” God will “love us” IF we “love Him.” (The full article: God’s (“Unconditional”) Love: It’s Moral Its Conditional, can be read or downloaded from <http://www.divorcehope.com/loveofgodisloveunconditionally.htm>.)

Letting Problems Go Too Long

The common major problem that we see at DivorceHope in all bad marriages is that the marriage partners have not taken the corrective decisive actions against covenant violations for years — many times for 10, 20, 30 and even 40 years! When you let your marriage go wrong for so long it breaths divorce or a very unhappy life full of problems. It then makes it much harder to correct the violations.

When violations come from **within** the marriage relationship, one of the worse things a marriage partner can do is to “hope” that their spouse will change. “Hoping” that they will change *without* ever directly facilitating change and addressing the marriage covenant violations from the start, normally creates more abuse and violations against a marriage partner.

Regarding our relationship with God, He always let’s us know the results of our covenant violations — broken union. A marriage is no different. If a marriage partner does not stop the violations of the marriage covenant and make necessary corrections, a permanently broken union will be inevitable.

When a person truly loves another, they are always on the alert to avoid any violations that would bring harm to their relationship with the other person. When a person is steeped in selfishness, they do not truly love at all. Love is NOT selfish by nature. Instead, all focus of gain is to self. Violations of the covenant relationship MUST always be addressed. And when violations are significant or not being corrected, they must be addressed with an ultimatum to permanently correct the violations or there will not be any more relationship.

We have found that 90 some percent of all marriage failures happen needlessly because of a lack of knowledge. Over the years, we have put together what we believe to be the best combination of affordable resources that directly and simply show how a marriage partner can solve many problems and nurture their relationship. These marriage resources can be found on our Save My Marriage page at <http://www.divorcehope.com/savemymarriagerelationships.htm>.

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(All Scriptures taken from the King James Version Bible or the New King James version.)

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