

MARRIAGE—THE FOUNDATION OF THE HOME

So far in our studies on the home, we've examined love and dating. In this study, we begin an examination into the foundation of the home—marriage. We'll look at it in general in this study, then in the next two studies, we'll consider each spouse respectively.

Before we begin, let's define marriage: "marriage" is from the Greek word *gameo* which Gunther said "is derived from the root *gam* ..., to fit together, pair," thus Webster defined it as "the institution whereby men and women are joined in a special kind of social and legal dependence for the purpose of founding and maintaining a family." With that very adequate definition before our minds, let's delve into our general study of marriage.

Production of Marriage: Marriage (and consequently the home) is a product of God (Genesis 2:18-24). Notice in this passage that...

- God didn't approve of any animal for Adam's companion;
- God didn't make another male for Adam (God made Adam & Eve, not Adam & Steve); and...
- God didn't make more than one woman for Adam ("woman" means a man with a womb).

Not only does Genesis 2 say it, but Jesus repeated it: "They two shall become one flesh" (Matthew 19:5). Likewise, Paul wrote, "Let each man have his own wife (singular), and let each woman have her own husband (singular)" (First Corinthians 7:2). Remember, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Psalm 127:1).

Purposes of Marriage: Purity, Procreation, and Partnership.

Purity: First Corinthians 7:2 records Paul as saying, "Because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband." In Proverbs 5:18-19 Solomon taught his son to "rejoice with the wife of" his youth, letting her "satisfy" him "at all times"; likewise, in Ecclesiastes 9:9a he said, "Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your ... life." In Hebrews 13:4 Paul similarly said, "Marriage is honorable among all."

The restraints and limitations in God's guidebook weren't intended to take the pleasure out of life, but rather to put real pleasure and great satisfaction into life. Man's Creator knows which kind of experiences will best satisfy man and which kind will not; for this reason God condemns physical intimacy outside of marriage. Those who flaunt and disregard God's restrictions will find that their choice doesn't bring true happiness. However, this isn't to say that marriage is a cure-all, for if one mate refuses to consistently fulfill his/her duty in the realm of physical intimacy, then the problem is still there and perhaps even to a greater degree than living without a mate at all.

Under this heading it ought to be pointed out that here is where the loves of *eros* (romantic love) and *epithumia* (sexual love) are to be found and fulfilled.

Concerning eros... When this love is enjoyed in the lasting context of Christian marriage, it offers wonderful emotions and personal rewards that are gifts and creations of God Himself. More than any other kind of love, *eros* can transform a mundane black-and-white existence into glorious living Technicolor by simply doing such things as touching one another in passing and holding hands.

Concerning epithumia... Spouses should have a strong physical desire for each other which intimately expresses itself; this is a definite indicator of the health of a marriage: if tensions exist in other areas of life, they will usually show up in times of physical intimacy. On the other hand, if there is sexual closeness, then the relationship will be affected very positively as a result; thus, this facet of love should never be ignored.

Procreation: Genesis 1:28 records God as telling Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and multiply." In Jeremiah 29:6 God said, "Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters." In First Timothy 5:14 Paul said, "I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children."

No, marriage isn't necessary for procreation, but from the foregoing verses it's very obvious that God expects procreation to take place as a result of marriages that conform to the previous point concerning sexual fulfillment; besides, people who marry but don't have children miss one of the greatest privileges that God has given to mankind.

Partnership: Genesis 2:18 records God as saying, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

We're not only to recognize that marriage is to dispel loneliness, but it's also vitally important to recognize that the Bible describes marriage as *A Covenant of Companionship*. In Proverbs 2:16-17, for example, we're told that "the immoral woman ... forsakes the companion of her youth." The word translated "companion" here carries the idea of "one that has a close, intimate relationship to another." That's what marriage is meant to be: a close, intimate relationship between a man and a woman—closeness fosters companionship, while aloofness destroys it.

In Malachi 2:14 we read, "the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth ...; she is your companion and your wife by covenant." The word "companion" here carries the idea of "union, association."

Incidentally, note God's intimate part in the marital covenant; this relationship may be illustrated by a braid. Although at first glance a braid looks like only two pieces of some material woven together, yet a double-braid is an impossibility in that, even if one could weave such, it would have no strength to remain joined, much less be used as a rope to save someone in trouble. Likewise, for a marriage to be as God intended, God must be involved.

In putting these two Hebrew words together, we come to a full sense of the idea of companionship: a companion is someone with whom another is intimately united in thoughts, goals, plans, efforts, and (in the case of marriage) in bodies. These passages together make it clear that companionship is ideal in both husbands and wives: in Proverbs, the husband is called the companion, while in Malachi it's the wife who is so designated; for both, then, entrance into marriage should mean the desire to meet each other's need for companionship. Love in marriage focuses on giving one's spouse the companionship he or she needs to eliminate loneliness (that which God said is "not good"). This oneness is illustrated in this story: In Iowa stands the historic Little Brown Church. Hundreds of weddings take place here each year. It's said that the preacher has adopted a beautiful farewell to the many couples. After the ceremony, he takes the couple to the entry and says, "Before you go, the bride has the honor of ringing the church bell." He places the rope in her hands and she pulls with all her might, but the heavy bell won't toll. Then the preacher turns to the groom and asks him to lend a hand to his bride. Together they pull and the bell tolls, sending out over the countryside the news of another wedding. Then the preacher says, "As you go out into life, never forget that as long as you pull together, you can ring the bell."

All this reminds me of what God said in Genesis 2:24: "A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." This verse contains "The" or "God's" Marriage Law. This law has three basic parts: a leaving, a cleaving, and a one flesh creation.

Leaving and Cleaving

One father understood his duty to his daughter very well: it's said that a young woman once married a man by the name of Dust; after a short while they began to quarrel, and she attempted to return to her father's house, but he refused to receive her, saying, "Dust thou art, and unto Dust thou shalt return." A young couple must know that for their marriage to please God, they won't only have to leave their parents, but they may also have to forsake their hobbies, associations, and other involvements of the past in order to take on this new responsibility. A refocusing of attention must now be upon each other: a husband's commitment is now to his wife, and her commitment is now toward her husband, with the husband becoming the head of his home with her full approval and encouragement and cooperation. (Cf. First Corinthians 7:32-34.)

One Flesh

These words closely parallel our word "everybody"; when we say "everybody," we don't think of bodies only, rather we mean everyone, every person. Hebrew usage was similar. "All flesh" means everyone (Genesis 6:17, 7:22, & 8:21); when God spoke of destroying "all flesh," He didn't mean flesh in distinction from bones: what He meant is that He would destroy every person. Further, when Joel wrote of God pouring out His Spirit on "all flesh," again, what he had in mind was every sort of person. So in Genesis 2:24, to "become one flesh" means to become one person; in fact, B. B. Baxter said, "The Hebrew word for 'flesh' refers not only to the physical aspect of our existence, as if we could divorce our flesh from our minds, but the word also carries the meaning of 'person,' and refers to our bodies and minds together."

Let's discuss in more depth the covenantal aspect of marriage by investigating engagement in Bible times. Engagement in Bible times was absolutely binding; in effect, it was the first step of marriage, for in the engagement the marriage covenant was made, and an engagement, like marriage, could be broken only by death/divorce (Deuteronomy 22:23 & Matthew 1:16-24). An engaged person who willingly engaged in illicit relations with another didn't incur a fine, but (as in adulterous relations after marriage) was put to death. In Deuteronomy 22:23 the engaged girl is called the "wife" of the man to whom she is engaged. In Matthew 1:19 Joseph is called Mary's husband though they were not married. In Second Samuel 3:14 David called Michal his wife before he married her.

The closest thing we have in the Bible to a ceremony of engagement is found in Ruth (where Ruth was covered by Boaz' garment) and in Ezekiel 16:8, the one I want to notice here: God said to Jerusalem, "When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine." The idea of the protective wing (or garment) is common (Psalm 36:7 & Exodus 25:20). The swearing of an oath refers to the engagement or possibly to the wedding later on. Hosea 2:19-20 have God saying, "I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in loving kindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord." When He employed the phrase "you shall know the Lord," God was using covenantal language (cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34). Incidentally, in Hosea 2 God was speaking of divorce from old Israel and engagement and marriage to new Israel—the New Testament church.

The point is this: since engagement was considered a binding covenant, surely we should have no problem today seeing that marriage is, as Malachi 2:14 says, a covenant—a covenant of companionship. Also under this heading of partnership it ought to be pointed out that the loves of *philia* (friendship), *storgos* (comfortableness), and *agape* (good-will) are to be found and fulfilled.

Concerning storgos... In marriage this love meets the need we all have to belong, to be part of a close-knit circle where people care and give the utmost loyalty to each other: when the world shows itself as a cold, hard place, *storgos* offers emotional refuge. A better word for *storgos* than "comfortableness" is "homelike-ness"; I love what F. W. Robertson wrote: "Home is the one place in all this world where hearts are sure of each other. It is the place of confidence. It is the place where we tear off that mask of guarded and suspicious coldness which the world forces us to wear in self-defense, and where we pour out the unreserved communications of full and confiding hearts. It is the spot where expressions of tenderness gush out without any sensation of awkwardness, and without any dread of ridicule."

Concerning philia... Spouses share each other's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, plans, dreams, time, and interests—some of the most intimate things they would share with no one else. Obviously it takes two for the full enjoyment of *philia*, and a marriage without it will be unsatisfactory, to say the least.

Concerning agape... A marriage possessing *agape* can survive anything: it's *agape* that keeps a marriage going if the natural loves falter or die. *Agape* loves no matter what: no matter how unlovable the other person is, *agape* can keep on flowing because it is unconditional love.

Conclusion

The Illustrated Bible had a strong fascination for small Geraldine: with the book open on her lap, she looked up and said, "Mom, do folks marry in Heaven?"

"The Good Book says they don't, Geraldine."

"Well, do they marry in ... in the other place?"

"I suppose not, my dear."

Geraldine shut the Bible with a bang and said, "Then I'm going to stay right here!" Well...

Although we shouldn't take it that far, not only should we indeed love marriage (especially those of us who are married), but we should also never forget that it is a covenant relationship that God created for purity, procreation, and partnership.

[Tony E. Denton, March 1998. ASiteForTheLord.com]