

Biblical Marriage: Two Lives Exchanged For a Lifetime of Union (Introduction)

Psalms 39:3-6; Gen. 2:23-24; 5:2; 6:9; 7:7; 24:63-67; 25:28; I Kings 21:25; Prov. 5:18; 18:22; Matt. 1:18-20, 24-25; Acts 5:1-11; 18:2, 18, 26; Romans 16:3; I Corinthians 16:19; 7:32-35; Ephesians 5:18-33; Titus 1:6; I Peter 3:1-7

Marriage: the fantasy of most, the disappointment of many, the perfection of few. For those who dream of great things in a life of marriage, hope runs high. For those who try and are disappointed, the way grows darkened. Ultimately, those who spend their lives together in ever increasing union and blessing seem a rarity. Somehow, it is easier to dream than to find a way to work out the dream forever.

So then, do the difficulties realized in our marriage only begin on our wedding day? Do they then cease after many years? I think not. An honest look in the mirror of our hearts will betray the problems in each of us. Marriage flushes them out as our spouse discovers and reflects who we are.

It is difficult from the day of birth for anyone to live at peace, even with himself. Marriage only seems to compound and expose difficulties that already lie in our self-centered lives. Unless we, together, find a new center, a common center, hope dims and resignation settles in. If a couple tries to share the same space unselfishly and enjoy it, they discover it is nearly impossible. Someone will get crushed or both will give up.

The only way for one to live is for both to die. If two live, there is conflict. If one dies there is toleration. If both die, life will come; peace comes and the whole family can rejoice. Only the biblical Christian can experience this blessing of the cross in daily life. Biblical death is always followed by a life that is godly, genuine, peaceful towards God and constructive with others, starting with your mate. There is nothing to lose here (except your troublesome self) and everything to gain. Are you willing to know the Lord this way, or do you prefer selfishness, even while dreaming of a perfect marriage? Can you live well as one if both of you live selfishly, and thereby nurture separate, distinct worlds?

So, then, what is your center today? You may come together as two people who have always been individualistic. Now you have two people occupying one life and one space. What is the choice here and what will the result be? If you jockey for power, someone will become stronger and someone will be crushed. One grows assertive and the other slips into a life of passivity; or perhaps you both will fight constantly until at last the gavel bangs and the judge announces your life as a couple is over.

Are you willing to take a new center? Some couples seek out a center of common interests as they search for a "happy marriage". Some want to have a child to "save" the marriage so they can have a new and common center. Some develop a family life centered around children and sports and school. Some center on their family business or farm or remodeling projects. It seems these things bring a measure of unity, but are they not temporary? What happens when things change? Your family will grow up and you will start over again with two in the house. Even if your intention was right in the beginning, what will you do now? Please, you must find out what it means to have Christ as your center.

For the biblical, normal Christian, Christ is the center of one's life, whether that means single forever, single for awhile, married, re-married or perhaps you have suffered the loss of a spouse. When you have a relationship centered on knowing Christ as your life, you have a center that lives, guides and gives perspective. This Center is alive, real and practical. It is about Christ, a Christ that lives in our family and builds up our family for the church. (Those who remain single or lose a mate need not feel alone. They are invaluable, for even they can have spiritual children and find completion in the church).

As your individual life is for your marriage, so your family is designed for the church life. If you learn to live in the church life with the peace and commitment of Christ, you will have great reason to live and have a healthy home, a direction in all aspects of your life; the perspective of affirmation and the encouragement of your fellow believers. Nearly nothing can shake a marriage like this that has such a relationship, commitment and practice together. The maximum benefit of two single's backgrounds and culture with their own individual lives is designed by God himself to find meaning and purpose and a way to live that answers the cry of your hearts and the eternal purpose of God in the church. Things don't just happen for better or for worse. With Christ so available to us, it is largely up to us what kind of marriage and family life we will have. This is not theory; it is real and it is for us to discover, experience and enjoy.

Questions for prayer, consideration and fellowship:

1. What is your priority in all your relationships, including those with your friends, your fiance or fiancée or your husband or wife? Especially in your marriage, do you seek first a relationship with the Lord or with the other person? Can you and will you agree with each other to make Christ the center of your individual lives? If so, will you believe the overflow of your love for Jesus becomes the "oil" to "lubricate" your relationship? Do you know that the closer each of you is to God the closer you become together? What if one of you pursues the Lord this way and the other doesn't? (Matthew 6:33; Hebrews 11:6; I Corinthians 7; I Peter 3)

2. "In the beginning was the Word...". The first thing, the oldest thing in the Bible we learn here about God is that He is the eternal and living embodiment of communication. How is your communication? Do you talk "at", or do you talk "to" your spouse? Do you impose your ideas and your "authority", demanding submission from your wife? And dear wife, do you "cave in" naturally, supposing that is God's idea of submission to a pushy husband? Do you "know" that Christ himself is the Leader and He also is Submission? (Colossians 3:4; Exodus 3:14).

3. While the Bible insists we love God "with all our heart, mind and strength" and obey Him, there is another side. He demonstrates His respect for our choice by never imposing His will on us. His respect for us should move us to love Him and respond to Him. Our love for God moves Him to nurture us carefully according to our readiness and ability to respond at the moment. Is this not like the husband who should love his wife and the wife who should respect her husband? By what way can the husband and wife live like this? (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Ephesians 5:33; 4:30; John 11:25, 14:6).

4. While some may speak of seeking a "balance" between family life and church life, I submit to you that this thought falls short of God's intention. In the Bible, the larger thought is that the family life is part of the church life. How do you decide priorities if there are conflicts between your family needs and meetings of the church and your responsibilities in the church? The Bible teaches us that the biblical church is like a complete New Man, a new culture, a new way to live that expresses God's divine life and desire and completes man's deepest need and longing. In Ephesians, we must realize that a proper marriage and family life is part of this wonderful new culture. Is this "new culture" of the church as the "new man" not the ultimate center and trade for your former culture(s) and former individual lives? (Colossians 3:4; Ephesians 2:12-18; 4:22-24; 5:18-33).

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