

Biblical Patterns Of Marriage

Introduction:

We are creatures of culture and products of our own environment. When a child is born he is not born into a vacuum: he is born into an environment. For better or for worse, the atmosphere, the environment into which he is born will shape him to become part of a culture he will never easily shake.

Those born into an environment of drugs, street life, homelessness, dependency on government programs, crime and related activities will likely grow up as part of a general culture that expresses that kind of thinking, expectancies and behavior. Similarly, whether a person is born into a blue collar or a white collar environment, it is likely the children will remain in such a way of thinking, living and reacting. A family that lives for sports or politics or religion or academia, of high or low society, every family has an environment which shapes its personal culture and its atmosphere tends to form an invisible fence for their offspring, whatever its merit.

What about the church people? If our marriages are actually centered on a relationship with Christ, does that relationship become a new culture that spontaneously produces a way of living that has its own invisible, protective fence for us and for our children? Can “success” really be that simple? Simple is not the same as easy. For better or for worse, without strong decisions most people will be kept inside that other invisible fence of culture and opinion. We all were born into a natural culture and without vigorous, positive, counter exercise in the church life, we will pass that shape of our former world on to others instead of the culture arising from the life of faith.

We are patterns for our spouse, for our family and for others around us. We are patterns at work, at play, at home and in the church. If our living is consistent, it will produce a steady atmosphere into which our marriage and little ones can come. It becomes a new culture that is observable, predictable and safe. Anything less than this stability lessens our testimony with each other and with others who watch us. We need to escape our natural culture and into a biblical marriage and home life, but how? Have we found the value of patterns in our church life?

Regardless of our condition, we watch others who are examples to us and our reactions to them are part of what has formed us. In turn, our spouses and children watch us and their reactions to us are what form the atmosphere in our home. That in turn becomes a culture, a way of life that testifies how we live, both deliberately as well as unconsciously.

The patterns that form cultures are human, usually of the fallen life and product. When people “get religion”, they may adjust their atmosphere and produce a different variety of sub-culture, but it is still man-centered even while reaching for God. Religion at its best will define God and reach for Him with a human motivation and human concept as its basis. As a result, it is difficult if not impossible to experience a truly biblical, godly result. Do we not need another way?

The pattern that Christians need is not only that of a human life that is “good”. We need a pattern of believers who knows what it is to start with Christ and bring Him into married life as a lifestyle. It is a humanity that has had an encounter with God. This is not only a mental encounter, but a collective receiving and practice of living by the Christ who has come to indwell us.

We will never drift into such godliness. We will not just drift into a happy marriage or a healthy and godly Christ-centered family full of love, full of respect for each other and others. It doesn't just happen, and it is greatly helpful to have examples above, below and around us. The Bible affords us some wonderful examples of godly couples and families. May the Lord help us to see and listen. It is for our learning that the Lord has given us so many patterns of couples and family life in the Bible. May the Lord help us to see it from the same angle He intended it for us.

Study guide: Biblical patterns of marriage

When you hear of Abraham and Sarah, do you think of “heroes of the faith”? When you think of Peter, what comes to mind? Each of these, the others in this study and so many more, were born into the fallen race of humanity. With them we share the fatal flaws of a hopelessly defiled human life.

Abraham (father of multitudes) started out as Abram (an exalted father), the pagan idolater. Sarah (princess) started out as Sarai (my princess). They had a regular family and even delayed their journey to the “good land” because of Abram’s caring for his father along the way, needing the Lord to appear to him again to further his journey into obedience. These believing ones did not change themselves and make room for others in their hearts. They were changed at their core by the Lord speaking to them. His speaking gave them a new name to reflect the new race of humanity into which they were called.

Peter was an ordinary young fisherman. He was neither educated, cultured or from a place of respectable society. When you think of this fiery personality and powerful preacher of the gospel, do you think of him as a married man? What do you think he and his wife experienced as he and she were called out of their fallen birth into the new creation? They didn’t volunteer for a nice religious job. On the contrary, their lives were cast into the winds of absolute consecration through the Lord’s calling upon Peter’s life, out from he found the church life consuming him with a living that is really alive. The Lord’s care for the mother of Peter’s wife is so precious in the process, as she was one to whom Jesus went, and healed her in Peter’s home.

These pioneers of the faith are examples, patterns to us in their marriages. If they were pioneers, they are also examples to us that every believer is a pioneer. If they are heroes of the faith to us, it would be normal if the Lord makes us faithful heroes to those who know us best as well as those who watch us from afar. These faithful and beloved ones would not look down on us. Rather, they would call us to come alongside of them and walk with them, beside them, walking into the unknown in every aspect of our living together; and surely including us with them in our marital state and in our families for the Lord.

I. The producing of lives through Adam and his descendants

A. Union in marriage the human commission before sin entered, and continuing thereafter

1. Gen. 1:25-28 ...male and female...be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...
2. Gen. 2:24-25 ...cleave to his wife...they...one flesh...not ashamed (sinless)
3. Gen. 5:1-4 God created man in the likeness of God made he him...male and female...and called their name Adam...begat a son in his likeness, after his image...and he begat sons and daughters...
4. Gen. 5:29-32; 7:18 ...Noah...begat Shem, Ham and Japheth...come into the ark...and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons’ wives with thee...

B. Marriage the way for God’s raw materials for redemption and sanctification

1. 8:15-9:19 ...be fruitful and multiply in the earth, and Noah went forth, and his his sons, and his wife, and his sons’ wives with him...the three sons of Noah, and of them was the whole earth overspread...
2. Ruth 4:11-12 ...like Rachel and like Leah, which did build the house of Israel...

3. Matthew 1, Luke 3 ...many in the genealogy that brought Jesus to us came out of treacherous, sinful and wasted situations. The words of God birthed them into a new realm, saving them out of their old race and by faith into the new race of humanity, the new creation
4. Acts 16:31 ...believe on the Lord Jesus Christ...be saved...and thy house...

II. The calling out of lives from among the fallen race for God's kingdom

A. O.T. marriages for the kingdom of God

1. Adam and Eve, Gen. 3:15, 21; 4:1, 4, 25, 26
2. Noah and his wife, Gen. 5:28ff
3. Abraham and Sarah, Gen. 11:29ff
4. Isaac and Rebecca, Gen. 25:67ff
5. Jacob and Rachel, with Joseph and Asenath, Gen. 29:30ff; Gen. 41:45, 48:5ff
6. Elkanah and Hannah, I Sam. 1:5
7. Hosea and Gomer, Hos. 1:2, 3, 6, 9

B. N.T. marriages for the kingdom of God

1. Joseph and Mary, Luke 1:27ff
2. Zacharias and Elizabeth, Luke 1:6-13ff
3. Peter and his wife, Matt. 8:14ff
4. The Lord's brothers, other apostles and their wives, I Cor. 9:5
5. Aquila and Priscilla, Rom. 16:3-4; Acts 18:2
6. Other typical saints in the churches, Col. 3:18-21

For prayer, fellowship and further study:

1. What is at least one strong point in each of the marriages and families identified in IIA and IIB? Are there any weak points from which something might be learned as well?
2. Who are other married ones in the Bible from which we can learn both as examples in well being as well as in learning from their failures? (David, Solomon, etc)
3. What is to be learned regarding others not married such as Paul and widows in the church, of which he speaks, that need help?
4. Who are other ones in the centuries following the Bible who are examples in marriage and in the faith? What about Samuel and Susanna Wesley? Madame Guyon? David Brainerd? Jim Elliott? Watchman Nee? Do we have to go back hundreds of years? Are there not numerous examples around you now? Is your name on this list with your spouse? (In thirty years will it be?).
5. What is the difference between bringing Christ into your marriage and in bringing your marriage to Christ? Can you see it? Will you pay the price to do it together?
6. How far away do you have to look for a godly pattern of marriage? What do you expect of them? of yourselves? Why do you expect anything, and what if you are disappointed?
7. What is the affect of biblical patterns of marriage on you?