

Marriage Is Not Out-of-Date



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 2:18-25, John 2:1-11, Eph. 5:22-33, Heb. 13:4, 1 Pet. 3:1-7.*

Memory Text: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (*Ephesians 5:25, NIV*).

All through the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, the image of marriage appears, in one form or another. Sometimes the images are of good marriages; sometimes they are of bad marriages; sometimes the images depict faithfulness; sometimes they depict infidelity. Either way, and whether in the Old Testament or in the New, marriage is often used as a metaphor for the relationship between the Lord and His people.

Thus, it should be clear how seriously the Lord esteems marriage. For Him to use it time and again as a metaphor for His relationship with His people should tell us marriage should be something special.

Therefore, this week we take a look at some biblical principles regarding this divinely inspired institution.

The Week at a Glance: What can we learn about marriage from the Genesis account? How should a husband treat his wife? How does Christ's death reflect an important principle necessary for creating a good marriage?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 24.*

Marriage in Paradise

Read Genesis 2:18-25. What basic principles can we find in this account of the first husband/wife relationship that can help us, today, understand what God's ideal for marriage should be? As you read, ask yourself the following questions: (1) What significance is in the fact Eve was created out of Adam's physical body, as opposed to her being created from something separate? (2) What do Adam's words in verse 23 mean? (3) Why, when they saw each other naked, were they not ashamed?

However unique the background to the story, it does show there was to be an intimacy between a husband and his wife that wasn't found anywhere else. There showed a closeness, a bond, both physical and spiritual, that no other person should be allowed to violate. The marriage relationship is blessed of God; it's something sacred, something we have been able to take from Eden, from a perfect world. How crucial, then, that we cherish it as we should.

Read Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-7. How do both Paul and Peter stress the unique bond of a marriage relationship? Who, ultimately, is deemed the head of the home? And yet, at the same time, what principles should dictate how the husband should treat the wife?

Though both Peter and Paul are clear about the role of husband and wife in marriage, notice how many times they stress that the husband should love the wife; in fact, Paul, in Ephesians, admonished husbands to love their wives with the kind of self-sacrificial love that compelled Christ to love the church. Imagine how much better our marriages would be if both husband and wife, in the Lord, followed these biblical principles.

Dwell more on the idea of Christ's death as an example of the kind of self-sacrificing love husbands should have for their wives. What great changes could that attitude on the part of husbands bring to homes and marriages?

Key Text: *Ephesians 5:25.*

Teachers Aims:

1. To show that marriage is as sacred today as it was in Eden.
2. To understand the intimate nature of the relationship that is to exist between a husband and wife.
3. To stress the importance of sexual fidelity within the marriage relationship.

Lesson Outline:

I. Marriage.

- A. God joined Adam and Eve together in holy matrimony and blessed that great institution.
- B. Peter and Paul stress the need for husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church.
- C. Marriage is a commitment intended to last till death parts the couple.
- D. God forgives adultery as readily as any sin.
- E. Earthly marriage mirrors our relationship to Jesus, the Bridegroom.

II. Sexual Intimacy.

- A. God created sex and the sexes (male and female).
- B. God blessed His creation and issued the divine mandate to them to “Be fruitful and multiply” (*Gen. 1:22*).
- C. Humanity has perverted and distorted God’s gift of sex.

III. Sexual Problems in God’s Church.

- A. Sexual immorality is an effective tool of Satan.
- B. Church members must guard against susceptibility to sexual sin.
- C. Exercising the will, praying, and keeping spiritually focused are essential in remaining faithful to Christ.

IV. Christ and Marriage.

- A. Jesus endorsed the ordinance of marriage and upheld its sacredness.
- B. Jesus attended the wedding at Cana.
- C. We are betrothed to Christ as His bride and await His coming for us.

Summary: “Those who regard the marriage relation as one of God’s sacred ordinances, guarded by His holy precept, will be controlled by the dictates of reason.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 121.

COMMENTARY

I. Marriage Is Good for You.

On one occasion Aristotle was asked to define a *friend*. According to Diogenes Laetrus, who wrote in the year A.D. 200,

Marriage—Till Death Do Us Part (*Matt. 5:32, 19:9*).

Some people who have been married for just a year or two decide they made a mistake and go their separate ways. Others who have been together for thirty or more years conclude that their relationship has become empty and stale and get a divorce. Also, an increasing number of people live in common-law relationships and shy away from marriage.

What is the underlying problem? Many of today's younger generation have a problem in making long-term commitments, whether it comes to church membership and/or to sealing a love relationship with a marriage vow.

How do the words of Christ Himself indicate that marriage is a life-long commitment? *Matt. 5:32, 19:9*.

Those are very strong words, leaving what seems like little room for extenuating circumstances. Indeed, the principles stated in the *Church Manual* continue to provide a solid basis for our thinking:

“Central to God’s holy plan for our world was the creation of beings made in His image who would multiply and replenish the earth and live together in purity, harmony, and happiness. He brought forth Eve from the side of Adam and gave her to Adam as his wife. Thus was marriage instituted—God the author of the institution, God the officiator at the first marriage. . . .

“The church adheres to this view of marriage and home without reservation, believing that any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal. The belief that marriage is a divine institution rests upon the Holy Scriptures. Accordingly, all thinking and reasoning in the perplexing field of divorce and remarriage must constantly be harmonized with that holy ideal revealed in Eden.

“The church believes in the law of God; it also believes in the forgiving mercy of God. It believes that victory and salvation can as surely be found by those who have transgressed in the matter of divorce and remarriage as by those who have failed in any other of God’s holy standards.”—(Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assoc., 2000), pp. 194, 195.

Focus on the last paragraph of the *Church Manual*. What hope does that give you if you have, indeed, violated the biblical standard of marriage? At the same time, what should Christ’s words above tell us about how important it is that we do everything possible to keep our marriages intact?

Aristotle replied, a friend is “One soul abiding in two bodies.” Of course the Bible had expressed a similar thought many years earlier in describing two married people as becoming “one flesh” (*Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5, 6*).

Today, in many parts of the world, this concept of two people joining together in marriage is considered old-fashioned and out of touch with reality. This is a shame, because God designed and created marriage—and did so with a purpose. Those who establish partnerships outside of marriage miss out on the fullness of what God intended.

In 2000, Linda J. Waite, professor of sociology at the University of Chicago, and Maggie Gallagher, director of the Marriage Program at the Institute of American Values, wrote:

“For perhaps the first time in human history, marriage as an ideal is under a sustained and surprisingly successful attack.” They point out that in Western countries such as America there is a popular view that marriage is either out of date or an optional extra. On the contrary, they argue, this “most basic and universal of human institutions” is a rewarding “uniquely powerful and life-enhancing bond that is larger and more durable than the immediate, shifting feelings of two individuals.”—*The Case For Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), pp. 1, 11, 12.

Waite and Gallagher conclude that, despite popular myth, married people actually live longer and are happier, healthier, and wealthier. “When love seeks permanence, a safe home for children who long for both parents, when men and women look for someone they can count on, there are no substitutes,” they write. “The word for what we want is marriage.”—Waite and Gallagher, p. 203.

II. The Wedding Vows.

In Jewish literature marriage is called *kiddushin*, which translates as “sanctification” or “dedication.” Understood in those terms, a wedding is not just a social arrangement or contractual agreement, it’s a spiritual bonding and the fulfillment of a *mitzvah*, a divine precept. Marriage is an exclusive relationship, where man and woman are dedicated together, under the blessing of God.

In a traditional Jewish wedding ceremony, a ring is placed on the bride’s right index finger because it’s considered the finger of intelligence—the finger that points at the words when reading Holy Scripture. This is a beautiful symbol of the importance of living married lives in reference to God’s Word, letting its principles guide us.

At the end of the service the groom will often smash a bottle or light bulb with his foot. The symbolic act reminds the bride and groom that, like the shattered glass, the marriage vows are permanent. But it’s also a reminder that a marriage is fragile—handle it

The Joy of Sex

Read Genesis 1:27, 28; 2:24, 25. What do they tell us about sexuality? Who originated it? Who encouraged it? Was there anything “dirty” about it in the context in which it is presented here?

Through the centuries there have been Christians who have rejected sex as dirty, unspiritual, and sinful, even to the point that many believed that those who wanted to dedicate themselves to the Lord in a special way ought to remain celibate. Throughout church history, in many religious communities, sex was, at least officially, outlawed, even among married people.

On the other hand, immorality has, at times, been hailed as true freedom, with all inhibitions set aside in the name of advanced religious truth.

The Christian view of sex is a balanced view. There is more to life than sex. But the enjoyment of our sexuality is definitely a precious part of life—a gift of our Creator, who made us “male and female,” and within the right context it can be a beautiful expression of both human and divine love.

Like all God’s gifts, however, it can be abused, and few gifts have been more greatly abused than this one. The key for the Christian is to understand under what circumstances the Lord wants him or her to benefit from and enjoy this blessing. When is sexual activity appropriate, and when is it not? These are important questions, because our world is filled with sad results of those who have misused one of God’s greatest manifestations of His love for humanity. How like the devil to take something so wonderful and turn it into something that will lead to the ruin of many souls.

All of the following texts talk, in one context or another, about human sexuality: Genesis 2:24; Proverbs 5:15-23; Ecclesiastes 9:9; Song of Solomon; Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 7:5. From these texts and any others you find, write a paragraph for someone who isn’t a Christian, explaining the biblical view of sexuality.

with care, treat it with respect, surround it in the protection of God's love—and it will last forever.

The traditional Protestant wedding ceremony has its origins in 1552 and the *Book of Common Prayer*. In the service outlined in the *Book of Common Prayer*, both the bride and groom make public vows in front of human witnesses and God: "I take thee, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Malachi 2:16; 1 Corinthians 6:16-19; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5; Ephesians 5:28-33; Philippians 4:13; Colossians 3:1-8, 12-17.*

- 1 Why does the Bible repeatedly use marriage as a metaphor for the relationship between God and humankind? List other human relationships and discuss their characteristics. In what ways is our relationship with God more like a marriage than any other of these relationships?
- 2 Review Ephesians 5:28-33. What principles guide Paul's admonishment for husbands to love their wives as much as they love their own bodies?
- 3 Many people feel that it is acceptable to view their first marriages as *starter* marriages, to be abandoned if they go sour, or if something better comes along. How does this differ from the biblical view of marriage?
- 4 While insisting that sex is not a big deal, our society makes it as big a deal as possible. The media in some countries continually tells us how important it is to have sex as often and as early as possible. What is the biblical response to this mind-set? Why is this response a healthier view?
- 5 Sex is a force many people find difficult to control. But while the Bible and Ellen White stress the use of one's will power to counter temptation, can we fight this battle ourselves? What is it necessary to do in order to claim God's power in this struggle?
- 6 Review the principles of the ideal marriage found in Genesis 2:18-25. How are these principles supported by the gospel? In Friday's section, we read that it is the purpose of the gospel to restore the purity and beauty of marriage that was destroyed by sin. How can the gospel help restore marriage to its original purity and beauty?

When There Are Problems *(Matt. 5:27, 28; Heb. 13:4).*

We live in a world full of temptations. Never should we underestimate the determination of the devil to divert the followers of Christ from their life of discipleship; and one of the most effective ways of doing so is to lead them into sexual immorality. The apostle Paul was specifically addressing instances of immorality among church members when he stated: “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall” (*1 Cor. 10:12, NIV*).

What principle ought to be kept in mind and to be pursued with firm determination by all who are married and claim to be followers of Christ? *1 Cor. 10:13, Heb. 13:4.*

Ellen G. White makes an important point when stressing the role of our will in remaining faithful to a marriage vow. A determination to focus our mind on spiritual matters will help us when we face sexual temptations: “Christ presented before His disciples the far-reaching principles of the law of God. He taught His hearers that the law was transgressed by the thoughts before the evil desire was carried out in actual commission. We are under obligation to control our thoughts, and to bring them into subjection to the law of God. The noble powers of the mind have been given to us by the Lord, that we may employ them in contemplating heavenly things. God has made abundant provision that the soul may make continual progression in the divine life. . . . We give our time and thought to the trivial and commonplace things of the world, and neglect the great interests that pertain to eternal life.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1145.

But not all is necessarily lost when we do succumb to temptation. Although sin may result in consequences that can not be undone, God is always willing to forgive. And to forgive impure thoughts, sexual indiscretions, or even blatantly immoral conduct is no more difficult for God than to forgive a lie or an act of pride or selfishness.

What practical steps can both men and women take in the area of alleviating sexual temptation, not only for themselves but to make sure they aren’t a stumbling block to others? How do what we read, watch, or wear, and where we go all play a role in how well we deal with this problem?

sickness, and in health, to love, and to cherish, till death us depart, according to God's holy ordinance: And thereto I plight [pledge] thee my troth." It's a beautiful picture of true human love—endowed with the selfless, unconditional love demonstrated by God Himself.

III. Practical Love.

There are few expressions that have been more devalued than “making love.” As Chris Blake, professor at Union College, Nebraska, says, “In analyzing the phrase we find we're not really talking about creating or building love; we're talking about making sex.” He adds, “And when two people have made sex outside of marriage, to be truly accurate we sadly need to describe what else they were probably making. They were making tears. They were making lies. They were making regrets . . . without the responsibility and depth and nourishment of committed love.”—*Searching for a God to Love* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), p. 96.

Within a Christian marriage, love is demonstrated in practical ways. Blake describes what it means to “make love” in the real sense of the words: “In the case of couples, watch him washing dishes for them. He's making love. See how she runs errands for him. She's making love. Look at how the two keep confidences, support, and smile through the troubles they go through. They're

Witnessing

The Bible admonishes us not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers (*2 Cor. 6:14*). While Paul was referring to the church separating itself from the unbelieving world, we can also apply this verse to the marriage union. Many Christians marry someone who is not of the faith. Sometimes two unbelievers marry, and one comes to Christ after that. Often this causes stress within the relationship. The conduct of a Christian wife can be the very means to bring her husband into a right relationship with God. A godly husband can do the same for his wife.

We read in Colossians 3:19, “Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.” The love that God commands a husband to have for his wife is not just sexual or emotional but a love that loves in spite of the response. It is the same type of love Christ showed the church when He died for it (*Eph. 5:25*). First Peter 3:7 admonishes husbands to honor their wives so husbands may have an open channel of communication with God.

God has placed an awesome responsibility on couples entering marriage, a responsibility to represent Him to each other and to the world around them. When married couples love each other as Christ defines love, they are showing God's true character.

Christ Endorsed Marriage (*John 2:1-11*).

Some of the advice given by the apostle Paul would suggest he was not overenthusiastic about marriage. Statements to that effect (*such as in 1 Corinthians 7:8*) should, however, be read in their context. They were written in response to a specific question (*vs. 1*), under circumstances we do not know in detail. Just two chapters later, Paul claims the right to marry and refers to the “other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas,” who traveled together with “a believing wife” (*1 Cor. 9:5, NIV*). The overall message of the Bible is undeniable: Marriage not only is permitted but it is a great gift, in particular, for believers who know the One who instituted it.

What does the prominent place given in John’s Gospel to the story of Christ’s attendance at the wedding in Cana suggest? *John 2:1-11*.

It is quite significant that John includes the story of the wedding in Cana among the very few miracle stories he recounts. The account makes abundantly clear that Jesus was happy to be associated with this wedding feast and that, by His very presence, He underlined not only how good it is to have a party but that it is good when people get married.

How does the use of the imagery of the wedding feast further underline the value and importance of marriage? *Matt. 22:1-14, Rev. 19:7-9*.

“In Biblical times a marriage involved two major events, the betrothal and the wedding. These were normally separated by a period of time during which the two individuals were considered husband and wife and as such were under the obligations of faithfulness. The wedding began with a procession to the bride’s house, which was followed by a return to the house of the groom for the marriage feast. By analogy, the church, espoused to Christ by faith, now awaits the parousia when the heavenly groom will come for his bride and return to heaven for the marriage feast which lasts throughout eternity.” —Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977), p. 340.

Christ gave Himself totally and unselfishly for His people; we, as a people, are to give ourselves totally and unselfishly to the Lord. How does that model of giving one’s self to another reveal essential principles of a strong Christian marriage?

making love. Witness his opening up his insecurities to her. He's making love. Hear her confront and encourage him. She's making love. Listen to them discuss the meaning of life. They're making love."—Blake, p. 96.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: A couple discussed what they would do should one of them die. After they had concluded that they would remain single and pour their energy into the children, the wife quipped, "Besides according to what I know about statistics, there would be no eligible men available to marry me. And according to what I know about you, there would be no women crazy enough to marry you."—Gerald L. Sittser, *A Grace Disguised* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), p. 107.

Think: How would you assess your own desirability as a marriage partner?

Thought Questions:

- 1 Marriage impacts more than two people and their offspring. How should your marriage specifically benefit the cause of Christ? How should it affect your siblings? Your community? Why should it affect these areas and what specifically should guide you in attaining the desired effect?
- 2 If marriage were placed on the scales, which side should have the most weight: cultural morality or Christian values? Which tends to prevail, and why? If you were commissioned to develop a marriage checklist for single adults, what specific traits would you enter under these headings, and why: spiritual values, physical attributes, physical health, emotional health, socialization skills, and reality check?

Application Question:

Define marriage from a Christian perspective. What are some other common definitions? Are these definitions accurate or fantasized? Explain. Relate the following quote to a good definition of marriage: "The word pretend comes from the Latin roots that literally mean 'to stretch in front of like a curtain.' Pretending is a conscious act of believing things are better than they really are, that we really can live happily ever after. It's all right in fairy tales, but not in real life."—Florence Littauer, *Taking Charge of Your Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Fleming H. Revell, 1999), p. 44.

Further Study: Comments on marriage and related topics by Ellen G. White are found in a number of different compilations. Her book *The Adventist Home* contains much relevant material. See, for example, Section III: “Choosing a Life Partner,” pp. 43–75, and Section V: “From the Marriage Altar,” pp. 99–127.

“Like every other one of God’s good gifts entrusted to the keeping of humanity, marriage has been perverted by sin; but it is the purpose of the gospel to restore its purity and beauty. In both the Old and the New Testament the marriage relation is employed to represent the tender and sacred union that exists between Christ and his people, the redeemed ones whom he has purchased at the cost of Calvary. ‘Fear not,’ he says; ‘thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel.’ ‘Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you.’”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, December 10, 1908.

“It should henceforth be the life study of both husband and wife how to avoid everything that creates contention and to keep unbroken the marriage vows.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 85.

Discussion Questions:

1 If sex is to be enjoyed only within the context of marriage, how do those who do not have a partner, or those who have lost their partner, experience their sexuality? Should they simply forget they are sexual beings? Can one be fully *male or female* without having any sexual relationship? What does Christ’s example offer them?

2 Look at the second Ellen White quote above. What practical things can both the husband and wife do in order to protect the sanctity of their marriage vows?

Summary: Many marriages fail. As Christians we can never go along with a situation in which unfaithfulness, in word or thought, is condoned. At the same time, a forgiving spirit can save and restore many a relationship that would otherwise be doomed. The Lord deems marriage as something sacred; we, as humans, should do no less.