

“God chooses what we go through. We choose how we go through it.”

BIBLICAL MARRIAGE

Incredible as it may seem, we can no longer assume that people in our culture understand what the proper definition of "marriage" and "the family" is. Especially Biblical marriage.

Marriage is a God-given institution.

Marriage is a covenant, a sacred bond between a man and a woman instituted by and publicly entered into before God and normally consummated by sexual intercourse. God's plan for the marriage covenant involves at least the following five vital principles:

(1) **The permanence of marriage:** Marriage is intended to be permanent, since it was established by God (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9). Marriage represents a serious commitment that should not be entered into lightly or unadvisedly. It involves a solemn promise or pledge, not merely to one's marriage partner, but before God. Divorce is not permitted except in a very limited number of biblically prescribed circumstances (see *Divorce* below).

(2) **The sacredness of marriage:** Marriage is not merely a human agreement between two consenting individuals (a "civil union"); it is a relationship before and under God (Genesis 2:22).

(3) **The intimacy of marriage:** Marriage is the most intimate of all human relationships, uniting a man and a woman in a "one-flesh" union (Genesis 2:23 -25). Marriage involves "leaving" one's family of origin and "being united" to one's spouse, which signifies the establishment of a new family unit distinct from the two originating families. While "one flesh" suggests sexual intercourse and normally procreation, at its very heart the concept entails the establishment of a new kinship relationship between two previously unrelated individuals (and families) by the most intimate of human bonds.

(4) **The mutuality of marriage:** Marriage is a relationship of free self-giving of one human being to another (Ephesians 5:25-30). The marriage partners are to be first and foremost concerned about the wellbeing of the other person and to be committed to each other in steadfast love and devotion. This involves the need for forgiveness and restoration of the relationship in the case of sin. Mutuality, however, does not mean sameness in role. Scripture is clear that wives are to submit to their husbands and to serve as their "suitable helpers," while husbands are to bear the ultimate responsibility for the marriage before God (Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18; see also Genesis 2:18, 20).

(5) **The exclusiveness of marriage:** Marriage is not only permanent, sacred, intimate, and mutual; it is also exclusive (Genesis 2:22-25; 1 Corinthians 7:2-5). This means that no other human relationship must interfere with the marriage commitment between husband and wife. For this reason, Jesus treated sexual immorality of a married person, including even a husband's lustful thoughts, with utmost seriousness (Matthew 5:28; 19:9). For the same reason, premarital sex is also illegitimate, since it violates the exclusive claims of one's future spouse. As the Song of Solomon makes clear, only in the secure context of an exclusive marital bond can free and complete giving of oneself in marriage take place.

Humanity's rebellion against the Creator's purposes led to at least the following seven negative consequences: (1) polygamy; (2) divorce; (3) adultery; (4) homosexuality; (5) sterility; and (6) gender role confusion, and (7) abortion.

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Marriage: Contract or Covenant?

Today, marriage and the family are regularly viewed as social conventions that can be entered into and severed by the marital partners at will.

Instead, Scripture teaches that family was God's idea and that marriage is a divine, not merely human, institution.

The Bible defines "family" in a narrow sense as *the union of one man and one woman in matrimony which is normally blessed with one or several natural or adopted children.*

Jesus' words, uttered when asked him about the permissibility of divorce: "What therefore God has joined together let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6). For this reason, marriage is far more than a human social contract; it is a divinely instituted covenant.

Because it is ultimately *God* who has joined the marriage partners together, the husband and the wife vow to each other abiding loyalty and fidelity "till death do us part." Rightly understood, therefore, a marriage entered into before God involves three persons: a husband, a wife, and God.

In Ephesians 5:21-33 instructions are given to both husbands and wives in form of a "house table,"

Wives, for their part, are called to submit to their own husbands, as to the Lord. As the church submits to Christ, so wives should to their husbands in everything (Ephesians 5:21-24). Husbands, in turn, are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. They are to provide for their wives both physically and spiritually and to cherish them as God's special provision for them (Ephesians 5:25-30). As Christian husbands and wives live out these marital roles, God's original creation design for marriage will be fulfilled once again: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Ephesians 5:31, citing Genesis 2:24).

The contemporary culture is in a deep crisis regarding marriage and family today. While the crisis has important political, social, and economic ramifications, in the ultimate analysis only a spiritual return to the biblical foundations will address the root issue of the current crisis. Marriage and the family were God's idea, and as divine institutions they are not open to human renegotiation or revision.

As we have seen, the Bible clearly teaches that God instituted marriage as a covenant between one man and one woman, a lifelong union of two partners created in God's image to govern and manage the earth for him.

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Marriage Today www.marriagetoday.com
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Books for Biblical Marriage

The Bible

God, Marriage, and the Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation by Andreas J. Kostenberger & David W. Jones

Sacred Marriage by Gary Thomas

The Sacred Search by Gary Thomas