



CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Reading: 1 Corinthians 7

The first marriage

Marriage is a relationship that God has provided. It is the joining together of one man and one woman for as long as they are both alive. Marriage is the closest of all human relationships. In it the husband and his wife can learn together the true meaning of Christian love and forgiveness, as they care for each other in a self-sacrificing way.

God created Eve as a marriage partner for Adam, so Adam and Eve were the first married couple. Therefore, the principles of marriage are set out from the very beginning in Genesis 1 and 2.

The principles of marriage

From Genesis 2:18,21-24 we learn that marriage was a solemn and serious commitment. After creating the woman, God brought her to the man (Genesis 2:22). Jesus makes clear in Matthew 19:5 that God actually spoke the words of Genesis 2:24 to Adam and Eve. In a very real sense, God was the one who officiated at this first marriage service.

Genesis 2:18,21-24 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him". So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." **Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.**

The order of God's words to Adam and Eve in verse 24 is important. He said:

1. that a man should leave his father and mother
2. and hold fast to his wife
3. and that the man and wife should become one flesh.

We will consider these three points in more detail.

1. God said that when a man and a woman decide to marry, the man should leave his parents to live with his wife. This does not mean that he should ignore his parents, but shows that his new wife now becomes the most important person in his family and he must put the care of her first. Of course, this applies equally to the woman. Because this could not apply to Adam and Eve, who had no parents, it is clear that Genesis 1 and 2 set out God's principles for marriage for all time.
2. The man was to "*hold fast*" to his wife. This does not refer to a sexual relationship but to the man and his wife being so close in thought, purpose and all they do, that they are inseparable, as if they are glued together. God created the woman to be a suitable helper for Adam. They were to be partners in life, caring for each other and working together for the Lord. A man and his future partner should understand what is really important to each other before they commit themselves to marriage.
3. The man and woman were to be "*one flesh*". This refers to sexual union (1 Corinthians 6:16) and comes last. Only **after** they were committed to each other for life, holding fast to each other, were they to have sexual relations. Eve was created from Adam's side – originally they had literally been "*one flesh*". Now in sexual union that closeness would be renewed. It would be a special way in which a man and his wife would feel absolutely together and united in a loving bond. It would show that their relationship should be so close that they would feel part of each other. This direct teaching from God is totally opposite to the casual way men and women have sex today, without really knowing their partners or without any commitment to a life long relationship.





In Genesis 1:28 God blessed Adam and Eve and told them to be *“fruitful and multiply”*. A loving and secure marriage between two believers provides the best environment in which a child can grow up and learn to serve God (Malachi 2:15).

So right from the beginning, God set out His purpose for marriage. He wants a husband and his wife to live together, helping each other through life. He wants them to work together as spiritual partners in His service and, if blessed with children, to bring them up to love and serve Him. Marriage is not a convenient way of getting a housekeeper free of charge, or for finding a man to look after you! There is much more to marriage than a man and his wife living together.

Marriage is the joining together of **one man and one woman, for life** (Matthew 19:4-6)

Christian marriage

Just as God presided over the marriage service of Adam and Eve, so a Christian couple should be joined together in marriage in the presence of God. Their marriage vows (promises) should be made before God, as well as in front of human witnesses (family and friends). The vows should reflect God’s ideals. God forbids anyone to break the marriage union that he has blessed: *“What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate”* (Matthew 19:6). 1 Corinthians 7:39 says, *“A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives”*. Of course, when one member of the marriage dies, the remaining partner can remarry (Roman 7:2,3).

Finding a husband or wife

The Bible gives a clear command that should be obeyed when a follower of Christ chooses a marriage partner.

Baptized believers should marry baptized believers

The true purpose of marriage can only be achieved when both partners belong to the Lord. In order to live together as spiritual partners as *“heirs (together) ... of the grace of life”* (1 Peter 3:7), the husband and wife must share the same faith and love of God. Paul makes it very clear that a believer should not marry an unbeliever:

“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? ... Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?” (2 Corinthians 6:14,15)

*“A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, **only in the Lord**”* (1 Corinthians 7:39).

An unbelieving partner can take us away from God, which is what happened to Solomon (1 Kings 11:1-11).

Sometimes it is difficult to find a partner who shares the same faith. Some people in this situation are able to stay single (Matthew 19:10-12) and there is nothing wrong with this (Jesus remained single). Others will want to find someone who is willing to learn the true Gospel, but should only marry them if they accept God’s salvation and are baptized. The choice of marriage partner should be made a matter of earnest prayer.

The marriage of believers should represent Christ and the true church

Just as baptism is a symbol of something greater (dying and rising with Christ), so marriage is also a symbol. The relationship between a husband and his wife should represent the relationship between the Lord Jesus and his church:

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. ‘Therefore a





*man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to **Christ and the church**. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:25-33).*

The husband should love and care for his wife in the same way as the Lord Jesus loves and cares for true believers. Similarly, the wife should love, respect and obey her husband just as true believers should honour their Lord and Saviour. Verse 23 adds:

“For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour”.

This symbol helps us to understand the different roles of the husband and wife.

The husband’s role in married life

A caring Christian husband and a faithful Christian wife are a great blessing to each other and their family, as well as to those with whom they worship. The husband should show selfless love for his wife after Christ’s example of love and care for his church (true believers).

The husband should be the head of his wife as the Lord Jesus is the head of the church. This does not mean that the husband is allowed to order his wife around – expecting everything to be done in answer to his commands and having his own way – that was not how Jesus behaved with his disciples. Although he was their Lord, the head of the body of disciples, at times he behaved as a servant to them to teach them the need for humility (Luke 22:27), and he considered the needs of others more important than his own. Peter gave this advice:

*“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives **in an understanding way, showing honour** to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:7).*

Being head of the family means that the husband should give a positive lead, but he should discuss important decisions with his wife. Most of all, the husband should lead the family in worship and instruction, as Abraham did (Genesis 18:19). In this way a baptized husband should regard himself as the head over the family, responsible for their lives before God, and he should think of his home as if it were a little Christian church, where God is honoured.

In some countries the women in the family do most of the heavy work. Christian marriage is a partnership and the husband will be keen to share the work with his wife and family. He should show *“honour to the woman as the weaker vessel”* (1 Peter 3:7) and love her as much as he loves himself (Ephesians 5:28). This spiritual and practical partnership will be a joyful experience for the whole family. Working together and sharing tasks will provide an excellent example of true Christianity, encouraging others.

A Christian wife

We have looked at the duties and responsibilities of the Christian husband, but the wife must also play her proper part. She should love and respect her husband in the same way as the church should love and respect the Lord Jesus. There is a delightful word picture of an *“excellent wife”* in Proverbs 31:10-31. She is someone her husband can trust absolutely, who *“does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life”* (verse 12). She works hard for herself and her family; she is kind and understanding, and *“fears the LORD”* (verse 30). The Bible has a number of examples of faithful wives who helped and supported their husbands, whilst letting them take the lead. Sarah respected Abraham and thought of him as her lord (1 Peter 3:1-6) and obeyed him.

The apostle Paul shows that because the husband represents Christ, and his wife represents Christ’s true church, she should not take the leading role in marriage:

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22).

Titus 2:4,5 contains Paul’s instructions concerning young wives:





“train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive (obedient) to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.”

Since Christian family life is to be shared with God, mothers have a special part to play both in caring for the family, and in guiding and teaching the children the things of God. Of course, both parents have their part to play in bringing up their children in a godly way. Scripture says that parents should *“train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it”* (Proverbs 22:6).

No sex outside marriage

Sexual union is an intimate act that allows husband and wife to express their love for one another in a very special way (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). It is also a blessing designed to bring children into a loving, caring family. God created this gift as a part of marriage and it should be kept pure and not spoiled by unfaithfulness (Hebrews 13:4). The proper and only place for sex is within marriage – **sex should only take place between a husband and wife**. When two people have sex together they become *“one flesh”*, so loose sex is wrong:

“Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, ‘The two will become one flesh’ ” (1 Corinthians 6:16).

The Bible condemns all wrong use of sex. 1 Corinthians 6: 9,10,18 says:

*“Do not be deceived: neither the **sexually immoral**, nor idolaters, nor **adulterers**, nor men who practice **homosexuality**... will inherit the kingdom of God **Flee** from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but **the sexually immoral person sins against his own body**”.*

The Old Testament also warns about sexual immorality – for example, Proverbs 6:23-35, 7:4-27 and Deuteronomy 22. Believers are forgiven their past sins when they are baptized and begin a new life. If we have been sexually immoral in the past, we too can be forgiven. Some of the believers in Corinth had sinned in these ways as Paul explained to them:

“And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified (separated), you were justified (made right with God) in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Summary

1. Marriage is a relationship that God has provided. It is the joining together of one man and one woman for as long as they are both alive.
2. Sex is a blessing from God and should only take place between a man and his wife. Sex outside or before marriage is wrong.
3. A baptized believer should only marry another baptized believer.
4. The husband should love and care for his wife in the same way that the Lord Jesus loves and cares for true believers.
5. The wife should love, respect and obey her husband just as true believers should honour their Lord and Saviour.
6. The husband and wife should bring up their children to love and serve God. The husband must lead the family, especially in worshipping God.

Verse to learn: Matthew 19:6

So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.

Passages to read: Ephesians 5; Proverbs 31:10-31; 1 Timothy 3; Colossians 3:12-25

