

The Ministry of Marriage

A teaching on God-appointed, Christ-centered marriages
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I make no claim to having a perfect marriage. I simply share what I believe the Lord has made real to me regarding His heart for marriage. I submit this teaching for your discernment and edification.

Periodically, I would ask different ones, “When are we married in God’s sight?” Many of us have been raised in a culture that believes a marriage takes place when vows are read before a minister or justice of the peace who, at the end of the ceremony, pronounces by governmental authority that the couple are now husband and wife. I wonder, though, does God honor that? Does that make it so? What about other cultures and other vows that may not be scripturally based? Does God honor those?

When Rebecca was brought to Isaac, he took her into his mother’s (Sarah’s) tent and the Bible says she became his wife, and he loved her. Gen. 24:67. Clearly, they were considered married when they first consummated it physically. Paul, the apostle, made a case for that argument when he asked, “What? Do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body? For two shall be one flesh.” 1 Cor. 6:16. Is that not a marriage of sorts?

On the other hand, Jesus asked the woman at Jacob’s well to go tell her husband to come there. She answered that she had no husband. Jesus responded, “You have well said, I have no husband. For you have had five husbands; and he whom you now have is not your husband.” Though she was living with a man, he was not considered to be her husband. This episode suggest that something more than sex has to be in place before it can be called a marriage.

Most people I asked thought that a marriage takes place when the couple commits themselves to each other in their hearts. I finally settled on a criteria that seems right to me. What do you think?

Jesus declared, “Whom therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder.” It seems possible that three things are to come into alignment for it to be a marriage in God’s sight.

When the couple sincerely believes that God has joined them together.

When the marriage vows are pledged (usually in a public ceremony with one or more witnesses present).

When the marriage is ultimately consummated in the marriage bed.

No mention is given here of the fact that marriage is also a civil union. This has more to do with entering into a legal contract for legal purposes. Just

because a couple has a legal document saying they are married does not mean that their marriage was made in heaven.

Well, then, does this suggest that every couple has not been joined together by God? Can that marriage legitimately be “put asunder?”

Each couple who wants to be married in God’s sight will want to settle in their hearts that their union was made in heaven, and they will determine to make it a God-appointed, Christ-centered marriage.

A. Christ-centered, Biblical Marriage

A God-appointed, Christ-centered marriage has two parts. One is God’s part in the marriage and the other is our part in the marriage. The God-appointed part is God’s choice in the matter. The Christ-centered part is our choice.

We begin at the beginning. Genesis 2:18-25. “And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make a help mate for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof. And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.”

We note several elements from this narrative in Genesis.

B. The Ministry of Marriage

From the beginning, we want to settle the issue that the marriage union was instituted by God and not by man. This being the case, we have to recognize that God had a purpose for a man and a woman to be married. That purpose could just as well be understood as a ministry. If it is a ministry, then it is a calling from God. The man is called of God to be the husband to his wife. The woman is called of God to be the wife to her husband. Each have a major role to play in God’s eternal purposes.

Once you as a married couple become fully aware of this concept, it should change everything in your marriage. We cannot so quickly walk away from that which God has ordained as a calling upon our lives.

You who are looking to be married, ask the hard question. “Do we really believe God has called us into the union as a ministry unto Him?” If you cannot honestly say so, then strongly consider not going forward with it.

If we fail to see that our marriage is in one accord with God’s divine will and purpose for our lives, then it will be based on circumstance. Our

attraction to each other might have been based on physical looks, and that is circumstantial. Our looks change and not always for the better. We get older, slower, fatter, flabbier, forgetful, and wrinkled. If it is based on success or appearance, those are circumstantial. If it is based on the fact that you two were voted most popular (or the two best techie nerds) and everyone expected you to get married, that is circumstantial.

Circumstances change and people change. Marriages based on circumstances are on shaky ground, especially when the circumstances change. We need a greater, more solid rock upon which to build our marriages.

What then is that ministry?

Firstly, we take into consideration the mandate of Genesis 1:28. The first purpose of created man in the marriage union is to procreate and take dominion. “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” Taking dominion was intended to be a co-ministry of the man and the woman. God did not say, “Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth,” and then say to the man, “you subdue and have dominion.” It was in the context of “them.”

Secondly, we see that a God-appointed, Christ-centered marriage is to be a ministry unto the Lord inasmuch as it is a picture of the marriage between Christ and His Bride, the called-out-ones to be assembled into Him. This trumps all other ministry callings. All Christ-centered marriages have this calling in common. It is foundational to all that is written here.

Thirdly, a God-appointed, Christ-centered marriage is to provide a context for ministry to each other—the husband to the wife and the wife to the husband. All marriages have this in common as well. No matter what the circumstances of your situation, you are to serve one another. This, likewise, is a picture of the body of Christ in relationship to each other. Until this is working in the marriage, it will portray a false image of how the body of Christ lives in relationship with each other.

Fourthly, a God-appointed, Christ-centered marriage is to be a ministry to the children given to the husband and wife. Children have the right to grow up in a family that demonstrates a godly marriage where there are such things as love, affection, support, safety, understanding, patience, caring, and problem solving. If you bring children into the world, you have no right to take this from them. It takes years for them to internalize what they see illustrated in the home. If children grow up having a godly marriage modeled to them, they will most likely respond out of that model in their own marriage. Children need to also know that the relationship their parents have with each other takes priority.

Parents should always prioritize their relationship over all others. Children will learn how to relate to other people by what they learn in the home.

Fifthly, a Christ-centered marriage is to be a ministry to others beyond the family. Their ministry as a couple can be any number of things. The Lord may have them together because her left-brain thinking complements his right-brain thinking, and together they accomplish certain callings for God and many tasks of their own. Couples need to know this about each other and draw on it rather than butting heads over it.

Not only will each couple want to settle the issue that God has them together for His purposes, but also, as far as possible, to discover what that purpose is. Whatever it might be, it is intended to bring God glory and honor. The sold-out-to-God couple cannot walk away from that divine commission. Even if you cannot discern what that ministry is, you can still have confidence that your marriage is a ministry to God in some form or fashion. It is not uncommon at all for us to have to surrender some fleshly whims of our own to fulfill God's will in our lives, but in so doing, we take the higher road.

Many of us, however, married in the flesh and not in the Spirit. It was based on circumstances and not ordained of God. We did not even know to ask Him about it. We were "in love," "in lust," or "in sick" as the case may have been. What then? Divorce is still not a viable solution. Exceptions may make divorce necessary, but those exceptions should never be an excuse for an unwarranted divorce. The problems you encounter in your present marriage will likely carry over into future relationships if they are not resolved. Most issues can be resolved if you work on them. If they can be resolved, then resolve them in your present marriage.

Repent of your worldly notions of marriage and determine to declare that your marriage is a ministry unto the Lord and for the Lord. Live accordingly. Allow no other options. Utterly change your mind about the nature and purpose of your marriage. It is no longer about ME and MY needs. It is all about God and His will. After all, should we not be looking to God to meet our needs? Does He not know better than anyone what we need?

Turn your lives and marriage over to the complete care of God. Both of you do this! Once committed, you can now trust Him to sanctify your marriage. However, do not expect all the consequences of fleshly and broken marriages to vanish. Some will and some will not. You will have to find a way to make peace with those that do not.

THE CONCEPT THAT MARRIAGE IS A MINISTRY IS MOST CRITICAL FOR US TO UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT.

C. Sacred Organism

If we agree that God initiated marriage, then we settle the issue that this is a sacred relationship and is not to be lightly entered into.

The Biblical concept of marriage is between a man and woman. God stated His initial purpose in Genesis 1:28. “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth....” Here and elsewhere throughout the scriptures, it is clear that God sees marriage as being between one man and one woman. Any other union is not a marriage according to the Bible.

Marriages are either spiritual or fleshly. A spiritual marriage is one that has been appointed by God—made in heaven. The couple sought the Lord’s will, decided they were called to be together, and thereby entered into that union. A spiritual marriage is one that is founded on Christian principles.

A fleshly marriage is one that has been based on anything other than God’s will; for example, sexual attraction, a social or financial arrangement, or to give a name to the child of an unwed mother.

Marriage, therefore, is a partnership or a covenant to ministry between three parties—husband, wife, and God. It is a binding covenant that is made in heaven. “So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” Matt. 19:6. “And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Matt. 16:19. For this reason do not make presumptuous vows and covenants. Let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ be ‘no.’ Matt. 5:37.

D. Called Adam and Eve

“And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.” Gen. 2:22-23.

Matthew Henry’s commentary on this passage is enlightening. “The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam: not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and hear his heart to be beloved.” They are partners in life, side by side.

E. Helpmate

The King James reads, “And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help mate for him.” The New King James Version and others reads, “a helper suitable or comparable

to him.” Gen. 2:18. She was given to Adam as a helper. The New Unger Bible Dictionary, page 551, defines the term “help” as “his counterpart.” “An aid ‘suitable for him,’ such as the man stood in need of.

The original Hebrew literally translates, “...to suit him.” Adam was not given to the woman to suit her, but she was given to him to suit him. How archaic is that? Makes you wonder what we might be missing out on.

F. Leave and Cleave

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” Gen. 2:24.

Jesus verified this when He answered His accusers. The Pharisees tried to trick Him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” Jesus answered them, “Have you not read, that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female? And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife...” Matt. 19:4-5. KJV

Leave means leave. Husband, you are no longer under the authority of your earthly father. Christ is your head, your authority. Cleave means cleave. You are no longer of your family of origin, but have become one new family in God’s sight.

You should not assume that you can run back home every time there is a spat between you. Parents, as a rule, should not encourage that. Be a David and face your giants. Together!

G. One Flesh

Jesus continued His defense in Matthew 19:6 explaining that a married couple are no longer two but one flesh. “Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”

This oneness in flesh between the husband and the wife also exemplifies the oneness between Christ and His Bride. Jesus’s prayer makes it clear that we are in Him and He is in us, just as He is in the Father and the Father is in Him.

What you do or say to your mate is the same as doing it to Christ. If you malign her, you malign Him. If you bless her, you bless Him. You are one. The Lord Jesus said it this way, “Inasmuch as you did to one of the least of these My brethren, you did to Me.” Matt. 25:40.

A precious union takes place between Jesus and His Bride, the body of Christ. While Jesus does not exalt Himself above His Bride, He remains her head. He is the head and we as His bride are His body. So, it is between a husband and his wife. Though they are one flesh, he remains the head.

This headship does not violate the phenomenal uniqueness of the individual as a personality. We are one with Christ, yet to be one flesh with our mates does not mean that we are to become one personality. We need to maintain a healthy sense of our individuality and a healthy respect for the individuality of our mate. In a healthy God-appointed, Christ-centered marriage, two whole people come together to make one whole couple and not one whole individual.

This one-flesh principle applies whenever sex is engaged, even out of wedlock. 1 Corinthians 6:16 reads, "Do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For the two, He says, shall become one flesh."

When a man and a woman engage in the act of sex, they two become one. One body is the same as one flesh. There is an integration (integrity, cohesion) as such that takes place.

When, however, either person has sex with an additional person or with multiple persons, that integrity is compromised. Those two become one with each other. The more sex partners he or she has, the more disintegrated or splintered their personalities become.

Reintegration and healing are possible through true repentance (heart core decision to change) in the Lord. Repairing that breach can be a long and difficult road to walk. Only the Holy Spirit can restore the integrity and oneness of such a wounded personality.

The Christian couple, therefore:

1. Desires to do things God's way, and in His time.
2. Are committed to a moral engagement period.
3. Are committed to fidelity in the marriage for life.
4. Are committed to a Christ-centered, biblical marriage and home.

H. Rooted in the God Kind of Love

The words in a popular country music song many years ago read, "Please release me, let me go. I don't love you anymore." It prompts me to ask, "What kind of love is it when you say you have it one day and not have it the next? Can the God kind of love ever stop? I hope not. I expect God's love to continue forever. Do you not also? We, too, have His love if indeed Christ is in us and we are in Christ. How can we love our neighbor one day and not love him the next? How can I say I love my wife one day and say I do not the next?"

The truth is, you cannot break off the God kind of love. If you can say, "I don't love you anymore," then it is not the God kind of love. It has to be something else we falsely call love. In so many cases especially with young people, what is meant by love is infatuation. According to the dictionary, infatuation is "an intense but short-lived passion or

admiration for someone or something.” An infatuation can even be over the idea of being in love—infatuated with love. Well, that is not really love, especially the God kind of love. We need to recognize this silly romantic mystic of love and repent from falling captive to it.

The anonymous person who wrote “The Marriage Box” makes a convincing read,

“Most people get married believing a myth that marriage is a beautiful box full of all the things that they have longed for: companionship, intimacy, friendship, etc. The truth is that marriage at the start is an empty box. You must put something in before you can take anything out. There is no love in marriage. Love is in people. And people put love in marriage. There is no romance in marriage. You have to infuse it into your marriage. A couple must learn the art and form the habit of giving, loving, serving, praising, keeping the box full. If you take out more than you put in, the box will be empty.”

A God appointed, Christ-centered concept of love is the only acceptable love for the Christian. We will want to decide which kind of love we have toward the other person before we get engaged, especially before marriage.

The Greek language has four words to help us discern the different kinds of love we experience. They are *agape*, *philos*, *eros*, and *storge*. *Agape* and *philos* are the only two used in the New Testament.

Agape is the God kind of love that was demonstrated by the sacrificial life of Jesus who said, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” John 15:13. *Agape* is God kind of love.

Philos is a brotherly, affectionate, emotional kind of love that can be quite fickle. It is sentimental. *Philos* can say one day, “I love you” and the next “I don't love you anymore.” It is soul (soulish) love. My grandson-in-law came up with this acronym for L.O.V.E—Lots Of Varying Feelings. That defines *philos*.

A dialogue between Jesus and Peter serves as a classic scriptural example of the difference between *agape* and *philos*. After His crucifixion, Jesus appeared to His beloved Peter, who days before had publicly denied Him, and asked, “Peter, do you love [*agape*] Me?” Peter could not answer honestly with *agape*. Rather, twice he answered, “You know Lord that I love [*philos*] you.” Nevertheless, *agape* was proven through his own death. He was reputedly crucified upside down for his witness of Christ.

Eros in Greek mythology was the primordial god of sexual love and beauty. It applies to sexual love that in actuality is more lust than love. *Eros* is flesh.

Storge is the word for that natural affection experienced among family members—such as the love of a parent toward the children and the

children toward each other. Siblings may fight like dogs when they are growing up, but likely become the good friends as adults.

Storge is exclusive and the most basic of all forms of love. The cow knows her calf and the calf knows her mother. Rarely will the mother allow another calf to suck. Penguins may all look alike to us, but they find exclusive attractions one to the other and stay joined for life. They can be separated for long periods of time and still return to find their mate in the flock.

The fact that the familial characteristics of *storge* spread across all species of animal life does not diminish its value. It is a precious and perhaps even a sacred bonding. Nothing compares to the love of a mother for her child.

I. Blood Ties

A God-appointed, Christ-centered marriage may have all four of these loves present in a healthy, godly manner. Yet, something more and different from these four loves seem to be present in a marriage. Perhaps it envelops a deeper meaning of *storge*. There is a sense of family—a tightness that should not be breached. Family members can fight among themselves, but when an outsider tries to pit one against the other, watch out! The whole family will likely rise to the family member's defense. A family member may be rotten to the core, but after all, they are still family. A family member may stay estranged for a lifetime, but there is always that feeling of loss. Family ties are that sort of thing.

If *storge* is not the word and the Greeks had a different word for it, I don't know what it is. I don't know of a word in English to describe it. This love bond between a man and woman, especially in a God-appointed, Christ-centered marriage, is unique and exists between them alone just as it is between Christ and His bride.

The relationship between a man and a woman in marriage is a blood tie. This is different from a soul tie. Soul ties are primarily emotional attachments. Soul ties can be powerful and hard to cut if they need to be.

The blood tie is spiritual and occurs when you become "one flesh." The same is true between Christ and His Bride. When we believe in Him, we become one with Him and He with us, just as He and the Father are one. He invites us to "drink His blood." Now that is not naturally possible, but it is spiritually actual. It is a mystery in the natural, physical sense. It is not a mystery when it is simply accepted as reality by faith. When you believe it, you will likely see it.

Therefore, when a man and woman become one flesh, they form a union that usually runs thick as blood. The children who are born to them are the literal bloodline of both parents. Thus, we have family in its deepest

and truest sense. Family should have an unbreakable bond. Believe it and live accordingly.

J. The joy of Marriage

The concept that marriage is a ministry may sound too serious, too religious, too weighty for some. May it not be so! I believe God intends for this ministry of marriage to be fun, adventurous, and fulfilling, providing an environment for personal and spiritual growth. He intends marriage to be romantic, physical (sexual), and provide full companionship satisfaction. Of course, marriage is packed with emotions of all kinds including the inevitable “ups” and “downs,” but the joy of being with that one person in all the world makes that roller coaster worth the ride.

The marriage relationship should be spiritually, mentally, emotionally, sexually, relationally, physically, and spiritually satisfying. Seeing marriage as a ministry should not put a damper on marriage. It should add a whole new adventurous dynamic to it.

K. The Marriage Castle

Think of marriage as a castle. Within its boundaries resides a queen who is protected and served by her king—her knight in shining armor. Though he is her spiritual head, he treats her as royalty. He protects and serves her to the degree that she is willing to submit to his service to her. She is far from being his underling. She, likewise, lives to serve her king, her knight. They have a mutual role to perform which makes their marriage functional.

Their castle is a stronghold intended to keep the enemy out. Anyone approaching the castle gate can enter only if invited; in which case, he has the authority to enter. No one outside of that marriage has the right or authority to invade that marriage. The couple protects the boundaries of that marriage with all of their strength. The marriage walls should be a fortress of stone.

The marriage is the cornerstone of family. Within the walls of this castle, the man and the woman make other little human beings—their children. Family is created. Love, nurture, encouragement, growth, guidance, peace, and safety should be taken for granted within this little family unit. They are one. An alien to this family should not breach the boundary of these family relationships. Neither should any member within the family do anything to breach the boundaries defined by this marital relationship.

Marriage training begins the day you are born. Though you did not realize it, every action, reaction, and interaction between you and your parents, and between your parents were shaping your perceptions of marriage for better or

for worse. Any misconceptions of marriage implanted within your mind need to be reshaped. You may need to examine those patterns that have previously been imprinted on your psyche and choose what to keep and what to toss. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you in this endeavor. This is your castle you are building. Build it well, following the blueprint of the Holy Spirit and guard it with all of your might.