



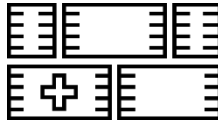
THE
MENTORING
PROJECT

MARRIAGE IN THE BIBLE: FOUNDATIONS THAT LAST



TIAGO OLIVEIRA

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THE BIBLE:
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THAT LAST



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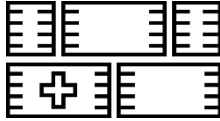
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INTRODUCTION¹

The Dead Sea Scrolls are a collection of ancient Jewish manuscripts discovered in the Qumran Caves, in the Judean Desert, starting in 1947. They contain, among other things, the oldest surviving copies of the Bible, which are of inestimable value. But when the first manuscripts were found by some Bedouin shepherds, they saw them only as useful leather and sold them to a cobbler in Bethlehem. Can you imagine that those precious manuscripts were about to be used to patch sandals just because the men could not recognize their value?

This true story serves as a sad parable of modern marriage. Like the cobbler with the scrolls, people take something glorious and cut it down to fit their own dreams. They turn a sacred covenant into a stage for their own personal desires, shaped by cultural expectations and fairy-tale ideals. People have dreams and plans for their marriage: the person they want to marry, where they want to live, how many children they want to have, and so on... We have become comfortable with “custom-made” weddings where we choose the place, the guest list, the preacher, the order of worship, the songs, and even the vows. It is as if God is only invited to bless our plans. Personal happiness and the fulfillment of individual dreams are all that marriage has come to mean. It is no wonder marriage is in crisis, including in Christian circles.

What if I asked you, “what is marriage according to the Bible?” Would you be able to answer it from a biblical perspective? I mean not only general truths about marriage, but the specific purpose for which marriage was created. The most important thing as you preparing for marriage is to know what you are preparing for. We want our marriages not only to start well, but, more importantly, to end well. We want foundations that last.

With this in mind, we will spend most of this life skill guide seeking to understand marriage, learning that it was created to be far better than our

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dreams could ever be. To learn the meaning of marriage in the Bible, we need to turn to the Word of God, especially the first three chapters of Genesis. By doing this, we follow Jesus' pattern. When questioned about divorce, he answered: "but from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8b).

This life skill guide follows the flow from Creation, to the Fall, and then to Redemption. To understand what marriage is, we need to understand its creation, its failure, and how Christ redeems it. Consummation is our hope—the reality which our marriages should reflect and anticipate.

This guide is organized and structured in the form of Biblical marriage studies. I invite you to open the Bible and follow along. As we follow the text, we will focus on the theme at hand: marriage. We will not look into all the details of the text, not because they are not important, but because we do not have the space, and it is not the central issue we are seeking to understand.

Lord willing, Marta and I will complete 25 years of marriage this June. These are the things I would like to have been taught when I was single and seeking christian dating advice. The truths written in this guide have transformed our understanding of a Christian relationship, and I pray they will do the same for you.

1

CREATION: THEY SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH

Everything was very good

By the end of the first chapter of Genesis, after God created all things, we read these words: “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” (Gen. 1:31a). This text gives us a picture of God contemplating his own creation. God saw everything that he created, and God concluded that everything was “very good.”

At the same time, remember that throughout the story of God creating the world, God evaluated what he created, and the conclusion he drew is that it “was good” (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). But, when all was created, God said “it was very good.” God’s creation was perfect. This means that we do not need to improve on what God has done. What we need is to know what God has done and seek to live it the way God created and intended us to. As we will see in the next section, it was the neglect of a right understanding of humanity, of what it means to be a man of God and a woman of God, a husband and a wife, of Biblical marriage as God created it, that brought sin into the world.

Man and Woman in the Image of God

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God

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created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:26-27)

When God says, “Let us make man,” the word used for “man” (adam) refers to human beings. In this verse, it does not refer to a specific gender, but to humanity as a whole, both man and woman. What defines this humanity is found in the phrase “in our image... in his own image.” Human beings are distinct from all other things or creatures that God made because they alone were created in the image of God.

It is true that everything God created reflects his character, just as an artist’s work reflects the artist who created it. “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1a). But human beings represent God’s character in a particular and personal way. Human beings are images, which means we were created to resemble and represent God. Consequently, our identity is not something we need to create. It is found in God Himself. Each one of us was created in the image of God.

The text further specifies that “male and female he created them.” Humanity was created with two genders, and both genders were created in the image of God. This is a fundamental truth of the biblical worldview. There are no degrees of humanity. The human species consists of two genders: male and female, man and woman. Both are equal in humanity, dignity, and honor, and the Bible clearly teaches this. The man is not superior to the woman, nor is the woman superior to the man. There is no humankind with only the man or only the woman. Mankind, as God created it, is necessarily both.

The Cultural Mandate

“And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” (Gen. 1:28)

Human beings hold a unique place in creation because they alone were created in the image of God. As we have established, this means they were designed to resemble and represent their creator. This identity carries with it a specific purpose and mission, outlined in five imperatives given to Adam and Eve: 1. be fruitful, 2. multiply, 3. fill the earth, 4. subdue

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it, and 5. have dominion. Their identity determines their mission, not only individually but also as a couple. Their marriage exists to fulfill these purposes.

What this clearly means is that the man and woman were created to reproduce and fill the earth. As image bearers, men and women reflect God's glory. As they multiply, the plan was to fill the earth with images of God's glory.

Second, they are commanded to "subdue, and have dominion" over all the creatures God had created. Man and woman were to exercise authority over all creation. However, this is not an arbitrary power. It is an authority that reflects God's own authority; it is a godly authority for the good of creation. The man and the woman (and their descendants) are ordered to be stewards of God's creation. Thus, the image of God in humanity is also reflected in their mission, and the Bible maintains a positive view of human authority over the created world, for its own good. This commission, often called the Cultural Mandate, is given to both man and woman. Together, they are to reproduce, filling the earth with image-bearers, and to rule, exercising a stewardship that mirrors God's reign.

But the narrative does not end in Genesis 1. Genesis 2 functions like a magnifying glass placed over the events of Genesis 1, allowing us to see in greater detail what transpired on the second part of the sixth day. While Genesis 1 tells us that God created man and woman in his image, Genesis 2 provides the specific details of how man and woman were created. It builds upon the previous chapter and allows us to understand the differences between the man and the woman.

It is not good

"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'" (Gen. 2:18)

After reading Genesis 1 and the repetition of "it was good," which culminates in God seeing everything he had created and concluding that it was very good, this verse comes not only as a surprise but a shock. This is the first time in the Bible that we read that something is not good. However, we must be careful to understand what this assessment means. It does not imply that God did anything wrong, for we saw in the first

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chapter that everything he made was very good. Rather, “not good” here means that something is incomplete. The man is not complete without the woman; he has a need that has not yet been met.

Now, let’s put this in context. In Genesis 1, a mandate was given to the man and the woman to be fruitful and fill the earth. It is clear that Adam is incapable of fulfilling this commission by himself. Therefore, when Scripture says “it is not good that the man should be alone,” it does not primarily refer to a psychological feeling of loneliness or solitude. It is not good for him to be alone because, in this state, he cannot fully reflect the image of God or carry out the mission God has for them. Adam needs to be completed. He needs a helper. The role of the woman is explicitly defined here as a companion in Biblical marriage. She is created to be the essential helper the man needs. But the role of a helper in no way means that she is inferior.

A Helper Fit for Him

Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found 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. (Gen. 2:18–23)

According to Genesis 2, even before the woman existed, the man was already exercising authority over creation by naming the animals. Yet, despite the vast array of creatures God had formed, we read in verse 20 that “for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him.” No animal, however magnificent, was sufficient to be the helper the man needed. No other creature was fit for him. Adam required a helper who would be of the same stature, the same level—someone who was as fully human as he was, possessing the same nature and dignity.

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To provide this, God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam. It was from the very substance of the man that the woman was created. In the famous and beautiful words of Matthew Henry: “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 near his heart to be beloved.”[1] This is a beautiful definition of love in the Bible.

The text tells us that from the rib God took from the man, he made a woman and brought her to him. It is crucial to see that God does not create another Adam. He creates a woman—someone like the man in substance, but distinct from him. If Adam’s need was just about company, God could have created another Adam or many other Adams. But God created the Woman. She is the one who can complement him in his mission. She is the woman (ishah) because she was formed from the man (ish). When Adam wakes up and sees her, he breaks into poetry: “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.” The woman is of the same nature; she is a human being, equal in value. But the woman is not the man; she is different, perfectly suited to complement him. These are the Bible verses about marriage that form the foundation of our faith.

Therefore... One Flesh

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” (Gen. 2:24)

Notice the word “therefore.” It signals a purpose. It was God who united the first couple and made them one flesh. Marriage was not a human idea. It was God’s design. Consequently, Adam and Eve, and every couple since, must look to God to define what marriage is. As Jesus explicitly affirms in the Scriptures on marriage: “what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matt. 19:6b). It was God who joined them together. The covenant of marriage is a bond that should not be broken because God made it. Marriage is God’s plan, to which human beings are blessed to participate.

The text further states that a man shall “leave his father and his mother.” When the two become one, the man’s relationship with his family of origin

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changes. He does not remain under their authority; a new family has been created. The marriage covenant is exclusive between a man and a woman, not between a spouse and their extended family. There should be no tension or divided loyalties. The husband gives himself fully to his wife, and vice versa. This is essential Christian marriage advice.

Finally, they “become one flesh.” This means they are no longer the same individuals they were before. The man has changed once he was united with his wife. He can no longer see himself in isolation. They are now one flesh.

Reflection Questions:

1. How does knowing that God made marriage change how we should approach it?
2. What does it mean that man and woman are both made in the image of God?
3. When did marriage become a thing?

2

FALL: THE FIRST MARRIAGE HAS FAILED

The Order of Creation

Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (...) The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Gen. 2:7, 15–17)

Before we proceed further and think about the Fall, we must pause to notice two details of God’s good creation from Genesis 2 that will become crucial in Genesis 3: 1—the order of creation, and 2—the recipient of the moral commandment.

First, we see that the man and the woman were not created at the same time. They were created on the same day, but at different times. The Lord God formed the man first, placed him in the Garden, and gave him the task of working the garden and keeping it. This sequence is not accidental; it establishes a structure for the relationship between the man and the woman in a Biblical marriage.

Second, a detail that may easily escape us is that the moral commandment regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was given only to the man, even before the woman had been created. This implies that the

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man of God was created first to take leadership in his home. This does not mean he was intended to fulfill the commandment alone, but rather that he was called to be the first, to take primary responsibility for representing his family and leading them in obedience. Implicit in this order is the expectation that Adam would lead and teach his family. Since the commandment was given directly to him, he bears the primary responsibility for keeping it and for ensuring his household understands and obeys as well. This is a foundational concept in Biblical marriage studies.

Sin

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman...” (Gen. 3:1)

In the opening verse of Genesis 3, we are introduced to a new character: the serpent. The text describes him with a specific characteristic: "more crafty" (or cunning) than any other animal. The word crafty in the Bible is used with both positive and negative connotations. Here, it implies a subtle, deceptive intelligence.

Usually, people associate the serpent's craftiness with the deceptive words with which he tempts the woman. But the serpent's deception did not start with the words. Notice carefully to whom the serpent speaks. He addresses the woman. Why is this significant? Remember the order of creation we just discussed. God gave the commandment directly to the man. Adam was responsible for teaching and obeying the commandment God had given him. By targeting the woman, the serpent subverts the God-given structure of the marriage relationship. He bypasses the head and appeals to the helper.

Now, it is crucial to understand that the serpent does not speak to the woman because she was intellectually inferior or easier to trick. The text does not imply this inferiority in any way. On the contrary, we have already established that the woman of God was fit for the man. The reason the serpent addresses the woman was a strategic move to overturn the created order. God's design was for the man to lead and protect his family, as they seek together to rule over creation. In the Fall, there is a sad irony in that an animal exercises dominion over the woman, the woman leads

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the man, and the man fails to obey God's command. The entire order of creation is flipped upside down.

"So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate." (Gen. 3:6)

This single verse records the greatest tragedy in human history. The woman looks at the tree. She evaluates it based on her own senses ("good for food," "delight to the eyes") and her own desire for autonomy ("desired to make one wise"). She decides that her judgment is better than God's command. She takes. She eats.

But there is a detail in verse 6 that is absolutely shocking, and yet we often miss it. It seems to me that some tend to imagine that Adam was off in another part of the garden, perhaps tending to the vines, while Eve was having this conversation. But the text says she gave some to her husband, "who was with her." Adam was there all along! He was standing right there, and he stood silent. This failure is a core lesson in Biblical conflict resolution in marriage.

The man who was created to "work and keep" (or guard) the garden stood silently while an animal entered the garden and deceived his wife. The man who received the commandment directly from the mouth of God stood silently while that commandment was twisted and questioned. This is the first failure of biblical masculinity. Adam failed to protect. He failed to speak the truth. He failed to intervene. He was passive. And not only did he fail to protect his wife, but he also partook of the fruit of the tree God had explicitly told him not to eat.

Consequently, both Adam and Eve sinned against God, but they did so in different ways that reflected the distortion of their roles. Eve took the lead, usurping the headship that belonged to her husband. Adam, on the other hand, abdicated his God-given responsibility. He followed his wife into disobedience rather than leading her away from it. He chose to listen to his wife rather than obey God. In this moment, the first marriage failed its purpose. The union between the man and the woman, designed to reflect God's glory, became a bond of rebellion. This highlights the need for

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Christian marriage advice that addresses the root of passivity and usurpation.

Punishment

“And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”” (Gen. 3:8-9)

Immediately after they sinned, the relationship between Adam and Eve changed dramatically. Before sin, they were naked and were not ashamed (Gen. 2:25). Now, shame enters the world. They sew fig leaves together to cover themselves. They hide from God, and they hide from each other. Intimacy and trust are broken in the first Christian relationship.

Now, once again, pay attention to the details. The text says that they heard God walking in the garden. They sinned, and now God comes. And when God comes to judge, who does he call for first? Once again, Adam and Eve are together, but God calls for Adam. God knows exactly what happened. He knows where they are. He knows they both sinned. He also knows Eve ate first. Yet, God speaks first to the man. This confirms the principle of headship we established earlier. Adam is the head of his family. He bears the ultimate responsibility for the moral state of his home. Adam’s response to God reveals his cowardice and the depth of the fracture that sin caused in their marriage. When asked if he ate from the tree, Adam says, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit of the tree, and I ate” (Gen. 3:12).

Consider the contrast. In Genesis 2, at the height of joy, Adam was a poet: “Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!” Now, in the depths of sin, he turns against the one he was supposed to protect: “The woman whom you gave to be with me...” He does not protect her. He does not take responsibility. He sacrifices her to save himself. He even blames God (“...whom You gave to be with me”). This is the sad reality of every marriage touched by sin: we instinctively blame the other to justify ourselves.

To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.” And to Adam he said, “Because you

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have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Gen. 3:16-19)

God is just, and sin carries guilt, and guilt requires a penalty. So, God punishes the serpent, the woman, and the man. What is noteworthy about the punishments given to the woman and the man is that they differ, reflecting their distinct roles in marriage in the Bible.

To the woman, the punishment focuses on two areas: childbearing and marriage. First, the pain in childbirth is multiplied. The very act of bringing forth life, which is central to the woman's role, will now be marked by pain. Also, her relationship with her husband will change, and it will not be a perfect, harmonious union but one full of conflict. In her sin, instead of willingly and joyfully submitting to her husband, she will seek to master, control, or usurp her husband's role. In response, the husband's loving and protective leadership will be marked by harsh, domineering rule. This distortion is a key topic in Christian premarital counseling.

The Danvers Statement summarizes this tragedy with great clarity: "The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women (Gen. 3:1-7, 12, 16). In the home, the husband's loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife's intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility." The Fall did not erase the God-given roles of man and woman, but it deeply corrupted the relationship between the husband and the wife.

To the man, the punishment focuses on his primary role and responsibility that God had given him. Adam was created to work and keep the garden (Gen. 2:15). Now, the ground is cursed. Instead of producing fruit, it will produce thorns and thistles. Work will no longer be joyful; it will be painful and marked by sweat.

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Final Consequence and Hope

“He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.” (Gen. 3:24)

The ultimate and most serious consequence of rebellion against God was not just marital conflict or difficult work. It was death. Spiritual death. Separation from God. Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden, away from the presence of God. The man and the woman, created in the image of God, blessed to resemble and reflect his glory in all the earth, in perfect relationship with their creator, are now in a state of condemnation.

This is the consequence of sin. Our sin is not just a mistake. It is a rebellion against God. Sin results in a permanent separation from God because he is holy. Sin requires God to condemn us because he is just.

I want you to pause for a second and realize the seriousness and the consequences of sin. I want to invite you to realize that a correct understanding of what it means to be a man and a woman, a husband and a wife, is not just a detail in human life. Understanding the definition of love in the Bible and the roles of a husband and a wife is the foundation for a marriage, our purpose in life, and our relationship with God. I want you to understand that the roles in marriage should not be determined mainly by personality or opinion. The roles assigned by God to the man and the woman are essential to the covenant of Biblical marriage as God instituted it.

By God’s grace, this is not the end of human history. We must now take a step back. Before they are expelled from the garden, there is hope. When God curses the serpent, we read:

The Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Gen. 3:14-15)

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God's curse upon the serpent serves also as a promise of salvation. It is not by chance that Genesis 3:15 is known as the first promise of the gospel. God declares war between the serpent and the woman. But God also declares or promises a victory. God speaks of an "offspring" (or seed) of the woman. Even though the seed of the serpent will "bruise his heel", the seed of the woman will one day crush the head of the serpent.

Have you ever wondered why the Bible contains so many long lists of names that are hard to pronounce? It is because the people of God were looking for the promised seed. They were tracing the genetic line till God fulfilled his promise. It was not Noah, nor Abraham, nor Moses, nor David. The genealogies continue until we reach the New Testament, which opens with the words: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). Jesus is the promised seed of the woman.

Both men and women are equally fallen, and both men and women are equally in need of salvation. We are saved by the same grace, through the same faith in the same Lord. As the apostle Paul wrote: "For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal .3:26-28).

Suppose there is salvation for our marriages. If our marriages can be redeemed. Then, we must turn to the promised seed for salvation and redemption.

Reflection Questions:

1. What does the order of creation communicate regarding the roles the man and woman are to play in marriage?
2. How does the serpent attack the order of creation in Eve?
3. How do we continue to see the effects of the Fall in marriages today?

3

REDEMPTION: CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

The Word of God

To understand the ultimate purpose of marriage, we must first understand how to read the Bible. The Bible is God's progressive revelation to his people. The diversity of Scripture does not imply disconnected or contradictory messages. Rather, it is the same message revealed through time. A helpful illustration is the development of a tree. When a seed is planted, it contains the same DNA as the mature tree. There are different stages of maturity, but it is the same entity. In the same way, God's promises given in Genesis, like the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15, are the embryonic form of the fulfillment we find in Christ.

If we believe that Scripture is one unified book telling one coherent story, then we cannot treat the details of that story as mere coincidences. When we look at the bookends of the Bible, we discover a stunning connection that helps us understand the meaning and redemption of marriage. When we place the first chapters of Genesis side-by-side with the last chapters of Revelation, the beginning and the end of the story, we see a deliberate symmetry. This perspective is vital for Biblical marriage studies.

The First and The Last Marriage

First, we see Creation. In the beginning of God's revelation, we have the creation of the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). At the end of God's revelation, we read about a new and better creation: "Then I saw a new

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heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away" (Rev. 21:1).

Then, we see the Fall and Redemption. In Genesis 3, the narrative is marked by the breaking of relationships. Adam and Eve's relationship with God and with one another is broken. But turn to the end of the story in Revelation 21, and we see reconciliation and the reversal of sin. We hear a loud voice from the throne saying, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4). In Genesis, they are expelled from the presence of God. In Revelation, God lives among them.

Third, and most significant to our study, we see Marriage. The Bible begins with a wedding and ends with another wedding. In Genesis 2, God brings the woman to the man. Adam, the first man to fall in love, composes a poem: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23). The history of humanity begins with the union of a husband and a wife becoming one flesh. In Revelation, the history of humanity ends with the same image. John writes: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). And again in Revelation 19: "Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7).

This is no accident. Marriage is not only a biological necessity, a human plan, or a social contract. It is a representation of the message of the Gospel, of the Covenant between Christ and the Church, and of God's plans for the salvation of his people. Throughout the Old Testament, God increasingly used the image of marriage to describe his relationship with his people. But in the New Testament, the shadow gives way to the substance. We realize that human marriage was always intended to be a pointer, a visible representation of the invisible, eternal marriage between Christ and the Church. Understanding what does the New Testament say about marriage requires seeing this heavenly connection.

This profound truth explains why Jesus taught that in the resurrection, men and women neither marry nor are given in marriage (Matt. 22:30). Why will our earthly marriages cease in heaven? Not because they were

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unimportant, but because they will have fulfilled their purpose. The signpost is no longer needed once you have reached the destination. The shadow is no longer needed once reality has appeared. In eternity, we do not need the representation because we will have the Consummation: the eternal marriage between Christ and his Church.

So the marriage between a man and a woman is not just an important aspect of life. Our marriages were created to be a representation of the Gospel itself. The Consummation of God's plans will be the wedding and the eternal marriage between Christ and the Church!

Think about it! Meditate on this wonderful truth that should be the foundation and standard of every marriage. Marriage was created so that we can see, taste, experience, and learn about eternity with Christ until he comes. In this sense, marriage is a foretaste of eternity. This is the ultimate definition of love in the Bible.

Perhaps no other text in Scripture is as clear as Ephesians 5 in comparing the relationship between a husband and a wife to the relationship between Christ and the Church.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. 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 splendor, 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. (Eph. 5:22–33)

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Redemption in Christ restores the relationship between husband and wife. It recovers the roles God designed in Creation, which were distorted by the Fall. As we saw in the first chapter, God created the man and the woman to exercise different and complementary roles within the family. Ephesians 5 outlines what this redeemed dynamic looks like. This is the heart of Biblical marriage.

To the Wives: Voluntary Submission

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." (Eph. 5:22)

Women are called to recognize that God created marriage as a complementary relationship in which the wife acknowledges her husband's leadership in the family. However, notice carefully what this commandment teaches. It is addressed directly to the wives. The wife's submission is a voluntary act. Husbands are nowhere permitted to force their wives to submit. This is a crucial point in Christian premarital counseling.

At the same time, the scope of this command is specific. It does not say, "women, submit to men." Absolutely not! A woman of God is called to submit to her own husband. This principle is fundamental because the wife's submission is functional, not ontological. The command is specific to the covenant of marriage: "submit to your own husbands."

Finally, we must not confuse this submission with servility. In Creation, the woman was made to be a helper, a necessary partner in the man's mission. Her submission is intelligent and willing. We must reject the cultural stereotypes that portray the woman as the one who cleans and cooks while the man sits on the couch drinking beer and watching football. The mission of God is given to be fulfilled by the man and the woman together, in a complementary partnership. This is the standard for a healthy Christian relationship.

To the Husbands: Sacrificial Love

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church..." (Eph. 5:25)

Husbands are called to exercise their leadership in the family. But, just as with the wives, notice what this commandment presupposes. First, it is addressed to men. Instead of being passive (the sin of Adam), a man of

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God is called to intentionally lead his family. This destroys the stereotype of the lazy husband. The godly husband is a man of action who assumes the responsibility of caring for his wife.

At the same time, the man's leadership must be loving. "Love your wives..." The man has no right to dominate his wife. In fact, the domination of man over woman is a consequence of the Fall (Gen. 3:16), not a command of God. God never desired for the man to exercise his leadership as a tyrant, but as a loving head. This is the biblical definition of love in the Bible.

The Danvers Statement summarizes this restorative work beautifully: "Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse. In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership." This balance is the goal of Christian marriage advice."

Christ is the Standard and Goal

Now, let me be very honest with you. Unlike in Paul's time, it is impossible to state these commandments today without causing discomfort. History and our modern culture have so distorted the meaning of marriage that the mere affirmation of male leadership and female submission has become one of the greatest offenses of our time. The idea that men and women exercise different functions is interpreted as an outdated model, a bad memory of a patriarchal society that subjugated women.

But here we must pause and reflect. Pay particular attention to the standard the Bible defines for the relationship between husband and wife. "Wives... as to the Lord" (Eph. 5:22); "Husbands... as Christ loved the church" (Eph. 5:25); "Husbands... as Christ does the church" (Eph. 5:29). Christ is the standard of marriage. He is the main character. At every step of his argument, Paul presents Christ as the origin, the pattern, the model, and the final goal of marriage. The Lord Jesus and the gospel are the reason, the motivation, the fuel, and the sustaining power of marriage. These are essential Scriptures on marriage.

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The Gym for our Sanctification

One of the main reasons for the frustrations in the relationship between husbands and wives comes from a deficiency in this basic understanding: marriage was not created according to our plan, and we are not the center of marriage. Marriage was created to teach us about the love of Christ. The goal of marriage is not merely to fulfill our earthly plans and dreams. It is much greater and better than we can imagine. The purpose of marriage is to make us more like Christ. The roles that husband and wife perform serve the greater purpose of loving Christ more and becoming like him. This is the essence of Biblical marriage.

God calls the wife to have the Lord Jesus as the reference point for her submission. Her submission is not the result of the worthiness of her husband (that would be impossible!), but rather the worthiness of the Lord Jesus. "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." It is the recognition that Christ is the head of the Church, that is the standard and reference of her life, which becomes the measure of her relationship to her husband. The way the wife relates to the husband should represent the way she relates to Christ. For the wife to usurp the authority of her husband is, ultimately, to usurp the authority of Christ in her life. This is a core lesson in Biblical marriage studies.

God calls the husband to have the Lord Jesus as the reference point for his relationship with his wife. Notice that the command given to men is given with greater insistence. The husband is commanded to love his wife. And this love is defined in verse 25: "as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." This is a sacrificial love. The husband's leadership must have this love as its model. The way Jesus loved us was by giving his life for us. He did not love to satisfy his own interests. He delivered himself up for us. The same should be true for the husband. He leads sacrificially, with his wife's interests in mind. By neglecting or failing to love his wife sacrificially, the husband shows he does not yet understand Christ's love. This is a vital principle for those seeking Biblical conflict resolution in marriage.

Our Lord Jesus loved us with a purpose: "that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word... that she might be holy and without blemish." Jesus loved us for our purification, for our

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salvation. In this way, marriage is like a gym for our sanctification. Just as people go to a gym to get in physical shape, marriage is that space where we are shaped by God and learn about his love, particularly the love of Christ for the Church. Understanding what is marriage according to the Bible means seeing it as a tool for holiness.

Of course, just going to the gym isn't enough to get in shape. We need a proper diet and exercise regimen. If we are foolish, arriving at the gym and using the machines carelessly, we might leave with a serious injury rather than better health. In the same way, marriage by itself does not sanctify us. No one becomes more like Jesus simply by getting married. Like a gym, marriage is a means of sanctification only to the extent that we understand what marriage is and seek to live it the way God designed. This is why Christian premarital counseling is so vital for those preparing for marriage, especially when applying christian dating advice or asking how to know if they are the one from God.

When I travel, I have a glimpse of this reality. When I'm out on a trip, my desire to return home increases every hour. My anxiety grows every day. I love to be with people. I love to visit churches. I'm privileged to serve others. But there is nothing like home and being with my wife. When we know and are united with Jesus, we desire to be with him. When we love Jesus, we want to be with him. The Church should cultivate a desire to be with Jesus, just as my longing to be with my wife grows with each passing day.

Marriage was created with the ultimate purpose of teaching us to love Jesus and prepare us for eternity. The ultimate purpose of marriage is not to please ourselves, but to please God and teach us to love him more and more. Marriage was not created to fulfill our plans and dreams (of building a family, homes, possessions, careers, or any other). God created marriage as an instrument to fulfill his plans. Our marriages were created for our good, but they do not have us at their center. Remember, in heaven our marriages will no longer exist. Why? Because we will be married to the Lord Jesus! As the Church, we belong to Christ and exist to give him glory, and our marriages are one of the means God uses to teach us to love him more. This is the final word on marriage in the Bible, explaining what does

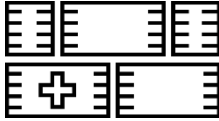
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the New Testament say about marriage and providing the most important Bible verses about marriage.

Reflection Questions:

1. What is the purpose of marriage? What reality does it point to?
2. What are the husband's responsibilities to his wife? What are the wife's responsibilities to her husband?
3. How is the biblical picture of marriage different than the one offered by the world?

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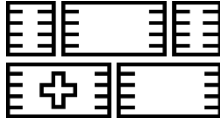


CONCLUSION

In God's eyes, a successful marriage is not measured by how well the couple gets along, but by their level of holiness. It is not measured by how much they achieve together on this earth, but by how much they serve the Kingdom of God. It is not measured by how many material resources they accumulate, but by how much of their time, energy, and gifts are invested in God's purposes. Ultimately, a successful marriage is not measured by our personal satisfaction, but by the glory of God. In fact, a truly successful marriage finds that the glory of God is its greatest joy.

Our marriages exist to teach us and lead us to Christ. We are progressively filled with the Holy Spirit as we grow in the knowledge of Christ. Marriage is God's training ground, where he trains us and molds us into the likeness of his Son. This is the core of a Christian relationship. It is in Christ that we find true joy and happiness in our marriages as we learn and enjoy Christ more and experience the loving relationship between Christ and the Church. We learn about the love of Christ, and we learn to love, for our joy and for his glory!

As you go through Christian premarital counseling and spend time preparing for marriage, remember that your union is a reflection of a greater reality. May your marriage be built on a foundation that lasts, not because it is built on your dreams, but because it is built upon the Rock. This is the true Biblical marriage that honors the man of God and the woman of God as they walk together.



END NOTES

1. This booklet was written by my pen, but nothing in it is original. First, because I'm convinced the following chapters are an exposition of what the Bible teaches about marriage. But, at the same time, I am indebted to men like John Piper, Kevin DeYoung, Timothy Keller, and others, who were the means God used to teach me. I commend to you what they wrote on marriage for further reading.



THE
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