

MARRIAGE

'And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which 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: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.' (Matthew 19.4-6)

In addressing the subject of marriage we must remember that remaining unmarried is also *normal* and *desirable* in various personal or social circumstances. In 1 Corinthians 7.8 Paul writes, 'I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I'. In 1 Corinthians 7.27 he adds, 'Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife'. Marriage, however, is beneficial.

(a) Marriage is *normal*. See Jeremiah 29.6-7, which record God's instructions to the Jews in their captivity as follows, 'Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away'.

(b) Marriage is *good*. See Proverbs 18.22: 'Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord'.

(c) Marriage is *honourable*. See Hebrews 13.4: 'Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge'.

(d) Marriage is *profitable*. See 1 Timothy 5.14 where Paul writes 'I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully'.

(e) Marriage is *sacrosanct* above man's legitimate

interference. 'Forbidding to marry' is a mark of apostasy (1 Timothy 4.3).

I. The nature of marriage

A. *Institution*: Marriage is a divine institution

See verses 4 and 5. The fact that Jesus 'answered and said unto them' remind us that true marriage is not a creation of the state, nor a voluntary contract with terms agreed by the two parties. Marriage is a divine institution republished for the Christian era by the eternal Son of God incarnate. Christ quotes God's original institution in the words, 'he which 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: and they twain shall be one flesh'.

B. *Definition*: Marriage is defined by God as between one man and one woman

This is not some arbitrary arrangement but is conditioned by the *nature* of man. In the beginning 'God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; *male* and *female* created he them' (Genesis 1.27). The importance of the connection between nature and the institution of marriage is emphasized in Christ's words, 'he which 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: and they twain shall be one flesh'. The nature of marriage was built in to man's creation and is thoroughly natural and consequently unchangeable. In 1 Timothy 3.12, Paul instructs that 'the deacons be the husbands of one wife'. Polygamy, the plurality of wives or husbands (also known as polyandry) at the same time is forbidden along with all other departures from one man and one woman united publicly by solemn matrimonial vow.

C. *Permanence*: Marriage is to be lifelong till death should part

The Saviour adds his own confirmation of the nature and

permanence of marriage saying, 'Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.' As Christ's teaching is absolutely binding we must conclude that rejection of the true nature of marriage is not merely an affront to Christ's believing church, it is rebellion against our Creator. In my childhood, the practice in our nation was very close to the divine pattern and most marriages endured until the death of husband or wife. Now many marriages last only a few years. Those responsible for divorce beyond the limits of God's Word will be called to account in the judgement, whether husbands, wives, legislators, judges or administrators. God's requirement is clear, 'the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband' (Romans 7.2). The same applies to the husband. (See further at Matthew 5.32, Mark 10.7-9, 1 Corinthians 7.10,39).

II. The purposes of marriage

The purposes of marriage underline what has already been said.

A. Marriage is for mutual help

As originally created, the man and the woman complemented one another as *head* and *help*. Before Eve was created, God had said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him' (Genesis 2.18). In Psalm 33.20 we read, 'Our soul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our shield'. There is nothing demeaning about being a help. Its origin was in Paradise. To be a help is to pattern after God's kindness in our creaturely way. Similarly, there is to be nothing autocratic about being a *head*. If we take seriously Christ's sacrifice as the head of his church, we understand what self-sacrificial love is involved. Paul urges husbands, 'love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it' (Ephesians 5.25). This is a high standard indeed and who is sufficient for such things?

B. Marriage is for preventing uncleanness

God's purpose for men and women does not include promiscuity. Our English word 'promiscuous' comes from the Latin and has the essential idea of '*mixture* without order' including indiscriminate relationships outside of marriage or, in the case of adultery, despite being married. Scripture is clear, '*Marriage* is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge' (Hebrews 13.4). Christ's standard in this connection far excelled the externally-minded Pharisees. His counsel in the Sermon on the Mount is as follows: 'Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell' (Matthew 5.27-29).

C. Marriage is for procreation

As originally created, the man and the woman were so constituted as to be able to procreate and 'be fruitful, and multiply' and fill the earth' (Genesis 1.28). It is this that endows physical intimacy with significance beyond personal pleasure. Within marriage the latter is pure but it attains a fruition far beyond the husband and wife being satisfied exclusively in each other's love. In the mysterious providence of God a completely new human being is originated with body and soul and the husband becomes a father and the wife becomes a mother. The words of David in Psalm 139 concerning his conception and development in the womb are to the point, 'I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them' (Psalm 139.14-16). By conception and delivery, the married couple are furnished with a 'legitimate issue'. The married Christian with a covenant child, who grows to love Christ, knows that procreation has resulted in an *eternal* bond. These things are a

million miles from man's attempts at user-defined marriage.

III. The requirements for marriage

We can summarize the requirements for marriage as four 'C's': consent, compatibility, consanguinity or affinity is not infringed, and cleaving.

A. Consent

Marriage must be voluntary not coerced. We might call the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah an 'arranged marriage' but not in the sense of any coercion. Rebekah was asked, 'Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go' (Genesis 24.58). Isaac, likewise acted voluntarily and 'took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her' (Genesis 24.67). There was no family or other pressure to interfere with the voluntary matrimonial vow in any way.

B. Compatibility

To be 'compatible' is to be 'consistent' or 'suitable'. People have all sorts of strange ideas about compatibility in relationships and it would be fruitless to go into them but in terms of entering into marriage, spiritual compatibility is insisted upon as a Christian duty. In 1 Corinthians 7.39 we read, 'The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; *only in the Lord*'. (Cases of spiritual incompatibility may occur where a husband or wife is converted after marriage but their spouse is not. There is no default of duty in such a situation but Scripture insists upon the preservation of the marriage bond. See 1 Corinthians 7.12-13, where we read, 'If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, *let him not put her away*. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, *let her not leave him*'.)

C. Consanguinity or affinity is not infringed

Leviticus 18 and 20.19-21 detail marriages that are prohibited on

the basis of blood relationship or on the basis of relationship by another's marriage. By way of summary we may say that a man or woman ought not to marry a relation by blood or affinity (those we call 'in-laws') closer than that of cousin.

D. Cleaving

In Genesis 2.24, we read God's requirement of separation in order to a new family. It is as follows, 'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh'. Those who marry must 'leave' in order to 'cleave' and a new family is constituted.

Conclusion

Marriage provides various spiritual lessons which are not of human origin but divine revelation. Note as follows.

(i) *God's union with his people is spoken of as a marriage for believers' comfort*: 'Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.' (Isaiah 54.4-5; 62.5).

(ii) *The Saviour spoke of his mediatorial union with believers as a marriage*. See Matthew 22.2, 'The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son'. See also the Parable of the ten virgins awaiting the bridegroom (Matthew 25.1-13)

(iii) *The final bliss is spoken of as a marriage*. John writes: 'And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for

the fine linen is the righteousness of saints' (Revelation 19.6-8).

Roy Mohon

www.christianstudylibrary.org