

A Study of Marriage from the Scriptures

Justin and Jen Smith

Weddings are wonderful times as we celebrate the work God has done in bringing two people together and unifying them as one. While the wedding lasts merely a day, the marriage is the chief concern of the Scriptures; the goal of this study is to better understand what God's word has said regarding this lifelong relationship so that we may serve Him as we become one!

I. The Beginning of Marriage – Origins and Purpose

Interestingly, unlike many of our social institutions, marriage is a concept and relationship which God began before the fall of man; in other words, marriage is an institution which existed before sin had entered the world! As we study the first marriage, we can help to see the intent and purpose of marriage.

Read **Genesis 2:18-25** and interact with the following thoughts and questions.

- In verse 18, God saw that it was not good for man to be alone and willed to make him a helper suitable for him. Being "suitable" literally means that the helper was to correspond to man; that is, she was to fill what he was lacking.
- After God had determined to make a helper for the man, why do you think He called Adam to name the animals in verses 19-20?
- In verse 22, the Lord built a woman out of the rib He had taken from the man, meaning that she was literally "bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh." What does verse 24 say should occur because of this?
- In this perfect relationship, verse 25 says that Adam and his wife were naked (totally exposed to one another), yet were not ashamed. This is a great description of how marriage is at its best; man and wife can live in harmony without shame.
- As we close this section, what thoughts arise come to mind concerning marriage?

II. But Where Does Marriage Fit In?

Marriage, then, began as a beautiful union where the man and the woman fill what the other is lacking as they become one in the Lord. But, as we shall consider in this section, marriage can become problematic when it is not kept in check. In this section, we will consider how marriage fits into the scheme of Christian discipleship and how to prioritize marriage appropriately.

As the crowds following Jesus began to get larger and larger in **Luke 14:25-27**, Jesus pauses and turns to the followers, making a dramatic announcement.

- What did Jesus say in verses 26-27?
- Knowing that marriage was created and endorsed by God, it would seem obvious that one should not hate his wife; what do you think Jesus means by this statement?
- In light of these verses, what place should marriage hold in a Christian's life?

While Jesus' words often give us pause, Paul's words in **First Corinthians 7** seem to force us to slam on the brakes! Paul begins this chapter by writing that "it is good for a man not to touch a woman," certainly putting a damper on marriage! Read **1 Corinthians 7:2-5**.

- Although Paul advocates singleness, he would rather the Corinthians marry than burn with lust and sin. What requirements does Paul place on the believers who choose to marry in verses 2-3?
- In today's culture, many marriages function as a contract between two individuals; husband and wife are married, yet retain their own separate lives. How would you respond to that view of marriage based on verse 4?
- While often skirted in conversation, sex is obviously in mind in verse 5. What is the principle Paul is teaching in regards to sex?

As Paul continues, though, he begins to speak very personally to the Corinthians, offering his advice and his reasoning behind his call to singleness. Read **1 Corinthians 7:24-40** and consider the following thoughts:

- Recognizing that we are living in the end times, Paul says that each one should remain with God in the condition in which he was called; if you were married, then you should stay married and if you are single, you should stay that way (v.24-27). This is Paul's advice, as he will explain below.
- In verse 28, while admitting that marriage is not a sin, says that married people will have trouble in this life. Based on verses 32-34, what are the troubles a married person has to deal with?
- What is the reason Paul gives in verse 35 to recommend that the Corinthians remain single?
- Understanding that marriage was created by God to fill what was lacking in man and woman, meaning that people find completeness in marriage, how do you reconcile Paul's feelings about singleness and marriage? (Hint: consider the lesson learned from Luke 14 above!)

In this section, we have seen that while marriage is a great invention grounded in the creative work of God, it is also an institution that requires us to focus our attention on someone other than Christ. A constant struggle for married Christians, then, exists as a spouse seeks to focus fully on Christ, while also staying true to his obligations to his spouse. In other words, it takes some work to deal with the "struggle" of being married while Christian and vice-versa. How does that thought sit with you? What are some of your thoughts on hearing this?

III. How Should Married Christians Live Then?

Having seen the origins of marriage and understanding the priority of Christ in marriage, we now turn our attention to the "How-to's" of marriage. Through a number of passages, we can put together a picture of how a Christian husband and wife live together and become one.

Starting with the shortest passage and working out, we begin this section by considering **Colossians 3:18-19**. Following the admonition to let the peace of Christ rule your hearts and the word of Christ dwell within you, Paul calls the Colossian church to do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, laying out quickly how the believers should approach the relationships that fill their lives.

- What does Paul call wives to do in verse 18? What do you think this means?

- What does Paul call husbands to do in verse 19? What do you think this means?

- Why do you think there is a difference in the actions Paul calls the husbands and wives to do?

While brevity is normally a valued commodity, in this case, we would like to know more about what Paul is calling husbands and wives to do; thankfully, he has expanded his thoughts in **Ephesians 5:22-33**. After reading this passage, consider the following thoughts and questions:

- Why does Paul say that wives should submit to their husbands in verses 22-24?

- Some have argued that Paul's call for wives to submit to their husbands is based on the culture of his day; in today's enlightened world, we should understand this as outdated. Considering Paul's argument in verses 22-24, how would you respond to this?

- The argument flow in verses 25-33 gets a bit confusing as Paul displays Christ as the model for how husbands should love their wives. After the command for husbands to love their wives, verses 25-27 describe the type of love that Christ displays and verses 28-31 give the application for husbands.

- What are husbands told to do in verses 28-30?

- Husbands are called to imitate Christ in their marriage, as displayed in verses 25-27; how does this picture of a husband differ from the stereotypical husband portrayed in our culture?
- Verse 33 serves as the critical summary of this section, reemphasizing the command from Colossians. What ideas still remain unclear for you at this point?

Finally, as we look through the Scriptural teachings on how to live as a married couple, our gaze shifts to **1 Peter 3:1-7**. In calling the believers to persevere as Christ did in 1 Peter 2:19-25, Peter opens chapter 3 with guidance for marriage.

- What benefits result from wives submitting to their husbands according to verses 1-2?
- How does Peter say that a wife displays a godly disposition in verses 3-6?
- Verse 7 calls husbands to live with their wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker; in what sense are women weaker than their husbands?
- How can husbands live in an understanding way and show their wives honor?

IV. Conclusion

In the end, the Scriptures have shown us that marriage is an institution created by God as a way to provide what was lacking in mankind. It is an intimate relationship that deserves our respect, but also must be guarded, lest it become an idol to us. However, if Christ is lifted up, then marriage becomes a beautiful illustration of Christ's suffering for our salvation. Two people become one, unified in Spirit under God, yet retaining different functions so that order may be kept in the home and Christ may be reflected in us. Marriage is a beautiful gift from God; enjoy the adventure!

- Any last thoughts or questions?