

Marriage and Sex

*Basic Scripture resources: Exodus 20:14;
Matthew 5:27-32; John 8:3-11; Romans 1 :24-32;
I Corinthians 6:13b-20; Ephesians 5:21-33.*

In the seventh Commandment God establishes the principle of the *sanctity of the marriage relationship*. In the original purity of the Garden of Eden God ordained and blessed marriage and everything related to it (see Genesis 2:18-24). The expression "holy matrimony" is thus appropriate.

Since marriage is good and holy, it must be respected, honored, and protected. Anything that perverts, threatens, or destroys the marriage relationship is forbidden by God. This is why the seventh Commandment specifically condemns adultery.

This chapter will discuss the nature of marriage, its relation to sex, and the sins that violate it.

I. The Nature of Marriage

Marriage is not just a social convenience that has developed through some mythical process of evolution. It was deliberately designed by God as part of the original creation. Hence to understand the nature of marriage, we must turn not to the sociologist or the marriage counselor, but to the Word of God.

A Complementary Relationship

The Bible tells us first of all that marriage is a complementary relationship. Neither man nor woman was made to live a solitary life. Each without the other is incomplete. But when joined together, each complements or completes the life of the other.

Read Genesis 2:18-25. After the creation of Adam, God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him." The "help meet for him" means a helper that corresponds to him or is suitable for him.

Before creating the woman, God required Adam to survey the entire animal kingdom. In this way Adam was made acutely aware that he was alone. Despite the abundance of other living creatures, he found none that corresponded to him (verses 19, 20).

Then God made the woman from the rib of the sleeping man. When Adam awoke and saw her, he immediately identified with her: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (verses 21-23).

The inspired writer then adds a divine commentary on this episode: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (verse 24). Thus man and woman were literally "made for each other." They are intended to complement each other in marriage. They do not stand separately as two independent and self-sufficient individuals. Together they form one whole, one flesh.

"One flesh" here certainly refers to sexual union, but it also includes much more. Man and wife actually become one *life* as they share with one another their feelings, aspirations,

desires, fears, weaknesses, strengths, possessions indeed, their very selves.

It is a fact, of course, that many people do not marry, whether by choice or otherwise. Some even glorify singleness, as if it were a higher, more spiritual state than being married. Certainly marriage is not commanded; one does not *have* to be married in order to be pleasing to God. Also, it is true that it may be better in some circumstances to remain single, as Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 7.

Nevertheless the fact remains that God designed men and women to marry, and only in this state are their lives complete.

An Exclusive Relationship

It is also clear from the Word of God that marriage is an exclusive relationship. The two who become one flesh form a complete unit. The old saying, "Three's a crowd," definitely applies in this case. There can never be a third party involved in a true marriage.

In Old Testament times God permitted certain practices, such as concubinage and divorce, that infringed upon the intended exclusiveness of marriage. Commenting only on divorce, Jesus said that God allowed such a thing at that time because of the hardness of the people's hearts. He stressed that "from the beginning it was not so" (Matthew 19:8).

The marriage relationship is necessarily exclusive because it is patterned after the solitary devotion of the one God to His people. (See 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:22-33.) God is faithful to His people, and He demands that His people be faithful to Him. We can no more divide our love and loyalty between two spouses than we can between two gods.

A Loving Relationship

Finally, marriage is a loving relationship. A husband and wife must feel themselves bound together not just by law or necessity, but by love.

This aspect of the marriage relationship is also based upon God's nuptial relation to His people. (See Isaiah 62:4,5; Hosea 2:19; 11:4.) Christ's love for His bride, the church, is specifically given as the pattern and example for husbands to follow (Ephesians 5:25-33).

When Paul exhorts husbands to love their wives (Ephesians 5:25), he is not referring to romantic sexual love. He is speaking here of the uniquely Christian love, *agape*. *Agape* is genuine, unselfish, self-giving concern for the happiness and welfare of the other person. This is the kind of love Christ showed for the church when He gave himself for it. Husbands and wives who share this kind of love experience marriage as God meant it to be.

II. Sex and Marriage

God has created us as sexual beings, male and female (Genesis 1:27). Sex is as much a part of our nature as is eating and laughing and working. This does not mean, however, that it must not be kept under control. God himself has told us how it must be regulated.

Specifically, the sexual relationship was designed by God to be a part of marriage. The sexual aspect of marriage is intended to reinforce the love and oneness that are the very essence of marriage. (See again Genesis 2:18-24.) Thus sexual union involves much more than physical contact; indeed, it should be an expression of the ultimate spiritual commitment that each partner has made to the other.

Sex was made for marriage, and not marriage for sex. Paul does advise a person to marry if his sexual drive makes fornication an unbearable temptation (1 Corinthians 7:1-9.) But this

does not make marriage simply legalized sexual opportunity. Such an idea degrades both marriage and sex. It makes marriage basically a self-gratifying rather than a self-giving relationship, and it makes sex a selfish act even within marriage.

Sex is not shameful and impure, as some people think. Rather, the Bible pictures it as a profound, wholesome, honorable, enjoyable expression of married love. This is the role implied for it in Genesis 2:18-25. Hebrews 13:4 expressly says that "marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled." With an earthy tenderness and a holy sensuality, the Song of Solomon celebrates the intimate delights of nuptial sex.

Since sexual union serves to strengthen the bonds of marital companionship and love, it is still quite legitimate and desirable even when procreation is not in view. Hence the wise use of contraceptives is compatible with God's intention for married sex.

III. Sex and Sin

Because of the profound relation between sex and marriage, it is evident that sexual relations outside the bond of holy matrimony are contrary to the will and purpose of God. Thus the Bible specifies and condemns a number of sexual sins.

Sinful Practices

"Thou shalt not commit adultery" is the prohibition of the seventh Commandment. Adultery is the sexual involvement of a married person with anyone other than his spouse. Such activity violates the oneness of the husband-wife relationship and tends to destroy the marriage bond itself. The New Testament continues to condemn it (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Hebrews 13:4), and it is the only legitimate ground for divorce that Jesus mentions (Matthew 19:9).

The Bible also condemns fornication. This term is used in two ways. Sometimes it means immorality in general, or simply unlawful sexual intercourse. This is obviously its meaning in Matthew 19:9, where it is used in the sense of adultery. More often, though, it has the specific meaning of the sexual involvement of an unmarried person. This sin, commonly called "premarital intercourse," is forbidden in 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10, 13-20; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3.

Another sexual practice that is condemned is homosexuality (Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10). Under the law of Moses, those practicing homosexuality were to be put to death (Leviticus 20:13).

A distinction is usually made between homosexuality, which is the unsought possession of homosexual tendencies, and homosexualism, which is the willful involvement in homosexual acts. The former is treated as a disease to be cured; the latter is condemned as sin.

A person who has homosexual tendencies (i.e., a homosexual or a lesbian) need not indulge in homosexual acts. Indeed, he cannot do so and still be obedient to God's law. Like the alcoholic, he must learn to control his appetite until the grace of God delivers him from his unnatural desires.

On the other hand, many people who are not homosexuals as such do engage in homosexual acts and seek homosexual contacts just for the sake of perverted pleasures and thrills. Such casual, unprovoked behavior may be even more wicked than homosexual activity by one who has an actual tendency in this direction.

Such practices as these are and always will be sins, because of the very nature of man and woman, and because of the very nature of marriage. The current widespread attempts to excuse such acts under the guise of a "new morality" are contrary to the will of God.

Sinful Lusts

Sexual sins can be committed in the heart alone. One such sin is lust, which is the mere desire for unlawful sexual relations. Jesus says that one who lusts after another has already committed adultery in his heart (Matthew 5:27, 28).

The Bible condemns lasciviousness, which is a kind of habitual lust, a constant dwelling on lustful thoughts (Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 4:19).

If lust is wrong, then so is anything that stimulates lust in oneself or in others. This is why the following things are wrong: certain kinds of dancing, immodest dress (1 Timothy 2:9), petting, suggestive flirting, and "dirty" literature and movies.

Sin and Forgiveness

Like all other sins, sexual sins make us guilty before God and incur His wrath. But like all other sins, they can be forgiven. Just as Jesus forgave the woman taken in adultery in John 8:3-11, so does God forgive all such sins for which we truly repent. So must we be willing to forgive others who have committed such sins. Adultery need not necessarily result in divorce; true repentance on the part of the adulterer or adulteress should elicit forgiveness from the wronged mate.

Better than the prayer for forgiveness, however, is the prayer that God will help us to avoid these sins in the first place.