

## MARRIAGE

Is it any secret that the institution is in trouble in America today? All around us we see the evidence, in the form of shattered homes and unhappy lives. As more and more people get divorced, we see the horrible results of this breakdown in marriage: Problem filled schools, a rising crime rate, juvenile delinquency, alcoholism, and the general dismantling of our society's moral framework. And in the lives of people we love, or perhaps even in our own lives, we have seen or felt the incredible despair that results when – as society puts it – a marriage “fails.”

Sadly but truly, this epidemic of unhappiness could be completely avoided – if only people would learn what marriage truly is, and what its true purpose is. Many looking for answers to these questions turn to TV psychologists, newspaper advice columnists, or others – many of whom don't have any real answers to offer . The answers do exist, but they aren't to be found on the Oprah show. They are to be found in the Word of God.

From almost the very beginning of the Bible, we are told of God's plan for the institution of marriage, Genesis chapter 2, verse 15:

*And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: 17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. 18 And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. 19 And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. 20 And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. 21 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; 22 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. 23 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. 24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. 25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.*

Here we see that Adam is doing exactly what God had called him to do. At this point the three parts of man – spirit, soul, and body - were created, including not only the spirit of man, but also the

spirit of woman, which dwelt within him. And these two spirit parts lived together as a unified whole, complete as God is complete, until God made Adam sleep, took his rib and created woman out of man. *This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man* At this point, one human being became two fractions – two halves, each having their own spirit, soul, and body - but requiring the other in order to complete themselves. At this point, the normal, healthy longing each of us has for a companion came into existence. And here, before the advent of sin, we see the prototype for the family structure, based upon the foundation of one man and one woman, and even the introduction of the idea of sex – “A man shall cleave unto his wife.” Marriage and sex are ideas that God developed, but like everything else, the world has distorted them.

To rediscover what marriage truly is and to identify the keys to making a marriage strong, secure, and peaceful, we have to turn away from the TV therapists and self-help gurus, and look instead to the Bible – the truth, as written by He who created the marriage institution in the first place. Our modern society views marriage as it views fashion or trends --as something subject to “common sense,” as something whose rules are open to unending and pointless change. But this is not how the Bible or God view marriage. “Common sense,” as defined by 2003 America, doesn’t mean anything in this context. The Word of God does, and that’s where we have to look for insight and understanding.

Of course, all marriages are different, just as all people are different, and on a detailed level what might work in one marriage might not work in another. But as an institution, marriage – like individual men and women – is governed by larger, overarching truths and basic elemental facts which determine the form a marriage takes, as well as whether it succeeds or fails. The first basic yardstick is to evaluate whether a marriage is a union that is in accord with God’s intentions or not. Notably, those marriages that are successful are going to be in accord with these intentions. Those that aren’t invariably will not be.

Referring back to the scripture, I want you to notice that God didn’t bring multiple women to Adam; He brought one. He also didn’t bring Steve to Adam – He brought Eve. The man and the woman were the initial seed that God planted in the earth, and from them came the family. Fulfilling their mission of bearing children and raising them in the ways of God, the man and woman were intended to populate the earth and live upon it as God intended, and to do so *together*. To the extent that this fails to happen, as we see in our divorce-wracked country, we see a corresponding decline in all areas. As marriage goes, so goes the family; as the family goes, so goes the church; as the church goes, so goes the country. The family is very important: It is the foundation of our society and all the things we do.

Again referring to this scripture, we see that Adam is doing what God wanted him to do. It was God who said he needed a helpmate; man wasn’t looking for something outside himself to satisfy him in his life. But after Eve was taken out of Adam, man’s desire was to find a wife, and a wife’s desire was to find a husband. It’s a natural desire in all of us to find a wife or a husband, because without that we feel incomplete. And so we engage in all the activities involved in finding that person, that other half that we need to complete ourselves. If we do so using God’s Word as a guide, we choose a mate who is appropriate for us, and who will complement us in creating a marriage and a home that is in keeping with God’s plan. Who you choose to share your life with is the second most important decision we make. The first is choosing Jesus; it is from this first choice that your second choice – and all your choices thereafter – should follow.

When we choose incorrectly, behave incorrectly, or both – when we step out of God’s plan for marriage – discord and unhappiness naturally follow. The media continually refer to “failing marriages,” but this isn’t accurate. Marriages don’t fail; people fail. People haven’t addressed problems or identified them, in their single lives or their married lives; they have ignored them or failed to recognize them, and let them get out of hand. Through the choices we make and the actions we take, we can either strengthen or destroy this miraculous bond that God has created for us.

In Genesis Chapter 3, verse 14, we see how God responds following Adam and Eve's defiance of His will, having eaten from the tree of knowledge. God pronounces his curse, but He also gives His redemption plan.

*And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: 15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. 16 Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. 17 And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; 18 Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; 19 In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. 20 And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.*

The paradise that Adam and Eve were initially placed in has been irretrievably lost, but God does not take away all hope; instead, He institutes challenges that man and woman will be forced to face, and equipped each of them with what it takes to be successful in doing so – *if* they and their union are in accordance with His will. To man He has said that the environment will work against you; no longer will it be enough simply to partake of Eden's rich provisions, instead, man will have to work to provide sustenance for you and your family, struggling against the elements and the earth itself. Man's counterpart will be there to support him, to counterbalance his attributes and weaknesses with her own.

### *Men and Women's Roles in Marriage*

To see how God intended marriage to work, we have to understand the true nature of men and women – and the true nature of their separate, distinct roles within the marriage bond. These roles stem from distinct differences between the sexes, differences placed into us by God for the purpose of ensuring that men and women are indeed counterparts to one another. These are fundamental differences in the basic nature of men and women; living in accord with them, rather than in opposition to them as the world so often suggests we do, is a key both to fulfilling God's will for us as individuals and to securing and strengthening our marriages.

To state these differences in simple terms, men are aggressors; women are responders. If you understand how men and women, aggressors and responders, think, you understand a lot about marriage. If we look at the definitions of and differences between these two terms, we can gain important insight into why some marriages succeed, marriages in which both spouses are remaining faithful to their God-given roles, while so many others fail.

The man's role in marriage stems from his basic nature as an aggressor. A man's nature calls upon him to be uniquely forward thinking, rational, and proactive—it is his rightful nature to serve as the leader, rather than the follower. They are the “hunters and gatherers,” venturing forth into the world to get what is needed to make themselves and their families comfortable and secure, and to solidify their positions of authority. Men by nature are called upon to be independent-minded, to act on

their own initiative, and—when necessary—to do whatever it takes to maintain the unique position God has placed them in.

Woman has been created as man's aggressor counterpart, responder. A woman's role can be defined as being somewhat opposite man's. It is a woman's role to respond to the leadership offered by her husband, and to act in accordance with it—to place his will ahead of her own in determining the course of her actions and her behavior in relation to the family, and to serve as the foundation of support for his authority. At the same time, the woman complements the man's unique "aggressor" traits with unique traits of her own—a more highly developed emotional nature, a more solidly-rooted concern for domestic affairs such as child rearing, and a heightened sensitivity as a counterpart to her husband's "thick skin." There's a difference to how we think. As an example: man will put common sense ahead of emotion; a woman will put emotion ahead of common sense. A man will say, "This is the shortest distance to that wall"; a woman will say, "Yes, but you'll run three people over to get there." If we understand our differences we can understand why our spouses are behaving and reacting the way they are, even though it's not the way we might think.

As the responder, the woman's role naturally entails responding to the leadership that a man delivers. If men aren't leading, what are women going to do? Respond to the lack of leadership. Women want a leader; a woman wants to support her husband in the effort of moving her family forward. Women also want to feel sheltered and protected; if they don't, they'll find that security elsewhere. The breakdown we see today is the result of men not being men, more than women not being women. It is the result of men not assuming their appropriate role as leaders and protectors in a Godly way, not permitting harmony to flourish within their households. Divorce results from women being forced into leadership roles, having to be both mother and father, wife and husband in relation to their children and households.

As the aggressor – and in accordance with God's will – man is to be the leader in the family and the marriage; as the responder, woman is to submit to him. Submission here doesn't mean subjugation, or forced submission; rather, it means a wife's willing submission to her husband's rightful authority as the head of the family and the household, and as the individual in charge of assuring that the family exists in accordance with God's plan. We see this in Genesis chapter 18, verse 17:

*And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; 18 Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? 19 For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of Him.*

This scripture provides a blueprint for the family structure and the family order. Abraham's ability to rule and command his family, and lead them in the ways of God, allowed God to bring upon his household the things that God wanted to give him. We don't see Sarah's name here; God was looking to man to command the family in the ways of God. Unfortunately today, we see more women in church than men – men are at home waiting for football to start while their wives pray for God to move in their lives. Whereas if the man were to say, "We're going to church," and, "We're going to pray before every meal," that leadership role in the ways of God will set harmony in their house. God's ability to bless Abraham in every way had a lot to do with what he did in relation to his family.

First Timothy chapter 3, verse 1 says:

*This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; 3 Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; 4 One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; 5 (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) 6 Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. 8 Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; 9 Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. 10 And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. 11 Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. 12 Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. 13 For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

This scripture, while detailing what it takes to be a leader in the church, also outlines what it takes for a man to be a leader in a marriage and a family. The word of God must be dwelling in his life – he must not be speaking or doing evil. If a man can't keep his house in order, how can he manage the things of God? It is important that the Word of God not only dwell in men's hearts, but that it manifests itself in his life and home. The godly actions of the leader of the family will also set the tone for the whole family, setting the pattern of behavior that the family will follow.

The Bible clearly provides the basis for how this is to be done; Ephesians chapter 5, verse 21:

*Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. 22 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. 24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. 25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. 28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. 29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: 30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. 31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. 32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.*

In this verse, the Bible clearly outlines the roles each of us is to play in marriage, as it is designed and intended by God. As the leader of a household, a man has to have his priorities straight,

in the order that God intended: first, the relationship with God, second, his spouse, third, his children, fourth, his job, fifth, ministry. A man is to love his wife as Christ loved the church – he is to elevate his wife, support her, and make her his equal in life. She is to be topmost in his considerations, second only to his consideration for God. When you put anything ahead of your spouse other than your relationship with God, you are putting the Word of God aside, and indeed putting part of yourself aside, since “The two shall be one flesh.”

Men are to love their wives exactly as Christ loved the church, giving everything, including possibly their lives, for them. To be a leader, you must submit; you must cause submission through love. Christ did not elevate Himself, He elevated the church above himself; if men have that love, they’ll do anything to elevate their wives. Love doesn’t keep score; love esteems the other person higher than oneself. Love is not self centered or selfish, but a pure form of giving, wholly concerned with the other. If a man loves and gives in this way, this behavior causes a woman to respond with full love back. On the other hand, if a man’s behavior causes bitterness, she will respond to that.

Marriage isn’t about what you get out; it’s about what you put in. If you have two people taking from each other, you have nothing left but, if you have two people giving to each other, the marriage will grow. The man sets the tempo for the environment of the home. If you walk in and start screaming, that is the environment of the home. We let off steam, our wife lets off steam, and the children become tense, and that creates the environment of the home. Leaders look at the situation and try to make it right, rather than falling into the same trap. Christ made those who submit equal, so that they would submit out of their own will. It is a man’s duty to take this position, and behave appropriately. It is a woman’s duty to accept this leadership, and respond appropriately. As a woman, you should be able to have faith that your husband (or husband to be) can lead according to the Word of God, and you should be able to feel comfortable willingly submit to his leadership. When this is truly the case, we are able to create a union that “no man may put asunder.”

God bless you

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sebastian Lucido".

Sebastian Lucido

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