

Marriage – A Commitment for Life, or a Life Sentence?

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.”

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.”

Marital oneness, is the desire of every newly married couple. For many, the decision to marry is a good one, but for others the decision can be tragic. Because of the many varied situations of those considering marriage, I have prepared this booklet to provide some guidance.

This booklet is designed to assist unmarried people who are trying to make a godly decision about marriage. It is not designed for married couples trying to improve their relationship nor is it to be considered a standard for a godly marriage, rather it is designed for those considering marriage. It will hopefully guide each couple to a godly decision about this most important decision of life.

Over the last 25 years of doing premarital and marital counseling within the structure of the Church, I have found that it is much easier to establish a strong marriage from the start, rather than heal a troubled marriage after the wedding.

There is really only one foundation that a marriage will have. It will either be built upon a foundation that each individual builds, or it will be built upon the foundation that God builds. “Unless the Lord builds the house, they that build it labor in vain.” Psalm 125:2

Marriage: For Better or for Worse?

People enter marriage anticipating it to be the best! Seldom do couples start out in marriage thinking that it will become the worst. Even though vows are taken that would indicate that we desire to be with our spouse until “Death do us part”, the majority of people taking such a vow today will fail. Even though these vows are made with strong intentions of fulfillment in the hearts of the newlyweds, marriage often presents a great challenge to seeing these vows fulfilled.

It is only in the Scriptures that we find a clear explanation of how people can be successful in this most important relationship in life. As a Christian couple, it is important that you understand the difference between what God calls marriage, and what the “world” or society calls marriage. Through a careful study of the Scriptures, it is possible for you to determine whether or not you are really ready for marriage.

Christian Marriage vs. Civil Marriage

Many when they consider marriage, think of the Church as the place where they should marry. For those who are considering marriage and are Christians, this is very important! The church offers a strong foundation for a couple’s life in Christ. For a Non-Christian couple it is unrealistic for them to enter into a Christian marriage. What if one of you are a Christian and the other is not?

The Bible passage that discusses believers not being yoked together with unbelievers applies most importantly to marriage. If two are going to become one by the yoke of marriage, they will be making a mistake if they are not of the same faith. The Bible says:

II Corinthians 6:14-18, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.” Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters’, says the Lord Almighty.”

Christian couples have chosen eternal values for their marriage. Non-Christian couples are living for the temporary benefits that can be gained from this world; their perspectives on life and their purposes are different from the Christian. Because of this very clear difference, the Bible warns against entering into a marriage where there is a Christian and a

non-Christian. If you are not a Christian this does not mean God loves you less, it means you have fundamentally different values and perspectives than a Christian. Non-Christian marriage is represented by two independent people trying to build a life together. Some succeed; many don't. They believe marriage means that two people desiring to live together have a right to do so. They are right; they do.

A civil wedding often occurs when two people desire marriage outside Christ and Christian principles. Non-Christians get married because they believe it can be a good thing. Even for those who consider themselves Christians, but have chosen not to devote themselves to Christ in such a way that would alter their life-styles, a civil ceremony may be appropriate. In a civil ceremony the couple is legally married by a representative of the state. These marriages are legal agreements that the two people will try to live together and structure a home. Should circumstances develop that cause the couple to request a termination of their marriage, they may do so through a legal divorce. Civil marriages and divorce are instituted and ordained by society, and the laws of the state dictate the formation and, if necessary, the termination of the relationship.

If you are a non-Christian, or a Christian who has decided not to live out your life with Christian principles and life, we would encourage you to pursue a civil ceremony for your wedding. If you are a person who desires to have Christ be the foundation of your marriage, we would encourage you to consider the following truths concerning Christian marriage.

Christian Marriage

A Christian marriage is a spiritual union with God that is intended to be a visible expression of the relationship that God has with the Church, which is the Bride of Christ. They are so intertwined that Paul switches from one to the other in Ephesians 5:25-33.

- 25 “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her
26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word,

- 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.
28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.
29 After all, no-one hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—
30 for we are members of his body.
31 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.
32 This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.
33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”

For the Christian, marriage is a relationship that is entered into that is mutually completing. The Scriptures indicate that the two shall become one. Not in an enmeshing sort of way, but by way of becoming mutually dependant upon one another for their growth and happiness as a couple. In the Christian marriage, it is not a 50% / 50% proposition, rather it is a 100% commitment.

We are convinced of one basic truth in Christian marriage, love alone will not hold a marriage together and will not make it the tremendous blessing it is meant to be in one's life. What holds a marriage together and makes it become all that God intended it to be is commitment. • A commitment to address and correct behavior and actions that hinder a spouse from truly enjoying the marriage. • A commitment to our spouse to love and accept them for who they are, not who we think they should be. • A commitment to faithfully and lovingly correct when an action violates the other in some way...and most of all, • A commitment to acknowledge that without him or her, I am not complete as God has ordained.

A marriage relationship sanctioned by God is different than a marriage structured under civil law. In a church wedding both people are claiming God's direct hand in their union, and the church and family are confirming that fact. Because each one has an individual, personal relationship with Christ, he or she understands the principle of two

people becoming one. Their personal unity with Christ is a vibrant spiritual reality that parallels genuine Christian marriage.

Following are a series of statements that will address specific ways the Christian couple can determine if they are ready for marriage. These statements reflect the deep belief that God knows best, even better than our own emotions or feelings. We would ask that you as a Christian couple who desire a Christian marriage consider these truths before you make your decision.

Sexual Relationship

In our highly charged sexual society it is not unusual for a couple in love to feel that the only way to express that love is through sexual intercourse. As a Christian couple, the Bible clearly warns you against becoming sexually involved before marriage. God desires for your marriage to be based upon trust and mutual respect. Sexual intercourse before marriage develops mistrust instead of trust. It fosters a focus on the physical instead of the spiritual and emotional foundation needed to build a life giving marriage. In God's eyes, sexual activity is much more than just a physical act, it is a very significant spiritual reality. In the Scriptures, the word fornication describes sexual intercourse outside of marriage. If you want to discern whether or not you are in God's will to marry, do not sleep together. It will hinder your ability to hear clearly from God concerning your marriage, and it breaks God's heart as all sin does.

We fully understand the temptations and struggles that are associated with our sexual lives. If you have been sexually active in your relationship, I would ask you to stop and allow God to forgive you and cleanse you from your sin (1 John 1:9). Jesus cleanses us from all sin and it is a great experience to see these problems released as we take our lives to Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Authority

In order to insure that their marriage will be successful, a Christian man and a Christian woman need to know that God has placed them together for life as husband and wife. The primary way to know God's perfect will in this situation is through the spiritual authorities that are in the couples life.

Parents Role

The first line of authority in a couples life will be their parents. They have been given to the couple by God to help them make godly decisions. Most Christians have this parental authority that should be consulted while a commitment to marriage is being considered. God has often given parents the ability to discern who would be a positive lifelong partner for their own son or daughter. This is even true if the parents are Christians or non-Christians.

That is why the old Christian idea of a man asking the woman's parents if he may propose to their daughter is valuable. Parents have primary responsibility to protect their children. In approaching a woman's parents, a man is asking the parents to resign from their position as the primary protectors of their daughter, and turn that responsibility over to him. If they approve, he may approach their daughter to see if she is willing. That transfer of authority is demonstrated in the marriage ceremony when the father as the representative of the family authority, turns his daughter over to her new husband.

Once parents are in favor of a marriage taking place, the next step would be to seek pastoral approval. Parents look for certain things in their children to determine if they are ready for marriage. Spiritual authorities can add a different dimension. Parents and pastors working together for the Christian couple gives them the strongest foundation they can have in the early years of their relationship.

The Church's Role in Your Marriage

When marriage takes place at WOL, we believe the minister performing the ceremony is a representative of God. In that position, he must be able to assure that God himself has joined the man and woman together, and that God himself is the center of their union. The Bible teaches that:

Mark 10:7-9, "...A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate."

Since the church has such an important responsibility before God in performing godly marriages, we at Water of Life Community Church have established a set of guidelines that we use to guide our roles as God's representatives in a wedding ceremony. We realize that God may be putting a couple together that do not meet these guidelines, but we have chosen these guidelines to direct our ministry.

Some Basic Guidelines to Help Determine if You are Ready for Marriage

Because of these concerns, we ask that couples requesting a Christian marriage by one of our pastors to meet the following requirements:

- 1) **We would desire both parties to be believers in the Lord Jesus Christ**, with that belief being reflected in their life-styles. But we understand God made marriage for all people so we will marry non-Christian couples if other circumstances are in order.
- 2) Normally, **the couple** needs to have known each other for at least **One** year.
- 3) It is required that **the couple** is willing to **attend a six week premarital class** offered by the church and then meet a minimum of 3 counseling sessions with the pastor who will marry them.
- 4) **If either or both of the people have been married before**, their previous marriage has to have been terminated because of a) adultery on the part of the ex-spouse (Matthew 5:32), or b) an unbelieving partner departing, thus allowing the believing partner freedom to remarry (1 Corinthians 7:15), or c) the previous marriage and divorce

occurred before they came to know Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), or d) their partner died.

- 5) **Study and discuss** the following Scriptures.

Malachi 2:13-16

- 13 Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because He no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands.
- 14 You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.
- 15 Has not [the LORD] made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.
- 16 "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

This passage reveals how very important our marriage vows are. If we choose to break our marriage covenant, God will defend our partner.

Matthew 19:3-9

- 3 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"
- 4 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female."
- 5 and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh"?
- 6 So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."
- 7 "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"
- 8 Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.
- 9 I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

It is God that joins couples together, and indeed the two become one.

Luke 16:18

18 “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

This reference explains how people can be married legally in the eyes of the state, but be committing adultery in the eyes of God.

Romans 7:1-3

- 1 Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?
- 2 For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage.
- 3 So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man.

This passage reveals that death does release one from the marriage covenant and widow/widower is free to remarry.

1 Corinthians 7:1-40

Please read this whole chapter of the Scriptures. It is entirely about marriage. Water of Life places particular emphasis upon vs. 10-11 as a basic approach to all questions concerning divorce and remarriage.

- 10 To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband.
- 11 But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

1 Corinthians 13

Please refer to the Bible for this chapter

Use this chapter to help you determine if you really are in love for here genuine love is revealed.

Hebrews 13:4

Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

God honors marriage highly and adultery will not be overlooked by Him.

1 Peter 3:1-7

- 1 Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives,
- 2 When they see the purity and reverence of your lives.
- 3 Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes.
- 4 Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.
- 5 For this is the way the women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands,
- 6 Like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.
- 7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

This passage gives instruction to a wife of an unbelieving husband. This passage gives powerful insight on how to be persuasive, but it requires the power of the Holy Spirit to obey.

If after studying these scriptures, and have read through this booklet, you feel as though you meet these guidelines, please feel free to contact the church about your wedding plans. If you have questions regarding your situation please contact one of our pastors for further input.