

“Courtship and Marriage”
(Proverbs 18:22)

I. Introduction.

A. What is marriage?

1. A covenant of companionship.
 - a. “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him’” (Gen. 2:18).
 - b. “Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant” (Mal. 2:14).
2. Most important decision in life.
 - a. Certainly, conversion most important event.
 - b. Marriage is the most important decision. Why?
 - (i) A good marriage can be a great blessing and help.
 - (ii) A bad marriage can be a hardship throughout life.
 - (a) “It is better to live in a corner of a roof than in a house shared with a contentious woman” (Prov. 21:9).
 - (b) “It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and vexing woman” (21:19).

B. Why get married?

1. Companionship.
 - a. See Gen. 2:18 above.
 - b. “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him” (Ecc. 4:9-12).
2. Godly offspring.
 - a. “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (Gen. 1:27-28).
 - b. “This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth” (Mal. 2:13-15).

3. Desires:

- a. Preserves moral purity.
- b. “Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband” (1 Cor. 7:1-2).

C. Who may marry?

1. One man and one woman:

- a. Polygamy not God’s will.
 - (i) God created one woman for Adam, not more than one, “So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man” (Gen. 2:21-22).
 - (ii) “An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2; cf. Titus 1:6).
 - (iii) Polygamy was tolerated and regulated (Ex. 21:10), but not the Lord’s original intention.

b. Not two men or two women: Homosexuality a serious sin.

- (i) “If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them” (Lev. 18:22).
- (ii) “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

2. A man and a woman who are eligible:

a. They must not be bound to another.

- (i) They must not be engaged: Engagement, betrothal, promise to marry is viewed by the Lord as marriage.
 - (a) “If there is a girl who is a virgin engaged to a man, and another man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city and you shall stone them to death; the girl, because she did not cry out in the city, and the man, because he has violated his neighbor’s wife. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you” (Deu. 23-24).
 - (b) “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly” (Matt. 1:18-19).
 - (c) Gill writes, “It was usual with the Jews first to espouse or betroth, and then to marry, or rather consummate the marriage, by bringing the woman home to her husband's house, between which there was some space of time. The account and manner of betrothing is given by Maimonides in the following words.

“Before the giving of the law, if a man met a woman in the street, if he would, he might take her, and bring her into his house and marry her between him and herself, and she became his wife; but when the law was given, the Israelites were commanded, that if a man would take a woman he should obtain her before witnesses, and after that she should be his wife, according to Deu. 22:13 and these takings are an affirmative command of the law, and are called ‘espousals’ or ‘betrothings’ in every place; and a woman who is obtained in such a way is called ‘espoused’ or ‘betrothed’; and when a woman is obtained, and becomes ‘espoused’, although she is not yet ‘married, nor has entered into her husband’s house’, yet she is a man's wife.”

(d) And such a distinction between a married woman and a betrothed virgin, which was Mary’s case, may be observed in Deu. 22:22 moreover, her being found or appearing to be with child, was ‘before they came together’; which it is likely, as Dr. Lightfoot observes, was about three months from her conception, when she was returned from her cousin Elizabeth. It is probable that as soon as she was espoused to Joseph, or quickly after, she went and paid her visit to Elizabeth, with whom she stayed about three months, and then returned home, Luke 1:56. Upon her return home, she appears to be with child, with which she had gone three months, a proper time for the discovery of such a matter, Gen. 38:24 and which is assigned by the Jewish doctors for this purpose.

(ii) They must not be married.

(iii) If one or the other has been divorced, it must be a Biblical divorce.

b. If either one is a believer, they both must be believers.

(i) “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,’ Says the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 14-18).

(ii) “A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39).

c. Must have parental consent.

(i) “If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a dowry for her to be his wife. If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the dowry for virgins” (Ex. 22:16-17).

(ii) “But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry. But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well. So then both he who gives

his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better” (1 Cor. 7:36-38).

- (iii) This is why the young man asks the father for his daughter’s hand.
- (iv) This is why the question is asked: who gives this man to be married to this woman.
- (v) An exception would be when the woman has no authority/head.

D. How long does marriage last?

1. For as long as both shall live, unless broken by adultery or desertion.
 - a. For life: “A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39).
 - b. Unless there is adultery: “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery” (Matt. 19:9).
 - c. Or desertion: “And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. . . . Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace” (1 Cor. 7:13, 15).

2. Marriage is not for the life to come: “But Jesus answered and said to them, ‘You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven’” (Matt. 22:29-30).

II. How is this union brought about?

A. Different methods historically:

1. Parents might arrange a marriage when their children are infants.
2. Some communities use matchmakers (Fiddler on the Roof).
3. A master might give a slave wife to his slave (Ex. 21:4).
4. A man might buy a wife for himself or his son (Ex. 21:8-10).
5. A king might give his daughter or take a wife for political alliance (1 Kings 11).
6. Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac from his people (Gen. 24).
7. Jacob went to Paddan-aram to find a wife from his father’s people (Gen. 28).
8. A man might give his daughter in marriage for a reward (Saul to David; 1 Sam. 18:20, 27).
9. In our culture, dating.
10. In any case, the consent of both parties is necessary – it is a covenant.
 - a. The consent of the father is also necessary.
 - b. It would best to have the consent of both sets of parents.

B. A Biblical alternative to dating and a safeguard: Courtship.

1. What is courtship? A supervised, non-threatening, non-binding, exclusive, consensual arrangement that allows an eligible young man and young woman and their families the opportunity to explore whether they would be a good match for marriage.

2. What are the advantages of courtship?
 - a. Helps to preserve purity:
 - (i) Desires are stronger at this age, greater temptation.

- (ii) “Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4).
 - b. Helps ensure marriage in the Lord: No dating with or marriage to unbelievers.
 - c. Helps ensure compatibility: between potential spouses, families.
 - d. Give added wisdom: both sets of parents also considering whether it’s a good match, not just the potential spouses (young man and woman can’t see clearly).
 - e. Honors biblical headship: Gives the father the opportunity to decide whether he can consent to the marriage.
3. How do you enter into a courtship?
- a. A young man and woman would get to know each other in a public environment:
 - (i) Preferably church or church related functions.
 - (ii) Other opportunities can be arranged.
 - b. If they become interested in each other as potential spouses, they would seek parental permission to court.
 - (i) Parental interview:
 - (a) The young lady’s father interviews the young man.
 - (1) Background.
 - (2) Beliefs.
 - (3) Commitment to Christ.
 - (4) Education.
 - (5) Compatibility: calling, goals, family size, standard of living.
 - (6) Ability to provide.
 - (7) Emotional stability.
 - (8) Health.
 - (b) The young man’s father interviews the young lady.
 - (1) Background.
 - (2) Beliefs.
 - (3) Commitment to Christ.
 - (4) Education.
 - (5) Compatibility.
 - (6) Emotional stability.
 - (7) Health.
 - (c) This would ensure they were serious about pursuing the courtship.
 - (d) Remember, this process is to determine whether they’re a good match for life.
 - (e) If not, it’s better to stop it here than for them to form an attachment.
 - (f) If either father says no, there must be a valid reason.
 - (ii) If things go well, then proceed to courtship.
4. What should you do during a courtship?
- a. Maintain accountability at all times for their activities and whereabouts.

- b. Allow them the opportunity to get to know each other as potential spouses (families as well).
- c. Encourage them to keep their hearts until they know whether it is a good match.
- d. Check for compatibility: “The Puritan ethic of marriage was to look not for a partner whom you do love passionately at this moment, but rather for one whom you can love steadily as your best friend for life, and then to proceed with God’s help to do just that” (Packer, Puritans).
- e. From the woman’s perspective: he must not only be a mature Christian and one who can provide, but also have a good character and be a kindred spirit.

5. How long should the courtship last?

- a. Long enough to answer all the questions.
- b. Long enough to be sure, as far as humanly possible, that this is a good match.

C. The next step: engagement.

- 1. If everything looks good and everyone is in agreement, then they would proceed to pre-engagement counseling. Why?
 - a. We’ve seen the binding nature of engagement. It’s not a trial period: it is the asking and receiving of a promise of marriage, a covenant that leads to marriage, one that constitutes the couple in a very real sense a husband and wife, one that requires a divorce to break.
 - b. Counseling before engagement further tests compatibility and eligibility.
- 2. If everything continues to work out and there is parental consent from both sets of parents, then the couple should enter an engagement and begin preparing for the wedding.

D. Finally, the wedding.

- 1. A public explanation of the institution of marriage.
- 2. The taking of vows.
- 3. The celebration.

III. Headship in Marriage.

A. Marriage is a covenant of companionship.

- 1. “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him’” (Gen. 2:18).
- 2. Husbands and wives are to have care and concern for one another, provide the basic needs of friendship, try to fulfill one another’s happiness.
- 3. They are to love one another as they love themselves.

B. But there is also a new authority structure that is established.

- 1. The Lord has established authority in all three spheres of society of State, Church and Family.
 - a. State: Magistrate and citizen.
 - b. Church: elders and saints.
 - c. Family: Husbands and wives, parents and children.
 - d. Master/employers and servants/employees.

2. How is authority to be used?
 - a. For the good of those under authority.
 - b. Jesus' example:
 - (i) "And He said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called "Benefactors." But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22:25-27).
 - (ii) Jesus used His authority to become a servant to His disciples to help them fulfill God's will.
 - c. Authority is given not to tyrannize, but to serve.
3. What are the limitations of authority?
 - a. God's will: each is a minister of God.
 - b. Each may declare and minister God's will, not their own (Ex. Elders).
4. How does this apply in the family?
 - a. The husband is the head of his wife, "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:3).
 - (i) They are to use this authority to minister to them.
 - (ii) "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body" (Eph. 5:25-30).
 - b. A wife is to submit to her husband as to the Lord.
 - (i) "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything" (vv. 22-24).
 - (ii) As the husband exercises his authority within biblical bounds, wives are to submit to it.
 - (i) Can a husband require his wife to live within the budget?
 - (ii) Can he require her not to attend church or not to worship the true God?
5. How does this work itself out in the decision-making process in the family?
 - a. Life is a series of decisions:
 - (i) Should the husband make all the decisions himself?
 - (ii) What is the wife's role?

- b. Decisions should be made together.
 - (i) How can a husband love his wife if he doesn't take into account her desires (1 Cor. 7:32-34)?
 - (ii) Each decision of consequence should be discussed; if possible, you should come to a mutually agreeable decision.
 - (iii) It might be useful to have monthly meetings to plan and discuss the decisions that need to be made, as well as the circumstances that might influence those decisions.
 - c. What if you both can't agree?
 - (i) Then the husband must make the final choice, before the Lord, of what he thinks to be best.
 - (ii) The husband also bears the responsibility of every such decision made.
 - d. What if the wife consistently disagrees with her husband and believes he is making bad or foolish choices?
 - (i) She should pray, talk to him in humility, continue to be a witness of godliness, "In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior" (1 Pet. 3:1-2).
 - (ii) If his decisions continue to be foolish, then she should speak to the elders – the elders then will try and help him.
 - (iii) If they're sinful choices, then follow Matthew 18.
6. How does this work itself out in parenting?
- a. Parents are to instruct and discipline their children: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (6:4).
 - b. Children are to submit: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth" (vv. 1-3).
 - (i) When children are very young, the parents must make all the decisions for them, and children need to submit.
 - (ii) As they grow and are able to make good choices, they should be allowed varying amounts of freedom to choose based on their maturity, under the parents' supervision.
 - (iii) Eventually they will be making all their decisions, so you need to let them make them as they are able.