

# Family Matters – Marriage Matters

May 1, 2016 - Pastor Randy Eliason

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*Hebrews 13:4*

*Give honor to marriage, and remain faithful to one another in marriage. God will surely judge people who are immoral and those who commit adultery.*

This command to honor marriage is one piece amidst a series of random, but important, instructions to Christians: love as siblings, show hospitality, remember those in prison, don't be greedy. Today I am going to begin this series, "Family Matters" by focusing on the subject of marriage. Marriage matters to God and so marriage should matter to us.

The suggestion that traditional marriage is being rejected in our culture can hardly be overstated. The percentage of couples who are choosing to cohabit rather than marry has skyrocketed, those who marry frequently divorce, and there is widespread confusion and disagreement over the gender and number requirements that constitute a marriage relationship.

Marriage, both conceptually and practically, seems to be like a car that has broken down. The trained mechanics, despite all their tinkering, have not succeeded in their attempts to fix it and the owners are questioning whether they should even continue to try and repair it. Maybe it should just be scrapped altogether. Due to this present crisis the church has a responsibility to clearly communicate God's vision and purpose for marriage and to boldly call the church to honor and embrace this vision and purpose.

*God's Vision and Purpose for Marriage*

The debate and disagreement concerning the definition and purpose of marriage is the result of the radically divergent worldviews held by the debate partners. On the one hand, there are those who view marriage as a sociological institution created by people. The definition of marriage is determined by particular societies and therefore subject to revision based upon the needs and desires of those societies. On the other hand, Christians believe that mankind has been created by God; a God who has revealed his purpose in creating us as male and female and to whom we are accountable to fulfill His purpose.

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The difference between these two world-views is essentially about how one responds to the following question: Do we exist for God's glory or our self-gratification?

### I. Marriage: What is it?

Marriage is the one flesh union between a man and a woman, an institution established by God and part of His good creation (Genesis 2:18-24; Matthew 19:4-6).

God's purpose in establishing the institution of marriage is two-fold; it is for the glory of God and the good of man.

### Accusation #1: The Bible Does Not Define Marriage

A few years ago Newsweek ran an article featured on its cover titled, "Our Mutual Joy", by Lisa Miller. Lisa wrote, "First, while the Bible and Jesus say many important things about love and family, neither explicitly defines marriage as between one man and one woman." What the Bible does reveal.

1. God's ideal for marriage as revealed in Genesis 1 & 2 was absolutely one of life-long heterosexual monogamy.
2. Following the historical account of the fall of man in Genesis 3, this ideal was corrupted as man came under the domination of sin (Romans 5). The existence of divorce and polygamy among God's people in the OT does not communicate God's acceptance and approval.
3. In the NT Jesus clearly renews God's ideal as the only acceptable pattern for marriage. (Matthew 19:3-9)

In response to the accusation that the teachings of Jesus do not provide us with a clear definition of marriage one need look no further than Matt. 19:3-11. In this passage Jesus was asked by the Pharisees, a sect of Jewish religious leaders, whether it was permissible for a husband to divorce his wife (*lit.* "send his wife away") for any reason. The question reflected a theological debate that existed among the Jewish religious leaders as to how to interpret Deut. 24:1. One school of

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thought considered the word “indecent” to refer to marital unfaithfulness. The other more liberal school considered the word indecent to include almost anything the husband didn't like; thus the question, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for *any and every reason?*” (NIV)

Jesus response circumvented their attempt to draw him into the controversy. Instead he referred his audience back to the creation account and God's original intent for marriage to be an indissoluble union. Jesus reproached them for their question by responding, *“Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female'? For this reason, 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 flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.”*

In essence Jesus was saying, “Instead of trying to establish the parameters of your *right* to divorce your wife you ought to be focusing on your *responsibility* to maintain the oneness with your wife that God has created!” Jesus' opinion on the matter is that, except for special extreme circumstances, marriage is to be a life-long commitment between a man and a woman. Jesus affirmed life-long monogamy to be God's will over against serial monogamy (a series of multiple marriage partners). Jesus taught that it is contrary to God's will to practice serial monogamy based on the fact that Genesis 2 reveals marriage to be a two-person union; one male and one female. If it is not God's will for us to form multiple, successive bonds with members of the opposite sex, it logically follows that polygamy (taking a second spouse concurrently) is also prohibited.

Jesus' response to the question of the permissibility of divorce and remarriage provides an even stronger implicit rejection of same-sex marriage than it does of polygamy. Jesus reasoning is consistent with that of the Essenes, a strict Jewish religious sect in Jesus day, who rejected polygamy on the basis that God created only two sexes; male and female (See the Damascus Covenant 4.20-5.1). When Jesus appealed to the Genesis passages to demonstrate that God intended marriage to consist of only TWO people, the numerical limitation was based on the principle that God has created only two sexes; male and female. When affirming life-long

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monogamy as God's will, he established it upon a male-female foundation. If we remove the two, complementary created sexes as the foundation for marriage we have simultaneously removed any basis to limit the number of participants.

### *II. Marriage matters to God because it brings Him glory*

The highest purpose of marriage to reflect the character of God and display the covenant-keeping love between Christ and the church. There are numerous passages in both the Old and New Testament where the husband-wife relationship is employed metaphorically to depict God's relationship to His people. God intended marriage to reflect the characteristics of His relationship with us; a loving relationship characterized by exclusivity, permanency, unity and intimacy.

**Exclusivity** – God calls His people to love him in an exclusive manner. This does not mean we love no one else. We love our kids. It does mean we don't love anyone or anything else in a way that makes he/she/it another God. We must have no other God's before us. Husband and wife must love others but their love for each other is a special love that should not be extended to others.

**Permanency** – God calls us to Himself forever, not for a season. Thus the marriage relationship is forever, not for a season.

**Unity** – God wants us to be "one with Him in mind and heart". Husbands and wives are called to reflect that "oneness" in their marriages.

**Intimacy** – God desires to be close to you. Marriage relationships are the most intimate of all earthly relationships.

### *Accusation #2: Marriage doesn't work.*

A building collapse does not necessarily reveal any weakness with the architectural drawings. It might be simply the result of the builders not following the plans. It might also be the result of corrupt building materials. Two selfish, immature, emotionally unhealthy individuals won't succeed in any relationship, including marriage. Those who say that traditional marriage is unrealistic are only affirming the sinful nature of man and ignoring the grace and power of God. They are focusing on a small part of a larger reality.

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I have seen marriages fail. I have seen marriages that were healthy for years become shipwrecked later in life. It is tragic. But it doesn't change the fact of the larger reality: Marriage is still working in a beautiful, albeit imperfect, way for a vast number of couples.

### *III. Marriage matters to individuals and society because it benefits them*

Marriage is not only for the good of God but also for the good of humankind; husbands, wives, and the children born of their union. It meets our need for complementary companionship and provides the opportunity for husband and wife to be blessed with the gift of children born of their union. It confers upon children the blessing of being reared by both a father and a mother in a stable environment resulting from the loving bond of husband and wife. Society benefits when God's ideal is realized as men and women follow God's original intended design for marriage and the family.

A. Marriage Benefits Men & Women

B. Marriage Benefits Children

C. Marriage Benefits Society

If God designed marriage, what does this mean for single people?

Marriage is God's will and therefore good for most, but not all.

Single people are not inferior to married people. The early years of a persons' life are marked by singleness and for many the end of life as well. For some people being single is a life-long calling, for the rest it is at least a temporary calling. (See 1 Corinthians 7:32-35)

Close: How do we restore honor to marriage, as instituted by God?

1. The church must model it before the world. We can't not be hypocrites who try and tell unsaved people they must follow the Bible's definition if we don't!
2. Single people. Do not let the world or your own desires dictate your relationship decisions. When you are ready to become one physically with a member of the opposite sex, you ought to be ready to formally marry that person. If you, then do it!

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3. **Married People.** Nurture your relationship. Paul writes to husbands that they should love their wife as their own body. Nourish your wife like your body. This instruction can apply to wives as well. Feed your spouse's spiritual, emotional, relational, and physical needs. Honoring the relationship begins with honoring your spouse.
  - Give your spouse affection
  - Give your spouse appreciation
  - Give your spouse attention