

Putting First Things First (Strengthening our Families) Marriage Fundamentals

Intro: Many of you are sports fans and probably cheer for a favorite team. We enjoy that until they start losing and then the fans want an explanation from the coach for the miserable defeats. When that happens, the coaches seem to always come back to the same solution. "We need to get back to the fundamentals of the game."

Simply put, no football team, for example, will be able to have a winning season without having learned to effectively block and tackle. No matter what superstar they may have acquired, that person's success depends upon the other players executing the fundamentals.

It's likewise important in family life to come back to the fundamentals. Occasionally someone can offer a trendy tip or two to "spice things up a bit." But if we want our marriages to succeed, we must not ever lose sight of the fundamentals that the Scripture have given to guide us. We need to look to the author of marriage to answer the fundamental questions about marriage. After all, it is His creation; and in His word He reveals what we need to know.

In the Scriptures we can see:

The divinely-ordained essence of marriage

Marriage is in its essence the union of a man and woman in covenant to love, honor and cherish one another for life.

It is a union

"For this causes a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall be one flesh." (Gen 2:24)

The language of Moses suggests a union of two people not only physically, but spiritually. Some call it an ontological union. It is as if two vessels are poured into one larger vessel. Think about what happens. There is an inevitable blending of wills. There is no way two people can be married and preserve intact their individuality. In that case, they simple become like oil and water poured into a bigger vessel, but never really united. Getting married does not require that you lose your identity. Just as every molecule of water in one glass is still present in the bigger vessel, but now blended, so two people in marriage blend who experience true unity become something together that they are not by themselves.

It is a covenant

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)

It is covenant that creates the oneness. Each person who enters marriage enters into a sacred covenant before God to grant the rights and fulfill their respective roles in the relationship. He gives his word that he will fulfill the promises of marriage.

It is a life-long commitment

"I take you to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until death do us part."

This traditional wedding vow is modeled upon the principle of permanence taught in both the OT and NT.

Jesus expresses the same concept of commitment in another way:

Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." (Mt. 19:6)

More and more it becomes clear that a lot of people who get married do not have a proper concept of what marriage is.

The divinely-ordained purpose of marriage

Marriage provides for the continuation of life through procreation.

It provides for the continued existence of the human family. It is God's ordained way of populating the earth.

God's command to every created pair is the same: *"Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."* But what we sometimes miss is that this is said to be a "blessing."

As we participate with God in His plans, we are in fact experiencing a blessing from him. So don't be afraid to experience God's blessing in having children.

It provides for sexual satisfaction in a safe and moral environment.

Today a lot of the talk about "safe sex" is really a discussion about how people can protect themselves while engaged in immoral activity. In contrast, God places sexual fulfillment in the context of a committed relationship.

1 cor. 7:2-3

The Hebrew writer, quite aware of the various misuses of the sexual relationship taught in the book of Leviticus, urges his Jewish brethren: *Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.* (Heb. 13:4)

And so a relationship of a man and woman in marriage is both moral and safe.

It provides for the companionship of two people through all of life's experiences, both good and bad.

"It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a helper suitable for him." (Gen. 2:18)

It provides for meaningful communication

It provides for mutual support

It provides for spiritual encouragement

It provides a healthy atmosphere for spiritual growth for the marriage partners.

Perhaps no relationship more than marriage can make clear to us our inherent strengths and weaknesses as people (to bring out both our best and our worst.) but that is the part of the value of marriage. As one of my good friends pointed out to me, "God made marriage not merely to make people happy, but to make them holy."

When we are attempting to work together with another, we can quickly become confronted with spiritual characteristics that need changing. Marriage can assist us in growing in many important spiritual qualities.

Unselfishness--the ability to consider the needs of others over our own (Phil. 2:3-4)

Forgiveness--the ability to repent of wrong and to forgive the wrong in others

In fact, there is no virtue that cannot be abundantly used in marriage day by day.

It establishes an environment in which children can be nourished and prepared for adult life.

God's way provides the structure and security that children need to flourish and mature.

And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Eph. 6:4)

On our society we see this huge number of children that come from single-parent homes (unwed mothers), the product of irresponsible men (and women). And social engineers look for every possible solution to remedy the problem, but the right one. They throw money at it; make laws about it; but refuse to acknowledge the elephant in the room. Things won't get better until these young people are taught to accept moral and spiritual responsibility for their lives and refrain from the risky behavior that produces these kinds of situations.

The divinely ordained roles of marriage

The roles of marriage are contingent upon the differing psychological and physical capabilities that the husband and the wife possess.

The Biblical model is derived from the creation account of Genesis two and is analogous to it.

The husband should exercise a loving and sacrificial leadership

The conception of headship is often misrepresented as arbitrary rule of men over women or justification for oppression.

But it is analogous to what the head does for the body. It senses every need and responds to bring about the need, bringing the proper nourishment to that part of the body.

It means that the husband values her and respects her right to life's good things

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, (Eph. 5:28-29)

The wife places herself voluntarily into her husband's care and exercises a respectful cooperation with her husband.

She is free to communicate her needs and wishes; but she also is dependent upon him for his protection and provision

She entrusts herself to him while at the same time providing important things her husband needs.

But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. (Ephesians 5:24)

And so the relationship is cooperative and interdependent. The sooner couples can end the tug-of-war about who's in charge, the better off they'll be. If both get where God wants them to be, they both benefit.

Conclusion: A successful marriage is really grounded in the spiritual ethos of faith in God and obedience to His commands.