

# THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE FAMILY

## BEGINNING WITH A PROPER FOUNDATION

There have been several different ways in which marriages have been considered in our present day culture. Those three viewpoints are then: marriage as a sacrament, a contract, or as a covenant. We have to begin here in looking at the family unit that begins with the union of a husband and wife since the foundation of that marriage is going to ultimately affect the operations of the family and quite possibly determine whether that family unit stays as such for the remainder of their lifetimes or not.

Before we consider the ways in which a marriage is established, whether it is considered by both parties, that is, the husband and the wife, as a sacrament, a contract, or a covenant, it has to be first established that, as we are looking at the family unit as it pertains to the Word of God, the Bible, that the two parties initiating the family unit must be a husband and a wife. The founding of that union is in the very beginning of the Bible in the book of Genesis where we first read that, "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (**Genesis 1:1**) Since it was God that created the heavens and the earth it would then seem prudent and imperative for us to look at why exactly did God create the heavens and the earth. After God created the heavens and the earth and He created all of the plants and trees and put all sorts of creatures large and small in the waters and on land He then also created man on the sixth and final day of creation.

First of all, we see in **Genesis 1:27**, "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." While this paper isn't going to fully address the gender identity crisis that is presently plaguing our nation, that Scripture right there tells us God's intended purpose for there to be but two genders, male and female. Then after God had placed man in the garden He said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." (**Genesis 2:18**) From there God caused the first man Adam to sleep and took a rib from Adam and He created the woman. God presented Adam's suitable helper to him to which 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." Right after that the Word of God tells us, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." (**Genesis 2:23-24**) There is no other union comparable to

the man and the woman. God's intended purpose and design was to have the man and the woman to become one flesh. Aptly stated, Wayne Grudem connects the significance of the union of man and woman with being created in God's image, "In marriage itself we reflect the nature of God in the fact that as men and women we have equality in importance but difference in roles from the time that God created us."<sup>1</sup>

### **GOD'S PURPOSE WITH MAN AND WOMAN IN HIS CREATION**

One more important thing to mention is the purpose behind why God created the heavens and the earth. It has been surmised that perhaps God was lonely and just longed for companionship. Yet, there is no evidence in the eternity that existed before creation that God was not perfect in His fellowship within the godhead. The answer to that question can once again be found in Scripture. The prophet Isaiah relays to us God's purpose behind His creation of us. "Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him." (**Isaiah 43:7**) Then we are told that in "whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (**1 Corinthians 10:31**) So we now have the why of God's creating us male and female which then leads to the next question of, "ok now what?" What is male and female supposed to do according to the intended will of God? We can once again find the answer to that question in the first book of Genesis. After God had created male and female, He blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (**Genesis 1:28**) This was prior to what is called the fall of man, before sin had entered into the world due to the disobedience of man to God. Yet even after the sin of man had gotten so bad that God flooded the entire earth and only saved Noah and his family, God said to Noah similar to what He had said to Adam and Eve, "God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." (**Genesis 9:1**)

### **THE SIN PROBLEM**

The first story we have in the Bible after the creation of all things by God is the narrative between Eve and the serpent which we know as being Satan, the devil (**Revelation 12:9**). Satan says to Eve, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" Even though Eve tells the serpent that yes, God did say that in the day they ate of it they would die, Satan replies, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, pg. 448 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994)

the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."(**Genesis 3:1, 4-5**) After Satan's lies deceived Eve, she ate of the fruit and then gave Adam of the fruit too. That is the first instance in creation where not only was God dishonored by Adam and Eve's disobedience but they also chose to believe the serpent over God's Word. God withdrew his personal and intimate contact with mankind after that. As Terry Tramel put it, while Adam and Eve did not physically die right then and there (although they would eventually), "on the contrary Adam died spiritually at that very moment, which caused him to experience immediate separation from God." So not only did the sin of Adam cause a sin nature to be evoked in his being but it separated him from the natural communion or fellowship he had previously with God. "Not only are all of the human family depraved; they are also deprived. There is something missing in the offspring that Adam experienced-communion, fellowship, and intimacy with God Himself."<sup>2</sup>

From then on He spoke through the patriarchs of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (the father of the nation Israel), and Joseph. Eventually God began using prophets, starting with Moses, and spoke through judges and prophets in leading His people of Israel. Yet time and again God's people have rebelled against Him to where God has at first withdrew from their presence, to eventually letting go of His wrath. We find such examples from the time of the flood where God only spared Noah and His sons, to the time of Sodom and Gomorrah where God destroyed their entire cities, to the giving up on His people of Israel and Judah and having them taken into captivity and be subjected to the rulers of Assyria and Babylon, the Medes and the Persians, the Greeks and then finally at the end of God's Word in the New Testament, the Romans.

While all of that may seem to be more suited to a message on the sin of nations it still goes back to each and every person and couple to decide as Joshua spoke to the Israelites at the start of their possessing the promised land of Canaan. Joshua stated, "choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (**Joshua 24:15**) Yet not long after in those early days of the nation of Israel, we find a completely different mindset of the people. As David Fisher put it, "as in the book of Judges, we live in a time

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2 Terry Tramel, Beauty of the Balance, The, pg. 108 (Franklin Springs: Life Springs Resources, Inc., 2009)

when everyone does what is right in his or her own eyes with equally tragic results."<sup>3</sup> He then goes on to say that for God's creation to live contrary to His will and truth it leads to couples just living together, raising children without that mind and heart of obedience to God which then brings forth a gradual decline and decay of the moral fabric of one's community and nation.

### **COMMITTED ACCORDING TO THE COVENANT**

As mentioned at the outset of this paper, we have three ways in which a marriage can be viewed. There is but one way of looking at marriage Biblically as according to the sovereignty and purpose of God. As a Christian, a child of God, we are taught and told by God's Word that we are to do all things as unto the Lord. (**Colossians 3:23**) To go along with that is that we were created for His pleasure and purpose and glory. (**Philippians 2:13, Revelation 4:11, Isaiah 43:7**) In the building and establishing and maintaining and preserving that family unit there is but one way that a marriage can be viewed properly, as was purposed by God, our Creator and sustainer of all things, and that is therefore as a covenant. As defined in God, Marriage, and Family, "it is a sacred bond between a man and a woman, instituted by and publicly entered into before God (whether or not this is acknowledged by the married couple), normally consummated by sexual intercourse."<sup>4</sup> While this is the more effectual way of viewing marriage it also then translates into a more stable and loving family. If children are raised under the auspice of marriage being a covenant before God, and really with God, as opposed to it being a sacrament that is by nature blessed regardless or a contract that can be broken, then that is going to work its way through the family. As the Word says to us, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." (**Proverbs 22:6**)

### **THE NEED FOR GOD'S HELP (OUR NEED FOR CHRIST)**

Without a Christ-centered family we will never be able to have a marriage and family according to God's purpose. As all are born into sin which originated from the seed of Adam who first sinned against God, we are all born then, as already mentioned with a propensity to sin. We are all born into that sin nature. While we can still "try" and be good and do the right thing to please God, there is truly one way, as we are told in His Word,

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3 David Fisher, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Pastor, The, pg. 60. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996)

4 Andreas J. Kostenberger, God, Marriage, and Family, pg. 78. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010)

that is THE way. As Jesus proclaimed, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

(**John 14:6**) That believing on Christ is not just for our eternal salvation. As the Apostle John wrote for his reason in writing his gospel account of Jesus, he said, "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." (**John 20:31**) Similarly, in that same book of John he states, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." (**John 1:12**) He is speaking of believing on Christ and then receiving of His Holy Spirit to work in us "to will and to do for His good pleasure". (**Philippians 2:13**) If a marriage is unequally yoked as Paul said (**2 Corinthians 6:14**) with one believer and one not, it is absolutely guaranteed that there are going to be problems since they are both not submitted to Christ.

### **THE ORDER OF THE FAMILY**

The Apostle Paul starts the 5th chapter of Ephesians saying, "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma." (**Ephesians 5:1-2**) That sets the tone really for what he says about the union of husband and wife and how they are to operate in their roles within that arrangement. "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. " (**Ephesians 5:22-28**)

Sometimes there is no need to expound upon the Word for it speaks for itself as the Word of God. Paul is ultimately speaking of what Jesus said was the great commandment of God and what is like it, that is to love God with all that is in us and to love others as much as ourselves (**Mark 12:29-31**) or looked at a little differently to give us an even better understanding, Jesus spoke of His new commandment, to love others as Christ has shown His love for us. (**John 13:34**) That love of God working in us is going to pay dividends in relation to one's spouse but will bear fruit within one's entire family. As the husband and wife become imitators of Christ that will train the child in the way they

should go and gives them a working example to emulate. Just as there is order in the godhead with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, there is also to be within the Christian home. The husband does not rule over the wife but is the head of the home for order. The children though are instructed to, "obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

(**Ephesians 6:1-3**) Right after that though Paul says, "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." That will not be a problem as a mother and father rule the home in the wisdom and love in Christ. In all things we are to be reminded that it is in the Word and in Christ where we obtain wisdom and righteousness, our sanctification and redemption as Paul stated in **1 Corinthians 1:30**. As each member of the family submits to the order and way of Christ our Redeemer the closer we will have that family as it is meant to be in honoring God.

## **CONCLUSION**

Unless one's house is built on a foundation in Christ it will never function or become what is intended and purposed by God. As Jesus said, "I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand." (**Matthew 7:24-26**) Each person within the family unit has a role and a responsibility in ensuring the house is at peace and harmony with God in Christ. We can be reminded of what God spoke to Abraham for He gives us that same great promise that is in Christ Jesus. "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." (**Genesis 15:1**) Jesus is our shield and our exceedingly great reward as we believe on Him and put our trust in Him. While trials, sorrows, pain and tribulation will still come to all of man as we still live in a fallen world we can find the peace and rest in Christ Jesus for ourselves and within our families.

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