

knows that, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor” (Eccl. 4:9). Married couples should evaluate how, as married people, they will serve God better together than they could apart.

Although not the primary reason for marriage, God also ordained matrimony for the propagation of the human race and the establishment of a godly seed. As God sovereignly blesses married couples with children the potential for kingdom cultivation increases exponentially.

Marriage Communicates the Gospel

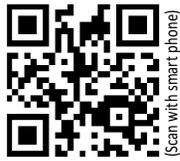
After reflecting on these same principles, Paul, at the end of Ephesians 5, stresses the importance of the institution of marriage. “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (v. 32). The best human marriage is a shadow of the glorious marriage between Christ and believers. As a husband, Christ provides companionship for heartbroken, lonely, wandering people. As the head of the relationship he provides leadership for those lacking direction (Eph. 5:23). As the Holy One of Israel, Christ washes his bride with his Word and Spirit to cleanse her from staining sins. Christ feeds his wife to make her healthy and strong (v. 29). His commitment is forever (v. 31).

Marriages that truly reflect God’s marriage to his people begin with a believing relationship with the perfect bridegroom, Jesus Christ (Matt. 25:6).

*Joined in one spirit to our Head,
Where He appoints we go;
And while we in His footsteps tread,
Show forth his praise below.* (Wesley)

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PROCLAMATION

Promoting robust, religious thought in the tradition of orthodox, historic Christianity
July 2012, Issue 37

MAKING A MARRIAGE

GOD’S BLUEPRINT FOR MARITAL SUCCESS

BY WILLIAM BOEKESTEIN

To say that Christian marriage is under attack today is a great understatement. The statistics are telling. Fewer people are pursuing marriage and those who do are waiting longer to get married. In 1960 fifty-nine percent of eighteen to twenty-nine year-olds were married compared to just twenty percent in 2010. In 1960, the median age for entering marriage was in the early twenties; today it’s nearly thirty. As marriage has declined cohabitation has increased, nearly doubling since 1990. This data reflects changing opinions and practices relating to marriage; thirty-nine percent of Americans say they believe that marriage is becoming obsolete. At the same time concern for God’s basic definition of marriage is declining. For the first time in history the

level of strong support for homosexual unions equals that of strong opposition (22%). And these statistics have not even touched on the problems found *within* Christian marriages.

Our need for help in marriage is capped by the fact that marriage is God’s plan for an orderly and godly society. Through marriage God provides companionship for his people, raises up families who will communicate the gospel from one generation to the next, and illustrates his covenant relationship with his people. As important as marriage is to God it should not surprise us that he has provided an infallible plan for marital success.

Embedded in Genesis 2:18-25 are at least six principles for a successful marriage. While not exhaustive, since



they are rooted in the first wedding consummated before man's fall into sin, these principles are foundational.

Some of us have never witnessed a pattern of a biblical marriage. Some of us who are married have been failing to follow God's plan for a beautiful marriage. Some of us may have great marriages. But we still need to grasp the fact that human marriage is pointing to something so much bigger than itself.

Marriage is for Companionship

Nine times in the first two chapters of Genesis, God describes his world as "good." There is no mention of anything that is *not good* until Genesis 2:18 jumps off the page. "It is not good that man should be alone..." God isn't only talking about marriage; he's saying something about basic human nature. We were made to fellowship with other humans. Adam had lots of stuff before he met Eve. But he didn't have companionship and that was not good. To live consistently with how God has created us we need to strive for deep friendships. With God's blessing this pursuit may lead, in the words of Puritan Thomas Gataker's description of marriage, to "one of the greatest outward blessings that in this world man enjoyeth." True intimacy is found not merely in close emotional or physical relationships but in a lifetime commitment of companionship.

God's emphasis on marital companionship reminds us that marriage is not simply a social contract where *he* pays the bills and *she* takes care of the house. If our marriages degener-

ate into that sort of contractualism we need to take drastic measures to foster God's gift of conjugal friendship. Through concentrated efforts like reading good books together and scheduling time every evening to talk, couples can develop the openness and trust that allows each to find solace in the other's company.

Marriage is Complementary

By God's design when a godly marriage is begun the two are better off because they complement each other. That Eve was a helper "comparable to Adam (2:18) assumes a complementary relationship; what one lacks the other supplies. Such a reciprocating relationship is found no where else than in marriage.

Both men and women are created in the image of God and are equal in dignity and value (Gen. 5:2). But because of differences in their constitutions and callings they are able to beautifully complement each other.

God made men to lovingly lead and wives to humbly help. Adam was placed in the garden first to exercise dominion over it. As Paul says, "The husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the church..." (Eph. 5:23). Eve was created to be a helper. This doesn't mean she is a doormat; God himself is described as the Helper (Heb. 13:6). The relationship between a husband and wife is like that of a godly king and queen.

As fallen creatures, men will struggle with leadership, being tempted to take a hands-off or overly domineering approach to husbanding.

Women, will struggle with submission, being inclined to usurp or disregard the God-given position of her husband's leadership (Gen. 3:16). But when both submit to their unique calling as husband and wife marriage becomes a heavenly-choreographed dance.

Marriage Requires Leaving and Cleaving

In marriage God creates a new family unit. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife..." (2:24). Contrary to conventional thought, the marital bond is stronger than the filial bond. As powerful as the parent-child connection is, Jesus says the marital bond is stronger (Mark 10:6-9).

For this reason, the influence that the parents have over an unmarried child must decrease when that child gets married. Children may and should still seek advice. They must attempt to honor their parents in all things lawful. Parents may and should offer counsel. But parents and children must recognize that marriage fundamentally changes their relationship to each other. A man's wife must become the most important person in his life, and vice versa. Each can no longer give their parents' views equal consideration.

Marriage Is Celebrated Physically

Something powerful happens in marriage; two fleshs become one. At the risk of being overly graphic, in marriage, two complementary parts come together, emotionally, spiritually and physically. "...And they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked,

the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25). This verse does not simply *describe* how things were between Adam and Eve; it *prescribes* the proper marital state.

In marriage neither person has power over his own body, but has given it to the other (1 Cor. 7:3-5). Each marriage partner must render "conjugal rights" (ESV). Sexual abstinence should be temporary. This does not mean that sexual intimacy should be looked at as a chore (it never is at first!) but as a sacred trust both partners are called to develop together. Especially if the marriage bed has become frigid this counsel is hard to hear. In such a situation each partner must promise to obey God's conjugal command and, beginning with repentance, move to small expressions of affection being sensitive to the other's vulnerability. If necessary seek the help of a biblical counselor.

Marriage is for Kingdom Cultivation

God's institution of human marriage comes in the context of the calling he gave to man to cultivate and subjugate the earth (Gen. 2:18b, 20b). God's cultural design for man is, in the words of John Murray, to be "untiringly inspired by the apprehension of the Creator's glory and by the passion to apprehend and exalt that glory more." In the garden, Adam was to apply his abilities to a plot of ground in order to make it flourish (Gen. 2:15). For this task God gave him a co-worker, Eve. This is still the calling of both single and married people; to bring the principles of God's kingdom to bear in every area of life. God