

MARRIAGE: A GODLY DESIGN

by

Willie Oliver

Family Ministries Director,

North American Division

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Theme: God designed marriage to help meet the multiple needs of men and women in a context of affirmation, safety, and security.

Theme Text: Genesis 1:28; 2:18-24; 1 Corinthians 7:5; Ephesians 5:22-32

Presentation Notes: Throughout the following outline, numbers in parentheses (1), (2), (3) will indicate items from the section called *Sermon Illumination* which may be used for illustration. The addition of your personal illustrations will enhance the presentation.

Today we celebrate marriage as a gift of God to His people. While it is true that not everyone will marry or needs to be married, it is significant to note that marriage is God's ideal for men and women to help bring about growth and fulfillment in several areas of their lives.

Whereas many objectives were envisioned by God in the establishment of the marriage relationship, several should be highlighted as basic. Recognizing these most foundational objectives will help to give us a proper perspective as we confront the problems of marriages and families and as we contemplate the strengths of a well-functioning home.

Propagating the Race

One of the objectives of marriage is that of having children to propagate the human race. God's first command to the couple in Eden was "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth" (Genesis 1:28). The wise man Solomon states, "Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from Him" (Psalm 127:3).

It was God's plan for men and women united in holy matrimony to have children. In addition to the obvious reason for having children, that of continuing the race, God gave human beings the ability to reproduce so that we might more fully understand His relationship with us as His children. (1) God also gave in marriage the capacity to procreate so that men and women would learn to share instead of thinking only of themselves. (2)

Promoting Personality Growth and Grace

The marriage relation is not just a medium of God to propagate the race. God could have multiplied the human race through other means, as He did the angels. The more immediate purpose is to develop and mature two different personalities in a relationship of mutual fellowship and responsibilities. This is not to suggest the fiction of couples marrying and living "happily ever after." That happens only in storybook fantasies. The real life marriage of the Bible doesn't necessarily promise a dream life of perpetual bliss. Rather, marriage is the joining of two individuals of opposite sexes who vow to live, love, and work together through rain and shine, sickness and health, adversity or prosperity. (3)

A man and a woman each come with a unique personality to marriage. They also have been reared in different families, and though they may have similarities in culture, education, race, religion and social class, they often bring to marriage a different set of expectations. It is when these expectations are not met that conflicts arise and disenchantment sets in. After the honeymoon, a couple may find that the gears don't all mesh without squeaking; one zigs when the other zags, and the anticipated harmony and heaven do not seem to materialize. This discovery can be traumatic. The feeling may gradually develop that "we were not really meant from each other, we are incompatible." (4) This excuse, popular though it may be, is really an avoidance of reality. Marriage partners are not custom made before marriage. If a husband and wife think they have no problems or personality difficulties to work out together, they are in trouble. They have missed one of the real objectives for marriage, growth and personality development, which come through struggle. We should recognize that every individual created by God is a diamond in the rough. Diamonds, however, need grinding and polishing to develop their beauty. God instituted marriage as one of the central workshops in which that grinding and polishing process takes place. The dust and sparks may have to fly a bit in the workshop, but the two need each other in the refining process just as the diamond needs the grindstone.

Viewed in this way, marriage becomes a most significant divine arrangement in which a couple seeks to respond to God's call for personal growth, to understand the work of grace in relationships, and to learn more fully the lessons of interdependence upon one another and ultimate dependence upon Him. Problems and grievances they didn't know they had are brought to the surface and confronted. In wholesome and intimate communication, they tactfully help each other to "see themselves as others see them." (5)

Developing Intimacy

A third objective in marriage is to develop intimacy (6) and give expression to the appropriate sexual passions which God has built into human beings. This objective is related to the previously noted one of propagating the race, but is certainly not limited to that. Sexual desires do not automatically subside when child-bearing for a couple is ended. Paul recognized this fact by exhorting: "Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Corinthians 7:5). The apostle saw this as a legitimate and necessary function of the marriage relation and gave this admonition to married couples, not as a suggestion, but as an imperative command.

It should be noted further that Paul saw the possession of such sexual drives as one of the reasons for which God has instituted the marriage relationship. To prevent an improper expression of these passions, the apostle commanded that "each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2). Although this chapter in 1 Corinthians is often thought of as Paul's great treatise on the greater benefits of being single, it is here also that he solemnly recommends marriage for many as an appropriate setting in which a couple might give proper expression to their God-given sexuality.

As we deal with the matter of intimacy, it is important to understand that intimacy is not necessarily tantamount to sexual intercourse. It is especially important to note the differences that often surface between men and women as they relate to the matter of intimacy. (7) As married couples consider 1 Corinthians 7, it would be wise for husband and wife to talk together and reach a mutually satisfying understanding so that their different sexual expectations do not become a matter of insurmountable conflict in the marriage.

Representing Christ's Marriage to the Church

A final objective in marriage is suggested in Paul's counsel to the Church in Ephesians 5. There Paul gives instructions to husbands and wives, declaring that the marriage relationship is really a

representation or picture of the union of Christ with His Church. In several ways Paul relates the marriage of husband and wife to that of Christ's relationship with His church family (Ephesians 5:22-32). In fact, Paul uses the words of institution of marriage in Eden to describe this divine-human relationship. The mystery of two lovers becoming "one flesh" in marriage is fulfilled in a special way in Christ's marriage to the church.

This cosmic and divine relationship gives marriage a whole new perspective. It puts marriage on the highest plane imaginable. It declares that God is specifically using the institution of marriage to portray that eternal union of Christ the Son of God with His people, the Church. No event in all the divine calendar is as important as the coming event in which the Father will consummate the union of His Son with His "glorious bride" (Ephesians 5:27). Although human relations are often temporary and unsatisfying, the divine-human relationship will be permanent and completely fulfilling. The people that make up that bride are those whom God is seeking today as He builds His church. They will forever be His closest companions as He reigns over the universe and institutes the high adventures of His eternal enterprises and delights.

No wonder then that the high ideals of faithfulness, purity, and love are strictly enjoined on the marriage relationship. They portray Christ's relationship with His eternal bride, a relationship of the highest order. That is why we are to love each other despite differences, for we dimly portray Christ's love for the Church. Paul strongly implies that this is one of the principal objectives in marriage in the divine agenda. Even the objective of propagating the race is really secondary to the divine portrayal of Christ's eternal relationship with His people. The real objective of marriage is to reflect, in a typical way, the love relationship between God and His people and to implant and perfect that love in human personalities. "Marriage is God's workshop or garden in which He is growing and maturing personalities for eternity." This objective should be recognized by every Christian couple so that the ups and downs of their marriage experience can be taken in proper stride. The rose garden they had hoped for in marriage can materialize only as God is recognized as the Gardener and the pruning and praising processes are properly appreciated. The fragrance and beauty of the relationship are brought out by their mutual discipline and delights in the plan of God.

Conclusion

God's plan is a perfect plan. God created marriage for children to be born and nurtured in a home where there is love and peace. God created marriage for husbands and wives to grow in their marriage relationship and grow as human beings. God made marriage so that men and women could enjoy the sexual passions that He has given to them, in a context of intimacy, love, affirmation, and commitment. God made marriage to help us understand more fully His love for the Church, His bride.

May this Christian Marriage Day be one of rejoicing, as we recommit ourselves to permanence and peace in our marriages, endeavoring to give glory and honor to God for the things He has done and continues to do for us.

Sermon Illumination

One (1): The Influence of Bearing and Rearing Children. "After the birth of his first son, Enoch reached a higher experience; he was drawn into a closer relationship with God. He realized more fully his own obligations and responsibility as a son of God. And as he saw the child's love for its father, its simple trust in his protection; as he felt the deep, yearning tenderness of his own heart for that first-born son, he learned a precious lesson of the wonderful love of God to men in the gift

of His Son, and the confidence which the children of God may repose in their heavenly Father" (White, 1952, p. 160).

Two (2): God Planned for Families. "A childless house is a desolate place. The hearts of the inmates are in danger of becoming selfish, of cherishing a love for their own ease, and consulting their own desires and conveniences. They gather sympathy to themselves, but have little to bestow upon others" (White, 1952, p. 159).

Three (3): The Blending of Two Lives. "The blessing of God in the home where this union shall exist is as the sunshine of heaven, because it is the Lord's ordained will that man and wife should be linked together in holy bonds of union, under Jesus Christ, with Him to control, and His spirit to guide. . . .

"God wants the home to be the happiest place on earth, the very symbol of the home in heaven. Bearing the marriage responsibilities in the home, linking their interests with Jesus Christ, leaning upon His arm and His assurance, husband and wife may share a happiness in this union that angels of God commend" (White, 1952, p. 102).

Four (4): Alienation in Marriage. "Satan is ever ready to take advantage when any matter of variance arises, and by moving upon the objectionable, hereditary traits of character in husband or wife, he will try to cause the alienation of those who have united their interests in a solemn covenant before God. In the marriage vows they have promised to be as one, the wife covenanting to love and obey her husband, the husband promising to love and cherish his wife. If the law of God is obeyed, the demon of strife will be kept out of the family, and no separation of interests will take place, no alienation of affection will be permitted" (White, 1952, p. 106).

Five (5): Christ Brings Unity. "If the will of God is fulfilled, the husband and wife will respect each other and cultivate love and confidence. Anything that would mar the peace and unity of the family should be firmly repressed, and kindness and love should be cherished. He who manifests the spirit of tenderness, forbearance, and love will find that the same spirit will be reflected upon him" (White, 1952, p. 120).

Six (6): Intimacy. "Becoming one flesh involves sexual union: 'Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived' (Gen. 4:1). In their drive to be joined together, a drive men and women have felt since the days of Adam and Eve, each couple reenacts the first love story. The act of sexual intimacy is the nearest thing to a physical union possible for them; it represents the closeness the couple can know emotionally and spiritually as well. Christian married love should be characterized by warmth, joy, and delight (Prov. 5:18,19)." (Seventh-day Adventists Believe, p. 298)

Seven (7): More on Intimacy. "In that most intimate of friendships called marriage, the opportunities and demands for a relationship of depth are pervasive. Intimacy is an art with as many expressions as there are artists to express it. It is often expressed in the sharing of thoughts and ideas and feelings. It is expressed in shared joys and sorrows, in respect for the deepest needs of the other person, and in the struggle to understand him [or her]. Intimacy does not suggest a saccharine sentimentalism; it can be expressed in constructive conflict which is the growing edge of a relationship. . . .

"Intimacy grows as couples dare to risk greater openness. As each partner becomes more honest

with himself/[herself] and more aware of his/[her] own faults, and his/[her] own needs to blame the other for their conflict, the wall between them begins to come down, block by block. Each of us feels the need to hide at times, behind a mask of self-sufficiency or self-justification, particularly when conflict threatens or self-esteem is weak. Only as each individual relaxes his/[her] mask and becomes more transparent (openness) can intimacy develop in the relationship" (Clinebell & Clinebell, 1970, pp. 24,25).

References

Clinebell, Howard J. & Clinebell, Charlotte H. (1970). *The Intimate Marriage*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.

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Seventh-day Adventists Believe. (1988). Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.