

The Foundation of Marriage: What are the Roles?

Ricardo Campos, Teaching Elder Grace Chapel, Orange, CA March 20, 2011

I. Introduction

Though the world may have a cynical view of marriage, God reveals that marriage was meant to be a unique and tight bond between the husband and wife. The oneness that unites them is the foundation upon which everything else is based. As individuals they are equal before God. But as husband and wife, they have their respective roles: he is the head and she is his “helper.” However, man is not to abuse his authority over the woman. Because of man’s rebellion against God, their relationship is more difficult. They both have a handicap: she will want to dominate him and he will fail to use love and grace in his exercise of authority. But the man must remember that he would not exist without the woman. Finally, if submitting to authority is distasteful, we should remember Christ’s example: though He was equal to the Father in power and glory, He willingly submitted to Him, even unto death.

II. Is a Successful Marriage Even Possible?

What God says about marriage is relevant to everyone, both young and old, because everyone has to deal with intimacy and relationships. One would think that Christians would fare better than non-Christians in marriage and divorce. However, statistics show that Christians are doing worse than their atheist counterparts. With this track record, why should anyone listen to Christians concerning marriage? Is there something wrong with God’s advice or are God’s people failing to apply it?

Looking at marriage in general, is a successful marriage even possible? It seems that marriage turns happy people into irritating, controlling, and hard-to-get-along-with people. So what’s the answer?

In this series we’ll be looking at marriage as a whole and its various aspects: love, divorce, sex, finances, parenting, and dating. If you have a specific question, please email it to me, cousinricky@dslextreme.com.

Does the Gospel have anything to do with marriage? Absolutely. Jesus Christ didn’t just die to save us from hell; He came to give us everlasting life that starts right here, right now, a life that is supposed to be abundant, John 3:16; 10:10. Every wrong decision we make in our lives—our friendships, our work relationships, and our marriages—He came to redeem, Titus 2:14. How does Christ redeem our marriages and relationships? He does it by revealing the truth about marriage and by teaching us how to live it.

The world’s advice on marriage is two-fold: (1) marriage is a prison that turns happy people into irritating people or (2) if you want a successful marriage, you must master one or more key issues: communication, sex, finances, etc.

God’s advice on marriage includes issues such as sex and finances, but He also provides the foundation upon which all of these and every other aspect of marriage is lived.

III. The Foundation of Marriage: What are the Roles?

Gen. 1:26–28, the Lord teaches us that: (1) men and women are equals before God because they are both made in His image, (2) God gave the husband and wife two mandates, have children and be the best you can be in life, whether you're the office clerk or the president of the company, and (3) the two mandates require that the husband and wife work together, otherwise both tasks are impossible.

Gen. 2:18–24, God teaches us that: (1) man was not meant to be alone (Adam noticed that he was missing his female counterpart), (2) marriage has one fundamental characteristic: oneness. God made Eve out of Adam because He always intended for the married couple to be one. Thus, God reunited Adam with his rib, Eve, and they became one flesh. Therefore, unity is there by design. It's a unity that is foundational to everything the couple does (communication, parenting, sex, everything), and (3) the woman is to be the "helper" and the man the authority over her. However, God never condones tyrannical lordship over the woman. Men who mistreat their wives this way will have to answer to God, not only for this sin, but for causing their wives to vilify men in general and God in particular.

Gen. 3:16, the word "desire" at the end of the verse can have a sexual connotation as in Song of Solomon 7:10. But it can also mean "desire to dominate" as in Genesis 4:7. Since this is God's judgment after man's rebellion (3:6), it means a desire to dominate. Thus, part of the curse is that the woman will want to dominate her husband, but he will end up dominating her.

This again reveals man's position of authority over the woman. But it also shows the handicaps that both have to deal with: wives will want to dominate their husbands and husbands, instead of exercising authority with love, grace, and honor (as Adam did, Genesis 2:23, even after his rebellion, 3:20), will want to dominate their wives. This is why we see women who dominate their boyfriends/husbands (though the man is also guilty here) and why we have phrases like "This is a man's world" and "glass ceiling." The man is to exercise authority over the woman, but it's to be done with love and grace. A man dominating a woman is no more biblical than a woman dominating a man.

1 Cor. 11:1–3, though the woman is under man's authority, man is under Christ's, and Christ is under God's. Christ's example teaches us that instead of rebelling against authority, we should willingly submit to it. He, though equal with God in power and glory, willingly submitted to His Father, even unto death, Philippians 2:5–8.

1 Cor. 11:11–12, though man's head over the woman, he's not independent of her. Without the woman, man would not exist.

IV. Conclusion

On the surface it appears as though God condones a tyrannical male-dominated society. But when we look close at how God designed marriage, we see a well-orchestrated unity between husband and wife, where the wife is the missing piece that man cannot do without and the husband is supposed to be a gracious and loving leader who honors his wife.