

What is Marriage: Questions Answered Part 1

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MARRIAGE

What exactly is marriage? Marriage is two people becoming “one flesh,” Genesis 2:18, 23–24. In every way, the husband and wife are to become one (mind, body, and soul). Additionally, our oneness with Christ, Ephesians 4:3–6; 5:30, is supposed to affect our oneness with each other, Ephesians 4:25ff; 5:22–33.

What’s the husband’s role? He’s the leader and authority in the marriage, 1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:22–24; 1 Peter 3:1. But his authority must be exercised as a servant, Ephesians 5:25–27.

What’s the wife’s role? She’s the helper that completes that which is lacking in her husband, Genesis 2:18.

If your wife or husband doesn’t fulfill their role, can you make them? The central command God gives the husband and wife is to die for each other, Ephesians 5:2, 21–33, period. He doesn’t then say, “and if they’re not obeying their command, make them.” You’re supposed to first concern yourself with your command not your spouse’s.

Does the wife have to submit to her husband, if so, what does this mean? Yes, she has to respect her husband’s authority in everything, Ephesians 5:24, 33. However, as her husband’s helper she is not to be a silent partner. Yes, at times submission will require her silence, but other times it will require her wise counsel or action, Genesis 2:18; Proverbs 31:10–31; 1 Peter 3:1–6.

Does the husband have to die for his wife; if so, how? Yes. He must die for her literally if need be, but more importantly daily. He must put her interests before his own so that she will be the best wife she can be, Ephesians 5:25–27. He must also remember that she is his equal before God and so must honor her as someone special, 1 Peter 3:7.

Is marriage a 50/50 partnership or a 51/49 or a 70/30 or 99/1 partnership? God placed the man as the authority in the marriage, 1 Corinthians 11:3, and the woman has to submit to him in everything, Ephesians 5:24. Thus, marriage is a 50.5/49.5 partnership. However, our Lord redefined how authority is to be exercised. Instead of lording it over another, we are to be their servants, Matthew 20:25–28.

What is the marital relationship like, a boss and employee or king and queen?

Although the man is the authority and the woman the helper, the relationship between them is not supposed to be like master and slave. It is to be more like king and queen: in 1 Peter 3:6 God reveals that it's supposed to be like Abraham and Sarah's relationship, where Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him "lord." She was not being subservient; she was respecting his authority. When she had the legal right to dismiss Hagar, she asked Abraham first, Genesis 16:6.

Do the man and woman have an inherent handicap? Yes, they do. Wives, instead of respecting their husband's authority, will want to dominate them. And husbands, instead of exercising authority with love, grace, and honor, will want to rule over their wives, Genesis 3:16.

What does the ideal wife look like, subservient, barefoot, and pregnant or can she actually have a mind of her own? The ideal wife in God's eyes is a strong independent woman who makes the most of her talents and abilities. However, independence does not mean that she undermines her husband's authority. Instead, she respects it and her husband implicitly trusts her because of it, Proverbs 31:11–12.

What's the purpose of marriage? God gave two central commands to husbands and wives: procreate and exercise dominion over all the earth, Genesis 1:28. Thus, man's job is to populate the earth and make the most of this earth. This meant that one day there would be people living in every corner of the world and that man would eventually build structures so tall they would call them *skyscrapers*. Additionally, marriage mirrors God's oneness. God exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Genesis 1:26; John 6:27; John 1:1; Acts 5:3–4; Ephesians 4:30; John 17:21. Marriage is one in two persons: husband and wife, Matthew 19:6. The husband and wife are to live in community with one another as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live in community.

What's the relationship between Christ and the Church and how does this affect marriage? Christ is the Husband and the Church is His Bride. This serves as the model husbands and wives must follow, Ephesians 5:22–33. Therefore, husbands are to die for their wives as Christ died for the Church and wives are to submit to their husbands as the Church is subject to Christ.

LOVE

What is love? Love includes strong emotions, but at its core is self-sacrifice, 1 Corinthians 13:4–8a. It means that you are willing to put the object of your love before yourself. Christ gives us the example to follow, 1 John 3:16.

Is there such a thing as ‘falling out of love’? How does this happen? This is NEVER supposed to happen. Marriage is the husband and wife sharing their deepest intimacy with each other, mind, body, and soul. This is not a Hallmark card; it is the way God designed marriage. When done properly, the bond between the husband and wife gets stronger year by year. This is why, after 50yrs of marriage, couples say that they love each other more today than they did the day they married. When couples fail to share and protect their intimacy and instead look for it elsewhere, they will inevitably “fall out of love” and “in love” with someone else. The intimacy is there; it’s just being shared with the wrong person. And at the heart of it is a husband who failed to love his wife sacrificially and a wife who refused to respect unconditionally.

How do you show love toward your spouse? The husband is supposed to die for his wife, Ephesians 5:25, and the wife is supposed to submit to her husband in everything, Ephesians 5:24. These are daunting commands but we are able to obey them because we are God’s children in Christ, Ephesians 5:1, 30. And His call to us is sacrificial love; we are to love our spouse the way Christ love us, Ephesians 5:2.

DIVORCE

What is divorce? Since marriage is God joining two people into “one flesh,” Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:6, divorce is tearing that flesh apart.

Is divorce OK with God? No, it’s not, in fact He hates it, Malachi 2:16. Divorce is undoing what God Himself has joined together, Matthew 19:6.

Can I divorce for any reason? No, you cannot. Divorce is permitted if your spouse committed sexual immorality, Matthew 5:32, or if your spouse is a non-Christian and refuses to stay in the marriage, 1 Corinthians 7:15.

What if he/she commits adultery, what should I do? You should do everything in your power to keep the unity of the marriage. God prefers that we follow His example and stay married though our spouse cheated on us, Jeremiah 3:8, 14–18. And if you cannot forgive and remain married, then God gives you permission to divorce, Matthew 19:9.

Is separation OK, what if my husband beats me or is a drug addict, can I move out?

God doesn't intend for wives to be mistreated by their husbands, physically or otherwise. In such cases, the wife does have recourse against her husband. She can approach him as a fellow Christian and confront his sin, even asking the Church for help, Matthew 18:15–17. She can also involve the authorities God put in place to address his criminal behavior, Romans 13:1–4. If she has to, she can move out of the house until he repents of his behavior.

Growing Apart: We just grew apart, so we divorced. Why does this happen?

Growing apart doesn't just happen. It takes two people actively pursuing the destruction of their marriage. He refuses to love sacrificially; she refuses to respect unconditionally. And both refuse to share their intimacy wholeheartedly, which at times will require them to forgive an unforgivable spouse.

Did God divorce His wife? No, He did not. In spite of Israel's many adulteries, God refused to divorce her, Hosea 2 (cf. Jeremiah 3:8, 14–18). In 1 Peter 1:15–16, God calls on us to be holy as He is holy. When it comes to marriage, being holy means following His example and treating marriage as an unbreakable bond, even in the face of adultery.

What if I'm married to an unbeliever or a believer who won't have anything to do with God, can I divorce? Regardless of who you're married to, it is God's desire that you remain married, Matthew 19:6. However, if you are married to an unbeliever who refuses to stay in the marriage, then you can divorce, 1 Corinthians 7:15. But if the unbelieving spouse is willing to stay in the marriage, then you cannot divorce, 1 Corinthians 7:12–13. Finally, if you're married to a believing spouse who wants nothing to do with God, this is not only no grounds for divorce, God demands that you stay in the marriage, Ephesians 5:25; 1 Peter 3:1.

Are prenuptial agreements OK? What is marriage? Oneness. Does a prenuptial agreement promote the oneness of marriage? No, it does not. In fact, it does the opposite. It basically says, "This is my stuff, that's your stuff." Thus, although there *may* be a legitimate reason for a prenuptial agreement, it is a bad idea because you're starting your marriage by first planning your divorce.