

Marriage Takes 3

Christian marriage requires three people in close relation: the Lord, a husband, and a wife. The invisible partner in a Christian marriage is who makes it a distinctively Christian. Marriage is a very important institution. It forms the basis of the family unit. Fundamental to the marriage relationship is the idea of covenant. The Bible presents marriage as a covenant between a man and woman to commit to one another in the fear of God

Some have said that marriages are made in heaven. The fact of the matter is that marriages are made on earth even if God did plan them in heaven. A successful Christian marriage does require a joint union of the couple to the Lord.

There is nothing magical about a Christian marriage - period! Believers get married for the same reasons as non-believers: sex, companionship, to have children, and a desire for fulfillment – these motivations play a crucial role. But the Christian couple have a greater resource in the Lord of their lives to make the marriage fulfilling. They also have a greater responsibility to bear with one another and to care for one another. In order to handle stresses and strains, there must be an underlying foundation of commitment to one another that remains unbroken and strong throughout the marriage life.

It is true that the Bible uses the symbol of marital union, especially expressed in sexual intercourse, as a teaching device. Actually, Paul in Ephesians says a Christian marriage should reflect something of the intimate union of Christ and his people. Then from the greater reality of the Christian's relationship to Christ, the apostle expresses some concrete applications for the Christian family life.

In Ephesians chapter 5 we find the pattern for a Christian marriage.

“Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is head and savior...husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself

up for her to make her holy... in this same way husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies... after all no one ever hates his own body but he feeds and cares for it, just *as Christ does for the church*. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh.” Now this passage of Scripture which also incorporates other Bible passages tells us a lot about the kind of relationship Christian spouses should have toward one another.

In the divine ordering of things, God made humanity male and female. Marriage and sex were God's idea at creation. Thus, our desire for marriage and its hoped-for benefits of completion and fulfillment are God-given desires. But a Christian marriage can only truly be achieved through God's active presence in the relationship.

Moreover, there is a social ordering that we must be careful to observe. In marriage a new family is formed, and this is one of primary social obligation. There is a leaving of old family units, together with the formation of a new one. Yet the spouse does not come cut off from all the influences and attachments of the original family.

In all things the Lord Jesus, and his love and relationship to the Church, form the pattern for the Christian expression of marriage. He shows the way to enter richly and fully into the practice of married life.

The husband is to manifest loving self-sacrifice. He is to forget himself and hold nothing back in caring for his wife. Reverent submission and devotion to her husband is to be the action of the wife. She is to find satisfaction and fulfillment in serving the will and well-being of her husband.

There are number of practical actions that will help a marriage stay strong and Christ-centered. Involvement in the life of a Christian assembly is very important. But one day of worship is not sufficient. It will greatly strengthen a Christian

marriage to have a family worship time where the Bible is read together aloud, prayer offered up, and a psalm or hymn is sung together.

In addition, there must be an acceptance of one another's weaknesses and quirks. Offences toward one another will occur and we must forgive one another just Christ has forgiven us. Sharing is crucial in the areas of finances, and child discipline. And having a guiding philosophy in these areas will reduce conflict.

Also, communication is a key to a healthy, growing relationship. Marriage partners must commit to and spend quality time together. However, each spouse must allow the other to have friends and not be possessive or smothering.

It is only in Christ and with his presence that this divine pattern for marriage can work. Although the husband is to lead or steer in the marriage, he is not to be self-seeking or self-serving. Self-centeredness is contrary to a Christian marriage. Both husband and wife are to have a self-forgetful love for one another. This can only be possible as the husband and wife give themselves first to the Lord Jesus in reverent submission and devotion. Then it is possible for them to be mutually submissive to one another through the fulfillment of their various roles in the marriage. Giving is always at the heart of the Christian union. Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." He also said, "Give and it shall be given unto you."

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