

God's Design for Marriage: **A Theology of Marriage From** **Genesis to Revelation**

By John Stemberger

Genesis 2:24

Introduction:

Ravi Zacharias has said that “if there is one clue to the meaning of life, it can be found in *relationships*.”

And one of the most central and important of all *human* relationships is marriage.

But talking about marriage as a topic is really an un-common thing. Marriage itself is a common thing-- but talking *about marriage* as an institution, is kind of like talking about the oxygen we breathe. And marriage is a little bit like the air we breathe. Oxygen is everywhere and all around us. Yet we don't really *think about* Oxygen because we can't see it, we can't touch it and it's not tangible. And so we can often take air for granted. But it is only when our air is altered at the essence of what it is at a molecular level or is severely polluted, do we suddenly realize how important this stuff is and we realize we need it immediately to survive!

Marriage is like that also. Marriage is all around us and everywhere. Yet we can't really see it, or touch it. And we really don't have conversations about marriage as a human institution. And so we can easily take marriage for granted.

But I would submit to you that it is only when marriage is altered in the essence of what it is, as the union of one man and one woman, do we suddenly realize how important this stuff is and we need it immediately to survive for the next generation!

So much of what we believe is really just made up of ideas and assumptions that we soak up from the world-- which may or may not line up with God's word and his design for human relationships. And things are changing in our world. And changing really fast. Our values, our standards and our beliefs are changing *so quickly* as a society that we have to ask ourselves...

How does *God* feel about all these changes?

Now you would certainly not go out and buy a new Harley Davidson or a new Lexus SC and then *just guess* about what the owner's manual has to say about the type of gas and intervals of maintenance the car should have. The beauty of the Bible is that it is like the owner's manual --or the operational manual for the human experience. The more we can align our beliefs, our values, our passions and our actions to God's design for the greatest product he has ever created, the healthier, happier and most optimal fulfillment we will have in life.

The framers had this beautiful saying they placed into the Declaration that says this: "*We hold these truths to be self-evident...*" But we are living in a day and in an age where there is no self-evident truth at all. Even the most basic pre-suppositions of life are up for grabs. What is a man? What is a woman? What is a life? What is a marriage?

And we live in a world where we are seeing cataclysmic social change that is unprecedented in the history of human affairs. And while much social change has been good in our country's history, the changes we are seeing today are being directed at radically redefining human institutions that serve civilization since the beginning of time.

Things that were *unthinkable*, just 15, 20 years ago, are now not only thinkable, but they are being promoted as virtuous and have been afforded the full force of legal protection and in some cases have been smuggled into the constitution illegitimately.

As the Bible says, we as a society now call "evil good and good evil." But do we have the discernment to know the difference between good and bad, virtue and vice and know how to respond?

Again, how does *God* feel about these changes?

So let's look into God's word and look at His design for the most intimate and ultimate of all human relationships -- marriage.

1. **Marriage is Rooted in Creation.**

Genesis 1:26-27

Then God said, "Let *Us* make man in *Our* own image, according to *Our* likeness... And God created man in His own image, in the image of God he created him, *male and female*, He created *them*."

Genesis 2:24

"For this reason, a man shall leave his Father and Mother and shall cleave to his wife and they shall become *one* flesh"

So these verses provide the basis for *God's Design* in Marriage which is rooted in creation prior to the fall of man.

Marriage is the *first institution* that God creates.

Marriage is created and established *before* civil government, and even *before* the local Church itself.

And Marriage is God's design for the most intimate and lasting expressions of all human relationships.

Marriage is the fountain from which children and families spring forth into life.

Now some are given the grace to live a single life and may even have a calling to devote themselves to the Lord and serve him singularly --but most of us will be called to be married.

Philosophers and thinkers have tried for centuries to reconcile and make some sense of finding unity in all the diversity found in the world. On our dollar bill are the words *E Pluribus Unum* meaning, "Out of the many – One". The word University, is a word which brings unity and diversity

together. Many specialty colleges exist together in one “universe” and on one campus.

2. Marriage Reflects Something of the Nature of God.

One of the most fascinating things about God’s design for marriage is that in marriage (and to some extent in the family), we see a picture of the nature and character of our God. God, the Bible teaches, exists in perfect harmony in the form of relationship on a high level with three persons eternally existing in love and communication within the Godhead.

In marriage we also see this harmonizing of unity and diversity where the two great parts of humanity become one without losing their unique identities and roles as individual persons. And in marriage (as in the Godhead) we see the harmonization of unity and diversity.

So God’s design for marriage actually reflects something of the character of God Himself.

Listen to Pastor Jim Garlow of Skyline Church in California:

“We know that God is neither male nor female. Yet we are made “in his image.” In spite of the fact that we are, as individuals, made in the image of God, the true, full image is expressed when the two halves of humanity complement each other and become one.

If I understand the role of marriage properly, a male, by himself, is not fully representative of all the descriptors of the image of God.... At the same time, if I understand the early pages of Genesis correctly, a female, by herself, cannot do justice to the full spectrum of the image of God.

However, when the two complimentary halves of humanity unite - physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally and psychologically – the image of God, containing both tenderness and strength, is manifested. Male and female are made anatomically, emotionally and spiritually for oneness. Husband and wife, joined together, represent the full spectrum of the image of God.”

Author and Theologian Wayne Grudem writes:

“In marriage itself we reflect the nature of God in the fact that as men and women, we have equality in importance but difference in roles from the time that God created us....

The fact that God created two distinct persons as male and female, rather than just one man, is part of our being in the image of God because it can be seen to reflect to some degree the plurality of persons within the Trinity.

Though the unity is not exactly the same, the unity in a family among husband, wife, and children does *also* reflect to some degree the interpersonal unity yet diversity of persons among members of the Trinity.”

3. Marriage is Re-affirmed by Jesus.

In **Matthew 19:4-6** Jesus himself repeats **Genesis 2:24**, and again confirms God’s Design for marriage and says:

“Have you not read, that he who created them from the beginning, made them male and female. And said for this reason a man shall leave his Father and Mother and shall cleave to his wife and they shall become one flesh? Consequently they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let no man separate.”

And then in **Mark 10:6-8** Jesus again says...

“But from the beginning of creation, God made them male *and* female. For this reason a man shall leave his Father and Mother and shall cleave to his wife and they shall become one flesh. Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh.”

Jesus' teaching on marriage includes:

a. Marriage was instituted by God at the beginning - **Mt 19:3-4**

b. Marriage was designed for those created male and female – **Mt 19:4**

- c. Marriage is for man and wife, who become 'one flesh' (produce offspring) - **Mt 19:5**
- d. Marriage is a union that God joins, not the state - **Mt 19:6**
- e. Man may try to put asunder, but only God puts asunder - **Mt 19:7-9**

3. Marriage is Explained by Paul as a Great Mystery.

Serious minded Christians must be comfortable with mystery.

Why? Because we are *finite* beings studying an *infinite* God. The Bible says “we see in part and we know in part”. We see through a glass or a mirror dimly. We do not have the full picture until we see him “face to face”.

So mystery means that we know something, but we do not know everything. God has spoken clearly in many things. In others there is some mystery.

In marriage, we have a divine tension as God has both spoken about it with both great clarity and also calls it a “*great mystery*”.

In **Ephesians 5:25-31** Paul repeats Genesis 1:26 to the church at Ephesus and peeks into the theology and mystery behind God’s Design for marriage....

“That he might present herself to Himself the church in all her glory having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing: but that she should be holy and blameless...”

“For this reason a man shall leave his Father and Mother and shall cleave to his wife and they shall become one flesh. This *mystery* is *great*: but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.”

Marriage is a mysterious Symbol of Christ’s love for the church!

All of our marriages, as difficult as they can be at times, are still a symbol that God has placed in the earth to reflect something of His love for His people and therefore something about the Gospel itself!

And now finally in the book of Revelations we see that:

4. Marriage is Revealed by John as the Culmination of all things.

The Mystery Paul speaks of in Ephesians is then revealed further in the book of Revelation as the Church's Union with Christ for All Eternity.

Revelation 21:9

"Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."

God the Father is fashioning a Bride for His Son, the Groom, such that somehow we the universal church are someday going to be joined to Christ for all eternity. So in the Bible we see that the Church is the Bride of Christ.

Paul Billheimer, in his book *Destined for the Throne* says:

"Romance is at the heart of the universe and is the key to all existence. From all eternity God purposed that at some time in the future, His Son should have an Eternal Companion, described by John the Revelator as "the bride", the lamb's wife (Rev. 3:21). John further revealed that this Eternal Companion in God's eternal purpose is to share the Bridegroom's throne following the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev 3:21). Here we see the ultimate purpose, the climatic goal of history. The one purpose of the universe from all eternity is the production and preparation of an eternal companion for the Son, called the Bride, the Lamb's wife."

This is really a deep and profound meaning of marriage that many Christians have not considered and which answers in part the question why did God create man?

So in review, God's Design for marriage is weaved all throughout the scripture from beginning to end.

- 1) Rooted in Creation in the Old Testament,
- 2) Reflects something of God's Nature in the Earth
- 2) Re-Affirmed by Jesus in the Gospels
- 3) Explained by Apostle Paul in the New Testament
- 4) Revealed by John in Revelations

Other than the Cross, I can think of no symbol in all of scripture, Christian theology, or in the Bible itself from Genesis to Revelation that is more central to the heart of God, and more central to His purposes and plan than God's design for marriage.

So God's design for Marriage not only tells us something about who God is, but it gives us a picture of Gospel and ultimately explains the culmination of all things. Wow! How can we ever see marriage again in the same way.

Marriage celebrates the beauty and diversity of the two parts of the human race coming together, and life springs forth from it and the next generation is born. It is central to the human experience and is the crown point of all human relationships.

And when marriage is redefined, polluted or defiled by any perversion of God's design it does damage to the holy and divine purposes for which it was created.

Therefore we must protect and defend God's design for marriage in our personal lives, in our public policy and in our theology. The attack on marriage from divorce, from homosexual activists and from selfishness displayed in our own marriages, all must be fiercely resisted and defeated.