

UNDERSTANDING MARRIAGE

Biblical Truth and Good Advice about Relationship and Structure in Marriage

Christian Marriage is the model from which western marriage is explained. The unique “one-flesh” relationship and family structure described by Jesus Christ and the early church writers create the godly marriage, where both husband and wife are able to resist the seduction of worldly ideas and destructive temptations.

As western culture forgets its roots, the wonder of marriage is lost. Cheap and shallow connections, involving exploitation, insecurity, betrayal and pain then become the norm. In order to reverse that, and rediscover godly marriage that works, we need to have marriage explained clearly, in terms of the Christian marriage, so the most effective relationships can be established. This will not just benefit the couple, but also their children and the society in which they live.

The following explanations about marriage and relationship come out of the various books I have written on the subject, including *'Family Horizons'*, *'Marriage Horizons'* and *'Mending Marriages'*. Those books are reviewed at www.familyhorizons.net.

WHAT IS MARRIAGE?

In the **secular** community marriage is based on many different ideas, such as:

- Assigned Duties.
- Mutual Obligation.
- The 50:50 Partnership.
- It's a Man's World.
- The Idolised Woman.
- Something is Better than Nothing.
- Let's See if it Works.
- The Obligatory Duty.
- The Contract.

Christians can be confident about marriage and not be distracted by the ideas promoted in the popular culture, movies, press, music and television. The Bible reveals what true marriage is, from its invention in the Garden of Eden to its ultimate application in the marriage of Christ and the Church, at the end of the world.

Marriage has two main components - **Relationship** and **Structure**. Marriage is a relationship, but it is one that must be built on a God-ordained pattern, which gives it structure and enduring stability.

1. RELATIONSHIP IN TWO PARTS

Marriage involves an *interpersonal relationship* as well as an *official relationship*.

The interpersonal relationship is between a man and a woman who make a life-long commitment to each other. The quality of interpersonal relationship obviously impacts the way the couple relate, work together, solve problems and enjoy life together. But Marriage is also an “official” relationship, apart from the interpersonal fellowship of the couple.

The **official relationship** begins when a couple join together in marriage. God grants them a special “one-ness” that the Bible calls “one flesh”. Jesus called this being “joined together” by God. Once a couple is given **official “one flesh” status** by God they can enjoy legitimate sexual intimacy. Such activity without the “one flesh” bond is immoral, as either fornication or adultery. Immoral behaviour damages those who engage in it. So the “official” relationship is incredibly important. Marital intimacy before marriage is immoral, since the couple do not yet have the official “one flesh” bond which God gives them when they become “man and wife”. **God’s “one flesh” bond is *not* created by the couple and cannot be dissolved by them.** God establishes it and only He can dissolve it. Jesus taught; do not separate those “God has joined together”. This is the divine “glue” which God uses to make two people into one unique physical entity.

A happy couple without the official “one flesh” relationship are not married. An unhappy couple with the official “one flesh” relationship are still married, even if they separate. So the most important relationship is not the sentimental secular one, but the official bond God establishes. If people understood its significance they would take marriage much more seriously than many do today.

2. CORRECT STRUCTURAL DESIGN

God prescribed the Structure for marriage, involving both **Responsibility** and **Support**. The **husband** is the one who must take responsibility for the marriage, wife and family. He is accountable to God. The **wife** is the one who must support the husband’s leadership.

The man was designed to fulfil God’s special plans for his life. The wife was designed to empower the man to do that. The man, then, must love his wife and bless her for her commitment. The wife, then, must submit to the husband and energise the call of God on his life.

These ideas seem old-fashioned in today’s secularised culture. Yet, possibly to the surprise of today’s generation, they have worked wonderfully well for millennia. The modern, so-called ‘progressive’ ideas, which abandon God’s prescribed structure of responsibility and support, are far less satisfying, stable or effective as those which follow God’s design.

SOME POINTERS TO MAKING MARRIAGE SUCCESSFUL

In preparing for marriage, or in making a marriage stronger, there are a number of things that will make an important contribution. If people do not have these qualities they will find it harder to make their marriage work. These issues are discussed in more detail in our book *‘Marriage Horizons’*.

- **Personal Wholeness.**

That is, freedom from moral compromise and damage. Damaged people are unable to function as they should, especially in their marriage.

- **Commitment.**

Remaining faithful in the face of difficulty. Weak people who cannot make and stand by faithful commitments will be a black hole in the marriage.

- **Willingness to Forgive and Show Grace.**

Not holding resentment or bad attitudes. It is essential that people learn how to forgive others, especially in the face to face, daily challenges or marriage.

- **High Moral Standards.**

Rejecting temptation. People with loose morals will betray their marriage and hurt their spouse, their family and themselves.

- **Balanced Thinking.**

Having a clear understanding of truth. Distorted ideas about reality, oneself or others cause people to respond wrongly and to mishandle the challenges of marriage.

- **Willingness to Contribute.**

Maintaining a non-selfish approach. Marriage is a team effort and so team players who will make a strong contribution will be the most valuable in a marriage.

- **Openness and Transparency.**

Free to be yourself and accept others. Interpersonal relationships, especially the intimate relationship of marriage, require people to be confidently open and unashamed.

- **Courage and Confidence.**

Unafraid to step out with God's help. Fearfulness eats people's confidence and messes with their lives. It is to be avoided in marriage.

- **Willingness to be Wrong and Take Correction.**

Having a teachable heart. Stubborn and argumentative people damage their marriage, so teachableness and humility are vital qualities.

SOME SEDUCTIVE IDEAS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Seductive ideas, or lies, often draw people away from blessing and into the terrible mess of selfish action. What seems to promise 'gains' are often quicksand and loss. Watch out for these seductive ideas, discussed in more detail in *'Mending Marriages'*.

"I married the WRONG person" – You've got to be kidding!

"I DESERVE better than this" – Do you **really** want what you deserve?

"SOMEONE ELSE would make me happier" – How incredibly selfish of you!

"EVEN GOD could not fix my marriage" – How dare you think so! Nothing is impossible to God.

"ADULTERY has ended this marriage" – That's ridiculous! Millions of marriages survive adultery!

"God just wants me to be HAPPY" – God wants you to be HOLY and that will bring happiness.

"MY SITUATION is unique" – Rubbish!

SUMMARY

God invented marriage and designed it to work as a blessing. The only way to have marriage work and to be blessed is to build a godly marriage the way God designed it. If you cheat on the design you rob yourself of effectiveness and blessing. Don't blame God for your marriage troubles if you have rejected His wisdom and design. Humble yourself and submit to God's instructions. Then He will be happy to give you His grace to meet your needs. Otherwise, you're on your own and you don't have a chance!

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Based in Melbourne, Australia, he is married to Susan, and they have seven children and eight grandchildren. They have taught on family related issues for over 35 years and have proven their insights in their own family and in the many lives they touch.

Chris enriches his readers with wisdom and insight. He has written the *'Horizons' Series*, on Family, Marriage, Parenting and Manhood. He has also written *'Mending Marriages'* and will soon release books on Youth, Womanhood and Sexual issues.

Dr Field has a broad understanding of Biblical truth. He applies it to today with amazing relevance and application.

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