

Biblical Marriage & Singleness

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Society is in great upheaval over the topic of marriage. Everyone has an opinion, and the common thinking is that everybody's opinion is as good as anybody else's. But what does God say? What we believe about marriage is an authority question, not just a morality question.

God created the family.

God created the man from the dust of the ground (Gen 2:7), and brought the animals to him so he could name them. The animals were all created as pairs ("according to their kinds"), but Adam was alone without a suitable companion (Gen 2:18–20). God put Adam to sleep and formed the woman from one of his ribs (Gen 2:21–22). He brought the woman to the man and Adam named her "woman" (Gen 2:23), creating the first family.

God created marriage.

Marriage is not merely a human institution, set up for convenience or even procreation. God, in creating man and woman and bringing them together, created marriage.

Marriage was created by God in the Garden of Eden.

God established the pattern for marriage at creation when He brought the woman to the man. Then He provided this divine commentary on His institution of the family: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). God brought the woman to the man and ordained heterosexual marriage as the cornerstone of society. As intended by God, marriage was to be heterosexual and monogamous: one man and one woman for life.

This biblical pattern of marriage was validated by Jesus Christ.

In answer to a trick question about the legality of divorce in certain conditions under the Mosaic Law, Jesus made it clear that God ordained marriage to be between one man and one woman, united for life (Matt 19:3–6; Mark 10:6–9). In fact, Jesus even quoted Genesis 2:24 to support his point. Anything that varies from this pattern is against God's plan: in Jesus' words, "From the beginning it was not so" (Matt 19:8).

Jesus' argument against divorce was that every married couple is joined together by God. "So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt 19:6). Building on the statement from Genesis that Adam and Eve became "one flesh" or one person, Jesus concludes that God is the one who joins a husband and wife together. Man must not separate what God has joined. Marriage in God's plan is for life.

God's pattern for marriage pictures the New Testament Church.

Jesus Christ's relationship to his Bride, the Church, is spoken of in terms of a husband and wife (Eph 5:22–33). In fact, Genesis 2:24, the statement of God's purpose for joining man and woman in marriage, finds its ultimate fulfillment in the relationship between Christ and the Church (Eph 5:31–32). In other words, every human marriage, in a flawed way points to the gospel.

God created marriage, Jesus upheld that definition of marriage, and Paul revealed that the purpose of marriage is to glorify God by providing a picture of Christ and the church (Eph 5:31–32). But what about those who are not married?

Marriage is not ultimate—God is.

Every Christian is looking forward to an eternity of singleness (Matt 22:30). If we are ever looking at marriage as our source of fulfillment, we need to repent of our idolatry. Idolatry sounds like this: “All I need to be complete is _____” or “If only I had _____.” But marriage is not necessary for a human being to be “complete.” We need only to look at the perfect human being, Jesus Christ, who was not married but yet perfect in every way (Heb 5:9).

Marriage is not God’s will for every Christian or for every phase of life.

Jesus, talking to his disciples about the seriousness of the marriage covenant, says that some singles are so from birth, some not by their own choice, and others have chosen to remain so to serve God’s purposes (Matt 19:10–12). God also in his providence sometimes takes away a spouse, leaving a partner alone.

Christian singles (and marrieds) should practice contentment.

Something about the lustfulness of the human heart always drives us to look with envy on others’ blessings and covet them. But Paul says those who are single enjoy great blessings and opportunities. He wished that every Christian could be single as he was (1 Cor 7:7). He called on the Corinthian believers to “remain in the state in which he has been called” (1 Cor 7:24). Sometimes our terminology of “unmarried” implies that something is lacking. However, Paul says that those who are single are free of the anxieties of marriage (1 Cor 7:32), and can instead be concerned with giving their “undivided devotion to Lord” (1 Cor 7:35).

Christian singles (and marrieds) have been brought into a family: the Body of Christ.

God has given every Christian a family (cf. Mark 10:29–30; 1 Tim 1:2). The church is not made up of demographic subcategories, but of members of the body and of each other. Since we are the family of God, we call each other brothers and sisters (Eph 2:19). God’s arrangement of the Body of Christ is a necessary gift from God to help each member become more like Jesus Christ.

Christian singles should live with purpose.

Just as the purpose of marriage is not personal fulfillment but glorifying God by accurately picturing Christ and the church, the purpose of singleness is to glorify God by being completely devoted to Jesus Christ (1 Cor 7:35).

Questions to Ask Ourselves

Why is marriage an authority question, not just a morality question? How does that inform the way we approach this discussion in the public discourse?

How would you respond to someone who tells you that it doesn’t matter if marriage is between two men, two women, or a man and a woman, as long as they “love each other” or are “committed to each other”? Is love the basis of marriage? Why or why not?

How ought we to respond to unsaved friends, coworkers, or neighbors who enter into some sort of same-sex union?

Every member of the Body has been placed there by God (1 Cor 12:18), every member needs the other members (1 Cor 12:21), and every member has a responsibility to care for the other members (1 Cor 12:25). How do married believers need single believers? How do singles need marrieds? How can married believers care for single believers? How can singles care for marrieds?