

PROVERBS 5:15-19

CAPTIVATED BY MY LOVER

“Drink water from your own cistern,
flowing water from your own well.
Should your springs be scattered abroad,
streams of water in the streets?
Let them be for yourself alone,
and not for strangers with you.
Let your fountain be blessed,
and rejoice in the wife of your youth,
a lovely deer, a graceful doe.
Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight;
be intoxicated always in her love.”¹

Valentine’s Day is almost upon us. This has become a special day for many people, especially for retailers. Men, in particular, are targeted to do something special for the woman who accepts them. As result of excellent marketing, some businesses generate a great deal of business as we approach this day. I would like to say that it is because at heart, so many of us are hopelessly romantic; however, I suspect it is more likely related to social expectations and excellent marketing.

Men, especially, are urged to show their love through giving gifts to that special woman, especially if she has consented to share her life with him. Flowers, chocolates, gift certificates for spa dates and candlelight dinners are means by which we have traditionally marked the day. In this present year, marketers are pushing Vermont Teddy Bears®, “Pajamagrams”® and “Hoodie-Footie”™ sleep wear, any of which are supposed to show that we really care, to say nothing of giving the illusion that we really put some thought into showing our devotion. Such advertising leaves me with the disquieting imagine of a woman pouting as he looks throws a box of chocolates on the floor while shouting, “If you really loved me, you’d get me a teddy bear!” Or, the image of a women with fiery eyes, throwing a vase of roses at her husband as she shouts, “You clod! What a girl really wants is something romantic, like a Hoodie-Footie!”

Showering our one true love with gifts to reveal our devotion is fine; but what if there has been a succession of “true loves” that mark the years? What if marriage is no longer honoured? Unquestionably, marriage is under assault in our day. Our contemporaries, including far too many fellow Christians, profess to “fall in” love, and just as easily appear to fall out of love. Few pastors stress that a marriage vow is made not just to one’s bride or groom, but rather the marriage vow is made before the Living God. Increasingly, those being married pledge to love one another as long as love lasts, tacitly admitting the impermanence of the act.

Increasingly, marriage is not seen as permanent. A startling number of evangelical believers have been married multiple times; or Christian couples adopted the attitude of the contemporary world and simply began living together. It is no longer thought strange that a couple should set up housekeeping with benefits; rather, this seems to have become the norm. If things work out, then the couple will make the arrangement permanent—or not.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version** © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Complicating the issue is a redefinition of marriage concomitant with a redefinition of family that is being imposed on society by well-intentioned, if woefully ignorant, politicians. Divorced from biblical moorings, these political savants want to show their commitment to the new social ideal of toleration. Knowing that an increasing number of people choose to live in relationships that defy biblical morality, they don't want to hurt anyone's feelings and so they redefine what has defined civil society for millennia.

Consequently, it can no longer be denied that marriage is in crisis. I suggest that at the heart of the crisis lies a failure to recognise and/or to embrace Christian values. Though I cannot expect the world to adopt Christian values, I am astonished when the professed people of God not only eschew such biblical values, but appear genuinely ignorant of what pleases the True and Living God. If Christians ever hope to have an impact on society, we who name the Name of Christ must first accept His instruction so that our lives will be transformed. There is a desperate need to again define marriage and accept God's ideal for our relationships together.

THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE — I sometimes fear that people are convinced that God is some sort of cosmic bully seeking ways to make our lives miserable. Nothing could be farther from the truth, however. God longs to give us what is best, and His gifts are always for our good. This is the foundation for James' statement that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" [JAMES 1:17].

One of the good gifts that God gave to mankind was the gift of marriage. Let's go back to the institution of this covenant relationship. After we are given the overview of God's creative activity, we receive a more detailed presentation that focuses on the apex of God's creation—mankind.

"The LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature" [GENESIS 2:7]. This is the opening statement in a clear account of the crowning glory of God's creation. We are given a tender picture, as the LORD God dirties His hands to form the man from the dust of the ground. Then, having given man him form, the Living God bends down and kisses the man whom He has created, breathing into his nostrils the breath of life. Thus, it is said, "the man became a living creature." The man was not merely "a soul" (*nephesh*), but he was a "living soul" (*nephesh chayah*). He bore the image of God.

We then read, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'"

"Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'" Pay particular attention to what follows. "Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

‘This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.’

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” [GENESIS 2:18-24].

Within this account, informing us of the creation of the man and the woman is found the purpose for marriage. Underscore in your mind that God performed the first marriage ceremony. He brought the woman He had created to the man; and when he saw God’s handiwork, the man exclaimed, “Wow! You got it right this time!” This somewhat humorous statement actually reflects what is written in the original language. “Lord, You hit a home run!”

Remember, Adam had just completed naming all the animals. God’s purpose in having him review the fauna that would share the earth with him was so that the man would realise that there was no helper that corresponded to him. The man was not complete as an entity alone. God determined to make “a helper fit for him,” or “a helper that would make him complete.” Intuitively, perhaps even perceptively, the man recognised that he might stroke a cat or play ball with a dog, but these were not his complement. It would be necessary that one be created that made the man complete. The one whom the LORD God created for the man was named “Isha”—“wo-man,” for she was taken from “Ish”—“man.”

It is significant, and especially in the efforts of modern attitudes toward social change, that God created male and female. He did not create a man for the man, or a woman for the woman. The divine intention was that man and woman should be united in love for one another. It was never in the divine plan that people would focus solely on gratifying their own desires, but rather than they should strengthen one another through uniting in marriage. The divine intention was that man and woman were created for one another.

Marriage is for partnership; the woman would make man complete—she would complement him. The first purpose for marriage is to make the two stronger that when they are one. This may well be the intent of Solomon’s insightful statement that “A threefold cord is not quickly broken” [ECCLESIASTES 4:12b]. Let’s read the entire portion of what Solomon wrote so we capture the intent of the Wise Man. “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken” [ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12]. A wife complements her husband; and a man complements his wife. He is stronger because of her presence; she is stronger because of his presence.

Did you note in the passage in Genesis that details the first marriage that the divine commentary states, “A man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife?” Scope in especially on the statement that “they shall become one flesh” [GENESIS 2:24]. The divine will is iterated and emphasised as the Master cites this verse and stresses the same truth. Questioned by the Pharisees concerning divorce, Jesus said, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” [MATTHEW 19:4-6].

In our confused condition, it becomes necessary to state the obvious. A man is to hold fast to his wife, not his partner. While marriage is given so that husband and wife share in partnership, my wife is far more than a mere partner; and as her husband, I am far more than a mere partner. This is not a business arrangement, but a holy union to honour God.

Note, also, that *marriage is for pleasure*. To listen to the siren voices of this evil age, you would imagine that this was the first generation to discover sex. However, God created man and woman as sexual beings. Just as fire is a friend when it is in the fireplace and a foe when it burns outside the fireplace, so sex is given for our pleasure. However, as is implicit in our text, sex outside of the marriage relationship does not bring lasting pleasure, but trouble and sorrow.

This truth is evident in the marriage of Rebekah and Isaac. Abraham dispatched his servant to find a bride for Isaac. Eliezer brought a young woman from Mesopotamia to Isaac. After relating the facts of his adventures to Isaac, we read, “Isaac brought [Rebekah] into the tent of Sarah his mother and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death” [GENESIS 24:67]. The shared love served to comfort Isaac; and as the book unfolds, we discover that Rebekah also was comforted by Isaac.

Listen again to the words of the text, focusing on the note of joy sounded by the writer.

“Drink water from your own cistern,
 flowing water from your own well.
Should your springs be scattered abroad,
 streams of water in the streets?
Let them be for yourself alone,
 and not for strangers with you.
Let your fountain be blessed,
 and rejoice in the wife of your youth,
 a lovely deer, a graceful doe.
Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight;
 be intoxicated always in her love.”

We cannot read these words without being convinced that Solomon has in view the sexual delight within marriage. The concept of pleasure is stressed repeatedly. My translation commands young men to “rejoice in the wife of your youth.” The Hebrew word might better be translated “take pleasure.”² In fact, the wording excludes the possibility that anyone would look for another wife so long as your first wife lives.

God has placed the wall of marriage around sex; He did so, not to rob us of pleasure, but to ensure that our pleasure is increased. Only as sex is protected in marriage can it truly be enjoyed as God it to be.

In fact, if we look ahead just a few verses, we discover that infidelity brings—not pleasure, but death.

“Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman
 and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?
For a man’s ways are before the eyes of the LORD,
 and he ponders all his paths.

² Duane A. Garrett, **The New American Commentary: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Vol. 14** (Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN 2001) 93

The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him,
and he is held fast in the cords of his sin.
He dies for lack of discipline,
and because of his great folly he is led astray.”

[PROVERBS 5:20-23]

Thus, we also discover that *marriage is for purity*. Look at verse sixteen in our text:

“Should your springs be scattered abroad,
streams of water in the streets?
Let them be for yourself alone,
and not for strangers with you.”

Monogamy is not restrictive; reserving yourself for the one whom you married is fulfilling. Stated another way, we could say that fidelity to one person is not impoverishing isolationism. Again, promiscuity is wasteful, whereas fidelity blesses others and enriches those who commit themselves to each other.

It seems best to understand this sixteenth verse teaches that husband and wife are to fill and refresh each other—the one like a flowing stream and the other compared to a peaceful spring. As one commentator has observed, “Sexual anarchy results when people cross over the bounds of fidelity.”³ The seventeenth verse is explicit in stating what we know to be true—no man enjoys sharing his wife with another man, and assuredly is this true if he loves her.

In the marriage relationship, sex is compared to drinking water from a pure well. However, committing sexual sin is like drinking polluted water from the gutter or from the sewer. Sex within marriage is a beautiful river that brings life and refreshment, but outside of marriage, sex is a sewer that defiles everything it touches. The commitment to one’s own spouse can be compared to the banks of a river that keep the stream from becoming a swamp. God’s holy law confines the waters within the banks, producing power and depth. Extramarital and premarital affairs fail to satisfy because they are shallow, and it doesn’t take much to stir up shallow water.⁴

This emphasis upon sexual purity is found throughout the pages of the New Testament as well. How else shall we understand the words of the Hebrew Letter? “Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous” [HEBREWS 13:4].

Finally, *marriage is for procreation*. Undoubtedly, God intended that man and woman would produce offspring. This concept is found in the earliest passages of the Word when we witness the LORD God blessing the man and the woman he created. His blessing sounds strange to modern ears: “God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” [GENESIS 1:28]. The blessing sounds strange because we have despised God’s richest gift of children. We imagine that we are masters of our own destiny, and that we control when we will have children and how many children there will be. All the while, God gives children—not us.

³ Garrett, op. cit.

⁴ See Warren W. Wiersbe, **Be Skillful** (Victor Books, Wheaton, IL 1996) 49

This concept of God's blessing is iterated at the end of the Old Covenant when Malachi writes, "This second thing you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favour from your hand. But you say, 'Why does he not?' Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. 'For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless'" [MALACHI 2:13-16].

In this vein, the Psalmist has provided an incredible truth when he wrote:

"Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,
the fruit of the womb a reward.
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
are the children of one's youth.
Blessed is the man
who fills his quiver with them!
He shall not be put to shame
when he speaks with his enemies in the gate."

[PSALM 127:3-5]

To summarise, God intends marriage for partnership, pleasure, purity and procreation. There is no warrant for competition in the marriage, rather husbands are to love their wives and wives are to respect their husbands. Both husband and wife bear responsibility before the Living God to honour Him through this holy relationship. Truly, marriage is to be "holy" matrimony.

GOD'S PLAN FOR MARRIAGE — "Who Needs Marriage?" That is the title of a recent Time Magazine cover story about how the institution of marriage is changing in this day.⁵ The article cites the contradictory data of a much-publicised Pew study that reports that though forty percent of Americans believe marriage is obsolete, an overwhelming majority believe that marriage ensures that it will be easier to raise a family within the marriage union. They also believe that a fulfilling sex life is more readily available within marriage, and that married couples will be more financially secure, will find happiness, will have social status and will get ahead in a career. Undoubtedly, the study reflects similar attitudes among Canadians. Though living as though marriage is obsolete, we are nevertheless convinced that marriage is blessed by God.

God's plan is that people will be blessed through the marriage relationship. I understand that we live in a broken world. I realise that men are sometimes brutal and utterly self-centred. I know that men sometimes neglect their wives and children and focus on their own desires. However, such should not be true of any man who bears the Name of the Risen Saviour. I am likewise aware that women can be just as self-centred as can any fallen man. I know that women can be capable of the most despicable acts. However, such should not characterise any woman who bears the Name of Christ the Lord.

⁵ Time, Nov. 29, 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20101129,00.html>, Cover; see also, Belinda Luscombe, "Who Needs Marriage? A Changing Institution," TIME, Nov. 18, 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2031962,00.html>

We appear to have forgotten that as churches—congregations of the Risen Lord of Glory—we are responsible to hold one another accountable before the Lord God so that we will avoid living in such wickedness. Churches are responsible before the Living God to exercise godly discipline when those who claim membership act contrary to the Word of God, especially toward their family. What else can be meant by the instruction that warns us, “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” [1 TIMOTHY 5:8]. To fail to hold one another accountable within the community of faith is to dishonour the Lord and to discredit this holy Faith.

We need to hear again the admonition of the Word that teaches us, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” [EPHESIANS 5:15-33].

How we act toward our wife, or toward our husband, reflects our view of God Himself. If we treat our wife with despise, we have scant esteem for God. If we treat our husband with disrespect, we have little respect for God Himself. God’s plan for marriage is that in our relationship with one another we reveal something of the nature of our relationship to God. Marriage is expected to be somewhat like heaven on earth, rather than an ongoing hell.

In light of these words, I invite careful consideration of instruction that Peter provided for wives and for husbands. Listen to the words of the Apostle. “Wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewellery, or the clothing you wear— but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honour to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” [1 PETER 3:1-7].

I need not belabour the instructions Peter gives other than to iterate that wives are to cultivate an attitude of submission. Because of our fallen condition, I am compelled anytime I speak of the submissive attitude expected of a godly wife to state that it is a woman's privilege to give her submission to her own husband. I hasten to add that she is not obligated to offer her submission to any man other than her own husband. The corollary to this statement is that no man has the right to demand submission of his wife, much less of any other woman. Nevertheless, a wife is to cultivate an attitude that reveals respect for her own husband.

Men are responsible before the Lord to honour their wives. I need to say that this is not a matter of purchasing candies or flowers on special occasions, rather, it is holding her in esteem in his heart. The word that is translated "honour" is a Greek term that means he is to value her for who she is. The word implies esteeming her as precious. A man's wife is to be precious in his sight, esteemed, valued for who she is. Surely, this concept lies at the heart of Solomon's word:

"He who finds a wife finds a good thing
and obtains favour from the LORD."

[PROVERBS 18:22]

God's plan for marriage is that husbands love their wives even more than they love themselves. In fact, men are to hold their wives as precious. No one would ever knowingly abuse that which was precious to him. Likewise, wives are to respect their own husbands, seeing that in their treatment of their husband they are reflecting their relationship to the Lord Himself. Together, husband and wife are to reveal the beauty of Christ's relationship to His people.

PRINCIPLES ENSHRINED IN MARRIAGE — I must take a moment longer to address broader principles that are enshrined in the marriage relationship. Tragically, when we become so focused on gratifying our own desires that we no longer see the greater purposes in marriage, we miss the rich blessings God intends to pour out on us through marriage. Marriage is so much more than merely gratifying our desires. A husband is to expend himself for the benefit of his wife; a wife is to build her husband, recognising that in doing so she makes herself stronger.

I do not depreciate pleasure that is ours in marriage, but I caution that pleasure is but one facet of this rich jewel. To be certain, in sharing their lives, there is immense joy for husbands and wives. However, pleasure is not the only facet of marriage; there is so much more that should be witnessed in our relationship as wives and husbands. When properly understood and accepted, marriage is more than a mere union of man and woman. This is apparent in one of the verses following the text chosen for this message.

Solomon cautions:

"A man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD,
and he ponders all his paths."

[PROVERBS 5:21]

Marriage reflects our relationship to God Himself. I do not say that unsaved people cannot find pleasure in marriage, nor even that they cannot recognise aspects of the divine intent in marriage. However, they cannot enjoy the fullness of joy that is promised because they do not recognise that they are doing more than merely sharing their lives—they are fulfilling the divine intent. Our failure as Christians to serve as salt and light leads to depreciation of the divine intent.

The message calls on each Christian to accept the responsibility of ensuring that her or his marriage reflects the will of God. In terms that are blunt so that none can miss the import, I admonish Christian women and Christian men. Wives, love your husbands and exhibit the gracious submission that marks you as holy. Men, love your own wives and be devoted to their good, showing that you recognise the will of God for your life. Together, determine that you will glorify the Lord Christ and honour Him.

Of course, that is an impossible dream if you have never known the Creator as Master of life. If the Living God is but a foreign concept, you need to know that He created you so that you could know Him and enjoy Him forever. Though you are now estranged from Him, He sent His Son to die because of your sin. Jesus, the Son of God, took the punishment that you deserved, offering His life as a sacrifice because of your sin. The good news is that He didn't remain dead. He conquered death, rising from the dead and ascending into Heaven where He is even now seated at the right hand of the Father.

Therefore, the Word of God invites you to life. This is why it has been written, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free"—free of condemnation, free of guilt, free of fear. That divine promise continues by teaching us that "With the heart one believes, resulting in a right standing with the Father, and with the mouth one confesses, resulting in freedom." The promise of God is that "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved" [see **ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**].

I pray you are a Christian. I pray that you now enjoy the freedom of which I spoke. I pray that you now have the life that is offered through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.