

God's Design for Marriage

What is God's design for marriage? If you want a marriage that flourishes, you need to know what marriage is, where it comes from, and what it's meant to be. You need to know what a man is, what a woman is, how they're the same and how they're different. You need to know the Creator's design for marriage. If you want to be a leader of a church where marriages flourish, if you want to guide others by your teaching and example, you need to know God's design for marriage.

A great way to begin learning God's design is by looking at the first man, the first woman, and the original marriage described in Genesis 1 and 2. Let's just read what is said there. "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.' Then it goes on to give more detail of how God went about creating man and woman in chapter 2 of Genesis.

"The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living creature." "Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it. The Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him.' 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. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."

Adam was magnificently masculine. Eve was fabulously feminine. Both were happily human and neither felt ashamed nor inferior. The original marriage in Genesis is God's pattern for every marriage. Jesus Himself made this clear. He made it clear that to know the truth about marriage, we have to start

with the Creator's original design. Jesus once told people who had wrong ideas about marriage, "From the beginning, it was not so." And Jesus took them back to Genesis 1 and 2. So let's take a closer look at the Creator's design for marriage and let's begin by spelling out some of the things that marriage is and isn't in light of God's original design.

Marriage is a sexual union, not just a friendship or a partnership or a relationship between buddies. It's important to say this for one thing because some people have claimed that the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden was sexual intimacy, but that's just not so. Sex is not the forbidden fruit. Rather, Genesis teaches that one flesh is essential to marriage as originally designed and created by God. Having babies in Genesis is a divine mandate, not some dirty necessity.

A wife's body according to the New Testament belongs to her husband, and a husband's body belongs to his wife, and they should give their bodies to each other regularly and satisfy each other's desires. So it's not just a platonic relationship or a friendship. It is a physical and sexual union. The Song of Songs is an entire book of the Bible that celebrates romance and celebrates the sensuality and the sexual relationship that goes with romance. So it needs to be said that marriage is a sexual union and it's not just a partnership.

Marriage is a union between humans, not human with animal. No animal was suitable as a spouse for Adam. God brought those animals to Adam, but none of them imaged God as Adam did. None had a body and the mind to match Adam's. None could produce offspring with him to fill and rule the Earth. The man needed a fellow human and that's why God made Eve. This means among other things that sexual contact between humans and animals also known as bestiality perverts God's design and it is cursed in scripture.

Nowadays of course, we have some theoreticians and professors of ethics who speak of animal rights and many of the animal rights thinkers who exalt animals to a human level have also said that sex between humans and animals might be okay. That's a sign of how confused and wicked some in our own age had become. But in God's original design, marriage is of course a union between humans and not between a human and an animal.

Marriage is a union of a man and a woman. It's not a same sex union. Jesus said at the beginning, the Creator made them male and female. He made them male and female so that they could be united to one another. Scripture says you should not lie with a male as with a woman as it is an abomination. In

Romans 1, it speaks of women and they exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature. It's talking about lesbians. The men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men. The Bible clearly condemns homosexuality.

Marriage is a union of a man and a woman. It is not a same sex union no matter what the latest shenanigans of liberal churches or of liberal governments try to tell us. Marriage as designed by God is between one man and one woman. I mean it when I say one man and one woman and not many partners. Jesus, echoing the words of Genesis, didn't say that many become one flesh but that the two will become one flesh. This means that there must be no polygamy or marrying of various spouses, one man having several wives at the same time. Polygamy, having more than one wife, perverts God's design.

Now, there were a few notable men in the Old Testament who had multiple wives but it led to no good every time. The Lord put up with it for a time but He never endorsed it. God brought one woman to Adam, not two women or four women or seven women or twenty. This rules out polygamy in marriage. Muslims haven't gotten that memo. There were some old lined Mormons who believe that God still permitted polygamy. Brigham Young, one of the founders of Mormonism, had as many as seventy wives but God's original design was one man – one woman. That rules out polygamy and also rules out promiscuity, sleeping around without being married to someone.

The one flesh reality of marriage means that any temporary live-in relationship or any one night stand or even involvement with a prostitute, any of these kinds of relationships still involves becoming one body with her. Sex is not just a fun activity between people who can then go their own way. Scripture says, "Do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her for as it is written, the two will become one flesh." It's not just recreation.

When you are involved sexually with someone, you become united with them, and if you then go your own way, you leave a part of yourself behind and you tear a part of them away. Marriage is for one man and one woman and not for many partners. God designed sex for one man and one woman to become one in body and also one in spirit according to Malachi too. He did this in order among other reasons so that they could bring up godly offspring. A one man – one woman pairing is important for many reasons including the consistent rearing of godly offspring.

Marriage is a lifelong union and it's not a disposable relationship. Jesus says, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." Jesus went on to say, "Because of your hardness of heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives." But from the beginning, it was not so. "I say to you, whoever divorces his wife except for sexual immorality and marries another commits adultery." So Jesus was not into easy divorce and He did not approve of divorcing for any and every reason.

The Bible says a wife must not separate from her husband, but if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. A husband must not divorce his wife. So if you are in a situation where you can't get along with one another, you can separate temporarily but that does not mean you have the right to divorce and just trade in for a new model. It's wrong to use divorce as a way of trading one's spouse for another.

If you can't get along, if you feel you absolutely have to separate, God forbids you from simply writing off your spouse and then looking for someone you like better, either live with no partner at all or else find a way to overcome the differences between you and your spouse and be reunited. If your spouse abandons you or abuses you or becomes sexually involved with another person, they have broken the marriage covenant and you are permitted to divorce and to remarry. But even then, divorce is always tragic, always a last resort. The Creator of the original marriage does not permit you to abandon your marriage just anytime you like. As Jesus puts it, "What God has joined together, let man not separate."

So that's a quick summary of what marriage is and isn't. It's a sexual union and not just a partnership of buddies. It's a union of humans, not human with animal. It's a union of man and woman, not a same sex, homosexual union. It's a union of one man and one woman, not many partners. That rules out polygamy and promiscuity. And it's a lifelong union. It's not a disposable relationship. That means no divorce except in those rare circumstances that Jesus identified.

These facts about what marriage is and isn't are evident in Genesis and throughout the rest of the Bible. God's pattern can't just be reinvented without serious consequences. If you go against God's pattern, you're not just being immoral. You're fighting reality and you can't win. You can't violate God's pattern and expect to flourish. God designed marriage as the lifelong sexual union of one man and one woman.

Now that we've seen what marriage is and isn't, let's think about what it means to be male and female. How are a man and a woman the same and how are they different from each other? Let's first focus on what man and woman have in common. God created both man and woman in His own image, equal in dignity and value. God gave both man and woman a spiritual nature, a sharp mind, and a calling to work and accomplish things. God gave both man and woman the shared mandate to have children together and to take charge of the Earth and its creatures.

Sometimes, it's tempting to exaggerate the differences between men and women as one author does and say men are from Mars and women are from Venus. Well, the Bible puts our feet firmly on Earth. When Adam first saw Eve, he didn't say, "What planet did this come from?" He said, "This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." He knew that he was looking at his other half. Not only were Adam and Eve from the same planet, they were even from the same body.

God made Adam from dust but He didn't make Eve from a separate and independent bit of dust. He made Eve from a part of Adam. Where did God get the part of the man that He fashioned into the woman? Well, not from his head as though she would be superior to him and not from his feet as though she would be inferior but from his side to be his companion and his equal.

The interdependence of man and woman are clear in the two names that Adam gave to his wife in Genesis. He first said of Eve, "She shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man." So the name woman exists because she comes out of man and man was before her. But then she gets another name. The man calls his wife's name Eve, meaning life bearer because she was the mother of all the living. So she had come from man but in the future, all men would come from woman. As the scripture puts in the New Testament, "In the Lord, woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman is made from man, so man is now born of woman and all things are from God."

Scripture speaks of the equality of Christian husbands and wives in a variety of way. One is that we are equally created in God's image whether male or female. We're equally saved and adopted in Christ. In Christ, there isn't either male or female in terms of the payment of his blood and our relationship to him. Male and female husband and wife if they are Christians are equally indwelt in God's Holy Spirit and are temples of the Holy Spirit. Men and women according to scripture are equal in their character, in their capability, in their calling to serve God and to influence others. It's not that one is always going to be more talented than the other or have more important calling from God than the other.

We are equal in our character, capability, and calling. We're equally royal and destined to reign with Christ. We are adopted as His sons and daughters and we are destined for that great future as men and as women. We're equally united to each other. When we're part of the same body whether it's figured as the head or the body, we depend on each other for health and life and for enjoyment. And so in all these ways and others too, we have an equality and interdependence of a Christian husband and his wife.

It's clear then that there's a basic unity, there's a basic equality in a husband and a wife. But there are also differences in the way God made us, differences that shape our identity as male and female. Humans are equal. Husbands and wives are equal in dignity but they have different roles in marriage. The husband is to take the lead and the woman is to support him. This was evident already in the original marriage. God didn't create Adam and Eve at the very same time. He created Adam first before Eve. The New Testament repeats this fact when it calls for male leadership.

God placed Adam in the Garden to take care of it before Eve existed. She was to join and support Adam in the work to which had already called Him. When God was about to create Eve, He didn't say, "I will make someone for Adam to help." He said, "I will make a helper suitable for him." Now, don't think that that word "helper" means that Eve was inferior in ability or in status because the word "helper" was also used of God in the Bible. But anyway, God made Eve as a helper for Adam suitable for him. And when God made Eve, He didn't just start from scratch and make her from dust as He had when He formed the man. Instead, He formed her out of the man.

The New Testament says that his has abiding significance. "The husband is to be the leader in the relationship. Adam was formed first, then Eve," says 1 Timothy 2. "Man did not come from woman, but Woman from Man; neither was Man created for Woman but Woman for Man," 1 Corinthians 11:7-9. Even before Eve existed, God invited Adam to eat fruit from any tree but one and warned him against disobedience. How is Eve supposed to learn God's instructions? Adam was to teach her what God had taught him.

The New Testament says this pattern from the original marriage still applies. It tells women that if they have questions about the teachings of God's Word, they should ask their own husbands at home. This means of course that husbands had better listen to God and know the Bible well enough to be able to answer questions from their wives. They should be able to ask their husbands at home and that means not just the wives should ask husbands if the husbands should be knowledgeable and also the

fact is that Adam named Eve. Naming in scripture is an act of authority that even today many women take their husbands' last name. That's kind of a symbolic way of honoring him as head. These are some things that are revealed in Genesis and echoed later on in the Bible that indicate that the husband is to be a leader in the relationship.

Now, the original marriage in Genesis shows that the husband has primary responsibility to lead his wife and his family in a God-glorifying way. That means that mature maleness isn't about bullying or controlling and mature femaleness isn't about being a coward and doormat. The curse of sin can twist relationships. But that's now how it was in the beginning. When Adam first met Eve, he didn't say, "Oh, good! At last, I got somebody to boss around." He saw her as a marvel who was part of himself, equal in dignity and whom he should treat as well as he would treat his very own body.

In a context of equality and oneness, Adam in his manhood was to lead and have primary responsibility as the head of the marriage while Eve in her womanhood was to gladly affirm and support Adam. And the two united as one were to image God, have children, and care for God's world. This was God's design for healthy marriage in Genesis, and in the New Testament, it is God's design for healthy marriage among those who belong to Jesus.

Now, did God have any special reason for creating male and female this way? According to the Bible, God's ultimate reason for this and for every aspect for creation is to reveal something of Christ, His Son. The Bible says of Christ in Colossians 1, "All things were created by Him and for Him." This is especially true of the Lord's design for husband and wife. It's meant to show something of Christ. Here are two profound mysteries that marriage is meant to picture.

It's meant to picture the position of Christ within the being of God, the Trinity, and it's also meant to picture the relationship of Jesus with His church. First, let's think about how the relationship between a husband and a wife pictures something about God's own being. God is a Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—three divine persons united as one God. Now the persons of the Trinity are equal and they are forever united in love as one God, and yet the first person of the Trinity, God the Father, is the head of the second person, Christ. The Father initiates and Christ responds.

A healthy marriage images this headship. God the Father and Christ are united and equal with the Father leading and Christ responding. In the same way, a husband and wife are to be united and equal with the husband leading and the wife responding. The head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is

God. That's a biblical text which indicates to us that the way that woman and man relate are to show something of the way that Christ and God relate as body to head. This all goes back to Genesis 1. God created man in His own image, male and female He created them. And in creating them male and female, He wanted their relationship to reflect something of the relationship within the being of God Himself.

If a man treats his wife as though she is less than him and not one with him, then he images the ancient heresy that Christ is less than the Father and not one with the Father. If a husband doesn't lead in the relationship and his wife's role is identical and interchangeable with her husband's, they image another old heresy which denies any distinction between the Father and Christ. But when husband and wife are united in love, equal in status, yet distinct in roles with the husband gently leading the wife joyfully responding, then they image the truth about the Father and Christ in the Holy Trinity.

The loving union of a husband and wife offers a glimpse into the being of the God who created male and female in His own image. Biblical marriage centers on Christ in another way as well. It pictures the relationship between Jesus and His church. The Bible says the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body of which He is the Savior. From the beginning, God designed marriage to picture the relationship that would someday come about between Christ and His church.

And so when we read of this relationship of the husband being the head of the wife, we find what this implies. It means that a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh and this mystery is profound and I'm saying that it refers to Christ and the church. You see what Paul is saying in Ephesians 5 that marriage from the very beginning all along has been intended to point to the mystery of the relationship between Christ and the church.

There are some parallels between how Adam got his wife and how Christ got His wife. Adam's bride was taken from his side and she was flesh of his flesh. In a sense, Christ's bride, the church, received its being from Jesus' side which was pierced on the cross for His people, and the church is flesh of his flesh. Adam got a bride by being put to sleep and then being raised up again. Christ got His bride, the church, by entering the sleep of death and then rising again.

Now, scripture teaches us that in this relationship of husband and wife which is to image the relationship between Christ and the church, the husband's job is to picture or to dramatize the Christ role. The husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church His body and is Himself

its Savior. And then the command is this, “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” The way a husband relates to his wife pictures how Christ relates to His church. That picture may be true or it may be a false picture. But either way, a husband can’t help picturing Christ.

The Bible doesn’t say the husband ought to be the head of the wife. It simply says he is. That’s what God made him. The man being the head will set the tone in the marriage in the home whether he wants to or not. It may be a good tone and a healthy home if he leads well. Or it may be a bad tone and a weak home if he leads badly or not at all. In any case, the man sets the tone. Even if a man abandons his home, he still dominates that home by the very fact of his absence. The man’s headship is a God-created fact designed to picture Christ’s headship.

If you’re a husband, you simply cannot help picturing Christ. The only question is, what kind of picture you present? If you don’t show love to your wife, you picture Christ as unloving. If you’re unfaithful to her, you picture Christ as unfaithful. If you’re harsh, you picture Christ as harsh. If you never forgive, you picture Christ as unforgiving. If you don’t lead your wife and family in God’s Word, you picture Christ as not leading His people or caring how they think. You not only harm your wife that way, you also blaspheme the Savior whose headship you picture. Your false picture of Christ makes it harder for your wife and your children to know the Lord as He really is. What a horror to be a husband who presents a horrible picture of Christ the head!

On the other hand, if you cherish your wife with tender affection, you show something of the love of Christ. If you make sacrifices to help your wife, you show that Christ gave Himself up for His church. If you’re faithful to your wife, you show that Christ is faithful. If you lead your family in scripture and prayer, you show Christ’s wise leadership. If you’re patient and forgiving, you show something of Christ’s patience and forgiveness. In doing such things, you’re not only helping your wife and your family. You also honor the Lord Jesus Christ and you make it easier for your family to know him. What a privilege for a husband to display at least a hint of Christ’s headship and to make Jesus real to your family.

Now the wife’s role in all of this is to picture the church’s submission to Christ. Ephesians 5 says, “Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord.” Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their own husbands. A wife’s response to her husband pictures the church’s response to Christ. That picture may be lovely or it may be ugly, but either way, a wife can’t

help sending some sort of message about the church's response to Christ. If you're a wife and you don't delight in your husband's affection, you picture coldness as the proper response to Christ's love.

If you don't honor your husband's authority, you picture disrespect as the proper response to Christ's authority. If you defy your husband, you picture defiance as the proper response to Christ. You not only hurt your husband but you also proclaim rebellion against Christ and you attack God's Word. You make it harder for people who know you to find the gospel attractive and true.

But on the other hand, if you embrace your husband's love, you picture joyous trust as the church's proper response to Christ's love. If you respect your husband as your head, you picture respect as the proper response to Christ, the head of the church. If you submit to your husband's lead, you picture submission as the proper response to Christ's direction. You not only make your husband's life happier, you also honor Christ and you make the gospel attractive to your husband and your family and friends. The gospel of submission to Christ is either undermined or honored and lifted up by a wife's response to her husband.

A woman does not become stronger and happier by having a nice, harmless husband who is weak and uninformed compared to her and whom she doesn't respect. I guess wimp is better than a nasty bully. But best of all is a man who boldly and biblically seeks to represent Christ to his wife. The stronger he is in Christ, the stronger his wife becomes. The stronger she becomes, the more she helps him and makes him stronger still. In a healthy marriage, the husband doesn't want his wife to be a helpless little doormat. He wants her to be intelligent and strong and holy.

What does healthy headship look like? Well, let's think of what we've been talking about. One thing that headship in marriage is meant to represent is the relationship between Christ and the Father in the Trinity. What does the Father do? The Father glorifies Jesus. Christ Himself said, "It is my Father who glorifies me." And so a husband whose headship reflects that kind of relationship is always out to beautify and to glorify and to honor and to lift up his wife.

Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor. Since headship is meant not only to represent the relationship of the Father and Christ in the Trinity but also the love between Christ and His church, then a husband to reflect Christ's headship is going to be sacrificing himself for his wife's glory and splendor. That's healthy headship, not say, "I'm the boss. I get to make all the decisions and you just do what I say." When the Bible speaks of headship,

it's speaking of the Father glorifying the Son. It's speaking of Christ presenting His church in splendor. And of course the very fact that it speaks of the head in the first place means that the head is united to the body that it's connected with.

Scripture says 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. What kind of head would it be that said, "I don't like you, arm. I'm going to bite you" and takes a big chomp out of arm or says, "I don't like you, stomach. I'm going to starve you. I refuse to do any eating." That kind of head would be a moron, wouldn't it? Scripture says, "What kind of husband would ever hate his own flesh? Well, his wife is his body and so he's going to nourish her and he's going to cherish her. That's what healthy headship is.

Before we even get into the details of what should I do about this particular matter, just say, "Well, whatever else I do, I want to glorify my wife as the Father glorifies Jesus. I want to sacrifice myself for my wife as Christ sacrificed Himself for the church to present her in splendor. I want to treat my wife as my own body, and I'd be a knucklehead if I didn't because she is and anything that hurts her is going to wind up being damaging for me." Healthy headship is going to have this kind of vision.

Well, the Bible speaks of marriage and then connects it our relationship to God and it does so in some wonderful ways. Song of Songs says, "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord. Many rivers cannot quench love." Notice that phrase "Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord." The love between a man and a woman is something of a spark of the very flame of the love of God. This is a profound mystery, marriage is, but I'm talking about Christ and the church.

As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you. When we reach the new creation, marriage will be swallowed up into a greater reality and marriage is only for this life, not for the life to come, but it's pointing to something forever. As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, God will rejoice over us. The wedding of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. That's what marriage is meant to reflect and to start preparing us for, for the everlasting relationship of love that we have toward God and He toward us.

There's a beautiful unity and consistency in the Bible from beginning to end. Let's not violate this unity and let's not separate what God has joined together. This happens when somebody breaks up a

marriage but it also happens whenever we separate realities that belong together. If we treat creation as one idea over there and the Trinity as an entirely separate idea over here and the church's salvation through Christ as another separate idea and male and female relations as just another idea that's somewhere else entirely separated from all the rest, well then we're separating things that God has joined together.

All truth, all reality is joined together in Christ. Jesus said of marriage, "What God has joined together, let man not separate." A husband and wife shouldn't be separated and the meaning of their marriage should not be separated from the realities of creation in God's image or from the being of the Trinity or the relationship between Christ and His church. All this belongs together in marriage as God designed it and therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.

How should we respond to all this? Well, let's believe the Bible, God's Word. Let's take the original marriage designed by the Creator as our pattern for what marriage is and isn't. Let's repent of all sins that violate this pattern and ask God's pardon and His power to change. Let's believe in the Lord Jesus as the second person, the Trinity, and as the Savior and head of His church and then make marriage a picture of this.