

## Article reprinted from *Cross+Way* Issue Winter 1999 No. 75

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# Marriage in the Purposes of God

## Marriage

Christians have an unique view of marriage. Whilst most people see it as merely a social convention we recognise that it is part of God's purposes for humanity which are made known to us in the Bible. The fundamental reasons for marriage are spelt out in the marriage services of the Church and are derived from Scripture.

The LORD God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone' (Gen 2:18). This statement comes in sharp contrast to all that God had declared 'good' in His creation. Human beings need companionship, it is not good for us to be alone. This is not something exclusive to marriage, though it is marriage that God gives supremely for this end.

To the man and the woman God gave the command to 'fill the earth and subdue it' (Gen 1:28). The essence of this command is later repeated after the flood to Noah and his family (Gen 8:1). Therefore the bearing of children is part of God's purpose and plan for humanity and the earth. It could be argued that some style of loose commune or interchangeable partners would equally fulfil this command but the pattern of Adam and Eve show that it is marriage that is in view.

As the Old Testament unfolds it also becomes clear that marriage signifies 'unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church' (BCP introduction to the marriage service). Indeed this receives rich treatment in the prophets not least chapter 2 of Malachi where the fact that marriage is a covenant is likened to the covenant between God and His people. Therefore anything which breaks with this plan is rebellion against God. Here are included fornication (it is assumed in the OT that marriage will follow), adultery (Ex 20:14), homosexuality (Lev 18:22) and bestiality (Lev 18:23). Whilst we may not think of them as being in the same category they are all rebellion against God. In the old covenant law code the penalty for the last three offences is death (Lev 20:10-16).

The fact that marriage is far deeper than just a social convention is apparent at its very instigation in Eden, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh' (Gen 2:24). It is because marriage has this depth of origin to it, grounded in God's covenant with His people, that it is exclusive and permanent. Marriage is part of God's purposes for humanity now. It is 'till death us do part', but not beyond (Mk 12:25).

It is a striking fact that the clearest teaching about God's purposes in marriage are to be found from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only so, but he strengthens all the laws by saying that sin comes from the heart and therefore, in relation to adultery, even the desire is wrong (Mt 5:28).

## **Singleness**

Nevertheless, whilst Jesus so warmly endorses the place and importance of marriage, he did not actually model it himself and said that singleness is for some both God's purpose and calling (Mt 19:12). Therefore whilst marriage is good, part of God's purpose and plan, it is more 'blessed' to remain single (1 Cor 7:7,40).

Under the old covenant singleness is very definitely second best, for the sake of the kingdom of God people were to be fruitful and multiply, singleness threatened the covenant. Under the new covenant this is almost turned on its head: freed from the concerns of marriage the single person can be devoted more fully to the Lord (1 Cor 7:32-35). Thus our marital state is secondary to our commitment to Christ. We may add that under the new covenant we are to fill the world with the knowledge of Christ, this is often more easily achieved by those whose calling from God is to be single for Christ.

Since in evangelical churches we invariably expect our Vicar to be married with 2.4 children, in contrast to those who insist on single 'priests', it is a constant challenge that we uphold a proper biblical perspective, singleness is not second best. For those to whom it is given it is very definitely best and honouring to the Lord.

## **Living under God's will**

In Scripture God reveals to us His loving purposes for mankind. In terms of sexual practice this boils down to only two options. Either a person should remain single and chaste or they should marry and be faithful within that marriage relationship. To any who have rebelled from this plan we should say that you are not alone. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. However, sin that remains unchecked will eventually destroy us and separate us from God, forever. To those who have found forgiveness in Christ we recall His words, 'neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more' (Jn 8:11). Our delight and joy should be to live in obedience to God's will. This is never easy, in fact at times it seems all but impossible, but by the work of the Holy Spirit countless Christians through the ages have fought the same battles against sin and won. If you do sin, you have one who pleads on your behalf - Jesus Christ the righteous (1 Jn 2:1).