

The Marriage Bond and Divorce

The marriage institution, because of its divine origin, has continued to thrive despite the relentless attempts by the devil to devalue its importance, distort its essence and even make it a relic of a bygone age. A fact that cannot be denied however, is that it is only by having stable marriages that a society will itself be orderly and peaceful.

Marriage is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “a legally recognized relationship, established by a civil or religious ceremony, between two people who intend to live together”. (It should be pointed out that “two people” in the context of this sermon, means a man and a woman.)

Marriage is so important that it is considered by some as one of the three major phases in life – the others being birth and death. The union of a man and a woman as husband and wife is the foundation for a home and family, and it is the basic unit of society. Without the marital tie, the family circle, family instruction and parental love and care would have been altogether unknown.

Origin of Marriage

After man had been created and placed in the Garden of Eden, he was alone as there was no other human being on earth. If he had any communion with any other creature, it was with beings either high above him in the order of creation, as angels, or far beneath him, as the birds, beasts of the field and plants. But man was created to be a social being. The Almighty God Who is All-wise assessed the situation perfectly and declared: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” (Genesis 2:18) He then induced a deep sleep on Adam during which time He made, from one of his ribs, a woman, and brought her to the man. On seeing the woman, Adam said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” (Genesis 2:23) Thereafter, was recorded what is now known as the marriage charter: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.” – Genesis 2:24.

The declaration that the couple “shall be one flesh” denotes the unity of purpose or oneness of heart that exists or should exist between them. A bond which unites two unique and divergent personalities is a phenomenon so remarkable that Agur, the man of God, described it as “wonderful”, (Proverbs 30:18,19), while Solomon, the prophet of God, spoke of the superior merits of the marriage union over the single state. – Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.

Our Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated his support for the institution of marriage by his first miracle, that of turning water into wine. This occurred in Cana of Galilee when he and his disciples attended a marriage feast. (John 2:1-11). Apostle Paul, under divine inspiration, encouraged young people to marry, saying that “it is better to marry than to burn”. (1 Corinthians 7:9, 36) Many today will readily agree with Solomon the prophet who stated: “Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.” – Proverbs 18:22.

Purpose of Marriage

Marriage was established by God for the couple to complement each other. It was also designed to ensure the procreation of the human race. (Genesis 1:28) St. Paul said marriage is needful “to avoid” fornication, which is common today. (1 Corinthians 7: 2; Hebrews 13:4; Acts 15:20) And because a believer may be drawn into apostasy if his or her partner is not a Christian indeed, marriage between the people of God and non-believers was forbidden in the Old Testament and frowned on in the New. People of God, St. Paul says, should marry “only in the Lord”. -Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3, 4; 1 Corinthians 7:39.

Marriage Under Threat

Unfortunately, in some parts of the world, marriages are in decline. In Japan, the trend is so

serious that it threatens to leave the country with “a labor shortage, erode the country’s tax base and strain the pension system” as fewer taxpayers have to support an expanding elderly population. This was reported by Kozo Mizoguchi, Associated Press Writer in the on-line edition of the Boston News, an American newspaper (accessed January 17, 2008). He states further: “Yet Japanese companies typically expect long hours from workers, and many women with careers feel they cannot meet the demands of both work and family and must choose one or the other”. Indeed, many women in the technologically developed countries, are foregoing or delaying marriage to pursue career opportunities.

Stating that “Government Subsidizes Cohabitation”, Michael J. McManus, stated in the website www.virtueonline.org (accessed March 17, 2008) that the reason the marriage rate has fallen by 50 percent (in the United States of America) since 1970 is that “many couples cohabit rather than marry”. He added: “The number of cohabiting couples has soared 12-fold from 430,000 in 1960 to 5.2 million in 2005. About half of those who live together, never do marry. The result is that the percentage of never-married Americans aged 30-44 has tripled. That pushes down the marriage rate....”

Also, new laws in the developed countries are distorting the concept of marriage and family as stipulated by God Almighty. These days lesbians and homosexuals are allowed by law in some countries to be “married” after which they pick up a licence certifying them as “domestic partners”. According to Wikipedia Encyclopedia, under the Civil Partnership Act 2004, same-sex couples in the United Kingdom were granted rights and responsibilities identical to civil marriages. There is also a formal process for dissolving such partnerships that is akin to divorce.

We must point out that the union of homosexuals and lesbians is contrary to the purpose of God and is a direct challenge to the authority of the Almighty God as the people did in Babel in those days. – Leviticus 18:22; Deuteronomy 23:17; Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Timothy 1:10 ;Genesis 11:1-9.

It is gratifying however that since no one can change the purpose of God, there are many young people, even in the economically developed countries who still hold marriage in high esteem and keenly look forward to it. A poll of 5000 women aged 18 to 25, done in 2004 in Britain shows that nine in 10 young women still dream of a white wedding, with almost seven in 10 hoping to be married before they have children. The result shows that “far from embracing the promiscuous society in which they live, the ‘children of the divorced generation’ want to settle down with a husband and start a family...They believe in marriage and want to stay with one man for the rest of their lives.”- The Daily Telegraph Thursday October 14, 2004, page 14.

It must be pointed out however that whatever strain the institution of marriage is undergoing now is the fault of the individuals involved, because they fail to keep to the high tenets desired to make it work. Some of the basic problems facing present-day marriages are stated below.

Struggle for Equality:

God never purposed that the man and the woman should be equal in the marriage contract. The man is the head of the house. The woman must recognize that fact and hallow it for therein lies peace and order in the home. God’s law to the woman in the garden of Eden was “...thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee”. St. Paul exhorts, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.” – Ephesians 5:22, 24. See also Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1.

Where the woman is rude, contentious, confrontational or quarrelsome, she will become a burden on the man; she will be tearing down her house rather than building it up. In the Bible brawling wives stand in contrast to the model wife. (Proverbs 14:1; 19:13, 14; 21:9,19; 27:15;

31:10-31) There was a case in one of the major cities in Delta State, Nigeria, of a 54 year old man who felt so dejected by his wife's persistent nagging, that he decided to "punish her" by committing suicide. – Saturday Punch, October 18, 2003, page 8.

Emotional Immaturity:

Because of the political, economic and social dislocations of today's world, many young people come into marriage as emotionally imbalanced individuals. They thus find it difficult to get along with each other. The fact is that two emotionally mature individuals will complement each other and make a happy marriage by the grace of God. Marriage involves the ability to get along with people, to face both routine and crises without becoming unduly upset, to meet disappointment and difficulty, and primarily the ability to subordinate self-interest for the common good.

The maturity that comes from having strong faith in God and understanding His ways are requisite qualities the couple should have to be able to cope with changes in family fortunes. These qualities are particularly important for the wife to cultivate. – 1 Peter 3:1-5; Proverbs 19:14.

Incompatibility:

Two persons cannot get along well unless they understand or know each other very well. "Marry in haste, repent at leisure" is as true today as always. Marriage Counsellors say that disharmony in the home brings into play almost all the emotions: fear, uncertainty, anger, jealousy, hatred, worry, anxiety and so on. Great differences in beliefs are difficult to manage as they inevitably lead to tension if not to open quarreling, writes Gertrude Nystrom in Christian Romance and Marriage. Amos, the prophet raised this vital question centuries ago when he asked: "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). No matter how much one has by way of education, wealth, social status, or physique, what matters in marriage is basically one's own character and personality. Beauty may be an asset, but time will cause it to fade. It was King Solomon who said, "Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD she shall be praised." – Proverbs 31:30

Lack of communication:

Lack of communication in the home creates tension which leads to unhappiness for the couple. Because there is no fear in love, couples should be frank with each other and not sweep issues under the carpet. They should find time to discuss in an atmosphere of tact and mutual respect and affection. They should avoid the sin of pride which often prevents the husband and wife from expressing regret even when they know themselves to be in the wrong. (See Luke 17:3,4; James 5:16; Matthew 18:15) Some prefer to carry their matters to friends rather than discussing them with their partners at home. This is not good. Solomon the prophet admonished thus, "Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another: Lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away." – Proverbs 25:9

Emotions, as restrained aggression, hostility or unexpressed rage are very common among couples who do not communicate, particularly, when one of the partners endeavours to keep the peace.

Childlessness.

This creates considerable pressure on marriages. But it should not tear the couple apart.

Childless couples should give themselves in prayer to God Almighty, the Giver of life, (Genesis 33:5) while seeking medical help.' The Bible says, "He maketh the barren woman to keep house and to be a joyful mother of children." -Psalm 113:9.

Divorce

Divorce or dissolution of marriage is the ending of a marital union while the spouses are still alive. Unfortunately, since many nations, especially in the West are witnessing what has been termed "a continuing epidemic of dysfunctional relationships", the rate of divorce has been on the high side. Among the places where divorce has become common are the United States of America, Canada, South Korea and members of the European Union, with the exception of Malta

(where all civil marriages are for life, because civil divorce is banned). Divorce is so common now that the children born in many developed countries are called “children of the divorced generation”.

Studies show that divorce is harmful to the couple and to the children. A divorced man is twice as likely as a married man to die in any given year of heart disease, stroke, hypertension or cancer the big killers. J.J. Lynch in his book, *A Cry Unheard: Medical Consequences of Loneliness* states: “Death for the divorcee is four times higher than married people via auto accidents and suicide, seven times higher by cirrhosis of the liver and pneumonia, eightfold greater by murder and psychiatric illness is 10 times more likely”.

Quoting various studies, a pressure group called “Americans for Divorce Reform” was quoted in the website (www.divorcereform.org) to have stated: “Children of divorce are twice as likely to drop out of school as those from intact homes, three times as apt to have a baby out of wedlock, five-fold more likely to be in poverty and 12 times more apt to be incarcerated”. It is also stated in the website that children of divorced parents are twice as likely as those from homes with married parents to divorce when they grow up, if they marry at all.

It is quite gratifying that a number of young people in Britain “having reaped the bitter fruits resulting from broken families”, are reportedly “determined not to repeat the failed marriages of their parents.” According to The 21st Century Young Woman’s Survey of Great Britain, Nicole Martin, a writer for The Daily Telegraph stated: “Young people ..., far from embracing the promiscuous society in which they live ...want to settle down with a husband and start a family”. He added: “They come from divorced parents and they want a more stable life for their own kids”. – The Daily Telegraph, Thursday October 14, 2004, page 14.

No Putting Away

When the unbelieving Jews asked Jesus Christ why Moses gave allowance to the Jews to put away their wives he explained that it was because of their stubbornness. At that time the husband had the option of putting away the wife by a bill of divorcement (Deuteronomy 24:1; Matthew 1:19). Christ’s answer however restated the divine will as it was first given to mankind. He stated: “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery”. -Matthew 19:9.

Earlier, Malachi the prophet had been inspired to state: “For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away... Therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously”. – Malachi 2:16.

We enjoin all married couples and those intending to marry to study the divine rules for marriage and walk thereby so as to become model Christian families in which the children are brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord to the glory of His name. St. Paul states: “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will