

MARRIAGE

THE union of a man and a woman as husband and wife is known as marriage. It was instituted by the Almighty God not only for the accomplishment of His purpose but also for the benefit of men and women. In all the ways human beings have connections there is none – apart from the point of faith – the ties of which are stronger than the marriage bond.

According to the Holy Bible, both man and woman are the creation of the Most High. From ‘the dust of the ground’, He made the first man Adam in His own image and endowed him with the attributes of wisdom, power, justice and love. And God said: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” – Genesis 2: 18.

It is worthy of note that the Omniscient, who knows the end from the beginning, took to a different process in bringing the woman into existence. He caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, and took out one of his ribs to make a woman whom He gave to Adam to be his wife. Adam, having awaked out of sleep, did not vacillate between two opinions as to his fleshly connection with his wife but straight off he identified her saying: “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: 21-23.

Thus Adam and Eve became the first human couple from whom the entire race of mankind descended. It is the will of God that the marital union should be kept sacred from infraction and that its strength should be maintained at all times. For this reason, it is written: “Therefore shall a man (for the sake of marriage) leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. ” – Genesis 2: 24.

We have now seen how marriage originated. Since then men and women have been marrying as ordained by the Lord. And because of the importance He attaches to marriage He enacted laws to regulate it. The law, according to Leviticus chapter 18, forbids a man from contracting marriage with a woman who is his near relation.

The two principal reasons why God made the woman for the man and allowed them to get married, are (1) that the woman should be a helper or partner of the man (Genesis 2: 20-24); and (2) that they both should multiply and fill the earth with children. – Genesis 1: 27, 28.

It is very important that every man or woman understands the purpose of marriage as well as the position each one holds in the union. Many marriages have run upon the rocks and collapsed because the parties concerned lacked this understanding. They do not appreciate its sacredness.

Equal Rights?

Some people hold the wrong view that in a marriage contract both the man and the woman have equal rights. According to The American Peoples Encyclopedia (Vol. 12, page 1077), “American laws and customs have tended to greater and greater equality between husband and wife in the marriage contract.” This is very wrong.

There was never a time God, Who instituted marriage, indicated that man and woman were equal partners. When Adam and Eve sinned God, in passing His sentence, told the woman: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."- Genesis 3: 16.

What is more, St. Paul stated: "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man.... " (1 Corinthians 11: 3).

The married woman must acknowledge the man as her head and give him that due respect. She too is vested with some rights or privileges of respect, honour, and trust which the man, though as the head, is bound to acknowledge and show to her. (Read 1 Corinthians 11: 3-12) St. Paul further explained that it is the woman that God made for the man, and not the man for the woman. Man is the image of God but the woman is the glory of the man. The man, he said, cannot do without the woman as she too cannot do without the man whom God had made to be her ruler and head.

For any woman, therefore, to claim equality with her husband in the face of these scriptural authorities is a clear case of presumptuousness-and it is a sin (Deuteronomy 17: 12, 13; Psalm 19: 13) the woman must not usurp authority over the man. – 1 Timothy 2: 11-14.

On the other hand any man who is so spineless to the extent of subjecting himself to the domination of his wife, is acting contrary to the divine purpose. St. Paul stated positively that an effeminate-that is, a womanish man or a man ruled by his wife-has no place in the Kingdom of God. – 1 Corinthians 6: 9, 10.

We have said earlier that a married woman deserves to be respected but this respect must not be carried to the extreme of turning the husband nearly to a house- boy. What some so-called gentlemen regard as an act of "respect for the Mistress" is sheer stupidity. Woman is not man's equal. Patricia Fay Anderton, a London woman, was quite right when she stated: "God never intended men and women to be equal; He certainly never intended women to compete with men. A woman is the complement to man... comforting and caring for him, and her true place is by his side not as a working competitor." (West African Pilot, April 13, 1957).

Dignity

Marriage in its true perspective enhances the prestige and dignity of both the man and the woman. It was King Solomon who said, "Whoso findeth a wife (the godly type) findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord." (Proverbs. 18: 22) And St. Paul stated: "Marriage is honourable; let us all keep it so, and the marriage-bond inviolate; for God's judgment will fall on fornicators and adulterers." – Hebrews 13: 4. New English Bible.

Some people consider marriage as obsolete. Since unmarried women are very many and they can get some of them to satisfy their lusts at any time, it is, in their opinion, unwise to get themselves tied in matrimony to particular women. Another reason why they hate to get married is that they do not want to shoulder the responsibilities marriage imposes on men.

There are also the female counterparts of this sort of unprincipled men, who prefer a life of debauchery to that of honourable marriage. All of them, except they repent, stand condemned before God and before men of honour for allowing themselves to be used as tools by the devil in carrying out his will in opposition to God and constituting a menace to human societies. In the end, the fate of the lawless will be their lot. – I Timothy 1: 9-10; Romans 1: 28-32.

With regard to young women St. Paul advised: “I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.” – I Timothy 5: 14.

We must admit that the married life of certain people leaves much to be desired. What joy or comfort is in a marriage where the husband and wife behave like a cat and dog in the home? Some men are so high-tempered that for almost every misdeed of the wife, no matter how trivial, he is prepared to administer strokes of the cane or a heavy blow on her, or engage her in a fight. Similarly, some women are rude, very stubborn, like a devil incarnate, and ill-mannered so that they count it as sport not only to irritate their husbands with abusive words and provocative conduct but also to invite them to open duels. Once a situation such as this becomes the order of the day in a married home then all that marriage stands for is gone.

But the point is that the fault is not in the institution but on those misfits who neither understand the purpose of marriage nor appreciate the essence of the nuptial ties.

Virtuous Woman

A married woman who realises that she is a helper to her husband must do things to give him comfort and pleasure. She should show interest in her housework and should be humble, sober, discreet and chaste. (Titus 2: 4, 5) King Solomon said that a virtuous woman does not eat the bread of idleness, but is industrious; and she cares for her household so much that the evidence of her care is noticed in her husband among people. “She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.” – Proverbs. 31: 10 – 28.

It was in view of all this, King Solomon also stated: “A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.” -Proverbs 12: 4.

It is not education, offering of gifts to curry neither favour nor beauty that makes marriage a success but good manners based on the fear of God. “Favour is deceitful”, said Solomon, “and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.” -Proverbs. 31: 30.

In his admonition to married women St. Paul wrote: “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: and he is the saviour of the body. 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: 1-6.

Although God said that the desire of the wife should come from the husband (Genesis 3: 16) that is no reason why the wife should be a spendthrift. She should be able to live according to the means and social status of her husband. The Bible says: "Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands." – Proverbs. 14: 1.

Responsibilities

On the part of the husband, marriage entails a lot of responsibilities. That is why a man must count the cost before plunging into it. The husband should be God-fearing, knowledgeable and understanding enough as to be able to rule his wife and control the affairs of his home.

Husbands are required to love their wives, and they should not be bitter against them. (Colossians 3: 19) They should look after their wives well and nourish them in order to make them happy and appear decent: for the woman is the glory of the man. Said St. Paul: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for itSo ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church." – Ephesians 5: 25-29, 33.

It is an offence for a man to oppress or maltreat his wife. The seriousness of this is underscored by the fact that the prayer of such a man will not be answered by God. St. Peter therefore admonished: "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered." – 1 Peter 3: 7.

With regard to the purpose of reproduction, it is important that a good understanding exists between the husband and the wife. St. Paul's advice on this matter is enough. He stated: "The husband must give the wife what is due to her, and the wife equally must give the husband his due. The wife cannot claim her body as her own; it is her husband's. Equally, the husband cannot claim his body as his own; it is his wife's. Do not deny yourselves to one another, except when you agree upon a temporary abstinence in order to devote yourselves to prayer; afterwards you may come together again; otherwise for lack of self-control, you may be tempted by Satan." (1 Corinthians 7:3-5, New English Bible) It is a SIN and an abuse of marriage honour for the wife to have love connection with a man who is not her husband; so too it is a sin for the husband to have sexual relation with any woman who is not his wife.

European Custom

In certain religious circles it is believed that a man and a woman are not properly married except a priest officiates at the marriage ceremony and the man gives the woman a ring. This is what some people call Christian marriage.

According to the Book of Common Prayer, the "solemnization of matrimony" takes a process involving open declarations by both the priest and the parties contracting the marriage. At a stage, the priest delivers the ring to the man who puts it upon the fourth finger of the woman's left hand, saying:

“With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow...”

The word “worship” here is improper as it is very unscriptural. It is only God true Christians worship. The husband should not worship his wife and the wife must not worship her husband. In the Christian Religion, man does not worship man save God and Christ alone. – Matthew 4: 10; 20:20; Hebrews 1: 5, 6.

To say the least, this system of wedding with the ring and worshipping the wife is a European custom garnished with religious formalities. It is the tendency of the white missionaries in introducing some of their customs to their African adherents under the cloak of “Christianity” that makes certain Africans wrongly call Christianity the whiteman’s religion.

We challenge anyone to cite a precedent in the Bible to show that a priest ever officiated at a marriage ceremony as the priests of “churchianity” are doing or that a ring has anything to do with the marriage of Christ’s disciples.

There was a marriage feast in Cana of Galilee which Jesus Christ and his disciples attended in his days on earth. He did not perform any function of uniting people in a “holy wedlock”. All he did was his first miracle of turning water into wine. – John 2: 1-11.

It is the responsibility of parents to give out their daughter to whom they will according to their own customs which do not contravene God’s laws.

African Christians can marry according to their customs and Europeans, Americans or Asians according to theirs, provided those customs, we repeat, do not violate the laws of God. It is wrong for white missionaries to impose their customs on Africans in the name of Christianity. And for the African to ape the whiteman’s customs in the name of modernism is shameful. To despise any custom, which is not contrary to the Scriptures, just because it is African, is sinful. God is against despise. (Proverbs. 14: 21; 11: 12) African Christians can break their kola nuts and drink their palm wine during marriage negotiations and feasts; it is no sin. But they should not pour libations to the gods or ancestors. (Deuteronomy 6: 14,15) Christians have and serve one God-the Almighty God-through Jesus Christ. (1 Timothy 2: 5) Ancestors can neither help nor bless one’s marriage. The Bible says that the dead know not anything. – Ecclesiastes 9: 5,6.

Church Role

The role of the Church, which the pastor or any elder of the church can play, is to guide, advise and charge the contracting parties as regards the solemnity and sanctity of marriage which must be maintained in order not to contravene God’s laws and so that He (God) may bless the marriage.

Before concluding, we must stress once again that the relationship between husband and wife must be kept inviolate. Neither the husband nor the wife has the right to break their marriage at will. They must not allow extraneous influence or unnecessary interference from parents, relatives or friends to disrupt their home. The saying that “they shall be one flesh” is but an emphasis signifying the strong relationship that must exist between husband and

wife. Jesus Christ said: "What therefore God hath joined together let no man put asunder." (Matthew 19: 4-6) And God said through St. Paul: "Let not the wife depart from her husband: but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife." – 1 Corinthians 7: 10, 11.

What is important in marriage is not the joy and zest with which one enters into it but the understanding and ability to sustain it in the fear of God. Men and women should be educated and encouraged to marry, and to endeavour to build up a happy home to the Lord's glory.