

Dear Friend,

This is now the fourth in a series of articles designed to explore God's view of dating. God's view of dating cannot be arrived at by simply asking what the Bible says about dating because "dating" or "courtship," i.e., the process by which single men and women become married, is not directly addressed in the Bible. That was the point of the first article. There are many possible ways for single women and men to end up married. However, while the Bible does not directly tell us how to do this, yet it does tell us a great deal about all kinds of things that relate to this issue of single men and women finding a marriage partner. We've looked at why God made humankind male and female. We've examined what impact sin has had upon our maleness and femaleness and our relationship with one another, especially in marriage. This month I want to answer the question: what is God's purpose for marriage? What is marriage and why did God make it?

Ephesians 5:22-33 is the most comprehensive description of marriage in the Bible. The fundamental thing that we discover about marriage is that it is a portrait or a lived out parable of the relationship between Jesus and his "bride", the church. You can see this clearly in the commands directed to both the wife and the husband. In vv. 23, 24, 25 & 29, four times, Paul, after commanding wife and husband to certain behavior uses a phrase beginning with "as". In v. 23 he says that the husband is the head of the wife "as Christ is head of the church." In v. 24 he says the wife should submit to her husband "as the church submits to Christ." In v. 25 he says the husband is to love his wife "just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." In v. 29 after commanding the husband to love his wife as his own body he makes the point that husbands take care of their own bodies "just as Christ does the church, for we are members of his body." Therefore, the relationship of a husband and a wife in marriage is a visible model of the relationship between Jesus and the church.

The truly amazing thing about Ephesians 5 is in vv. 30-32. After describing the way wives and husbands are to live in relation to one another as Christ relates to the church, his body, he concludes in v. 30 by stating that all Christians are members of the body of Christ. Immediately he quotes, in entirety, Genesis 2:24. We need a little background on Genesis 2:24 before you can see the remarkable connection God makes through the apostle Paul. In Genesis 2:18 God says that it is not good for Adam to be alone but that God was going to make a helper that was suitable for or corresponded to him. The point here is not that Adam was lonely and needed a companion. It was not good for Adam to be alone because the male by himself cannot be the image of God. The unity and diversity of the Trinity, their mutual affection for one another, their united work in creation and redemption cannot be made visible by male humans alone but requires the human being who is like them in their "being" and in their value but who is unlike them in their role (This does not mean that only married men and women can "image" God.).

So God has Adam name all the animals and as he does so he recognizes that there is no other creature that corresponds to him. Then God makes the woman out of his rib and brings her to Adam who expresses the unity and the differentiation that exists between he

and she. It is at this point that the inspired author, Moses, says, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh.” This verse is God’s definition of marriage. A marriage has occurred when three things have happened: First, a new, culturally verifiable social unit has been formed. Second, the man and the woman enter into a covenant for life, a promise of faithfulness to each other in every aspect of life until death. Third, they are united sexually.

Notice it begins with, “for this reason.” In Genesis 2 what is the reason for marriage? The reason is that the woman is the “helper suitable for the man” that God promised to make for him. Adam, as the first man, is called “the son of God” in several places in the Bible (This is implicit in Genesis 5 & Psalm 8 and stated directly in Luke 3:38.). So God brings to his son a bride. This is a very common motif throughout the Bible where God’s people are portrayed as his bride, which finally culminates in Revelation with the “wedding supper of the Lamb.” The bride in Revelation is identified as the church just as in Ephesians 5. Just so we don’t miss it Paul says exactly this in 5:32: “This is a profound mystery but I am talking about Christ and the church.” The mystery of marriage is that it always has been intended by God to show the love of Christ for his church and the submission of the church to Christ. Therefore, every marriage since Adam and Eve’s marriage has been intended by God to demonstrate the relationship between Jesus and the church.

There are other important but always subordinate purposes to marriage including the bearing and raising of godly children, the economic and social foundation of every culture, companionship and in this fallen world the restraint of sexual immorality. However, marriage is a holy and worthy of respect institution chiefly because it is intended by God to portray the point of all existence, the glorious relationship between his Son and his bride, the church, made up of people from every tribe and tongue and language and nation.

This impacts how men and women, who are not married to each other, whether they are single or married, relate to each other. We recognize that there is a relationship between a man and a woman that deserves all our respect and admiration and protection because of what it is. If Jesus and his church are loyal to each other, then men and women must live loyal to their spouse, even if currently unknown and must help others maintain that loyalty in order to adequately represent the pure relationship Jesus has with his church (We will look at more of the consequences of this view of marriage upon male/female relations in future articles.).

Rejoicing in Jesus’ love for us, his church,