

## LESSON 4 \*July 17-23

# Marriage Is Not Out-of-Date



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### SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 2:18-25, John 2:1-11, Eph. 5:22-33, Heb. 13:4, 1 Pet. 3:1-7.*

**Memory Text:** “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (*Ephesians 5:25, NIV*).

All through the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, the image of marriage appears, in one form or another. Sometimes the images are of good marriages; sometimes they are of bad marriages; sometimes the images depict faithfulness; sometimes they depict infidelity. Either way, and whether in the Old Testament or in the New, marriage is often used as a metaphor for the relationship between the Lord and His people.

Thus, it should be clear how seriously the Lord esteems marriage. For Him to use it time and again as a metaphor for His relationship with His people should tell us marriage should be something special.

Therefore, this week we take a look at some biblical principles regarding this divinely inspired institution.

**The Week at a Glance:** What can we learn about marriage from the Genesis account? How should a husband treat his wife? How does Christ's death reflect an important principle necessary for creating a good marriage?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 24.*

## Marriage in Paradise

**Read** Genesis 2:18-25. What basic principles can we find in this account of the first husband/wife relationship that can help us, today, understand what God's ideal for marriage should be? As you read, ask yourself the following questions: (1) What significance is in the fact Eve was created out of Adam's physical body, as opposed to her being created from something separate? (2) What do Adam's words in verse 23 mean? (3) Why, when they saw each other naked, were they not ashamed?

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However unique the background to the story, it does show there was to be an intimacy between a husband and his wife that wasn't found anywhere else. There showed a closeness, a bond, both physical and spiritual, that no other person should be allowed to violate. The marriage relationship is blessed of God; it's something sacred, something we have been able to take from Eden, from a perfect world. How crucial, then, that we cherish it as we should.

**Read** Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-7. How do both Paul and Peter stress the unique bond of a marriage relationship? Who, ultimately, is deemed the head of the home? And yet, at the same time, what principles should dictate how the husband should treat the wife?

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Though both Peter and Paul are clear about the role of husband and wife in marriage, notice how many times they stress that the husband should love the wife; in fact, Paul, in Ephesians, admonished husbands to love their wives with the kind of self-sacrificial love that compelled Christ to love the church. Imagine how much better our marriages would be if both husband and wife, in the Lord, followed these biblical principles.

**Dwell more on the idea of Christ's death as an example of the kind of self-sacrificing love husbands should have for their wives. What great changes could that attitude on the part of husbands bring to homes and marriages?**

## **Marriage—Till Death Do Us Part** (*Matt. 5:32, 19:9*).

Some people who have been married for just a year or two decide they made a mistake and go their separate ways. Others who have been together for 30 or more years conclude that their relationship has become empty and stale and get a divorce. Also, an increasing number of people live in common-law relationships and shy away from marriage.

What is the underlying problem? Many of today's younger generation have a problem in making long-term commitments, whether it comes to church membership and/or to sealing a love relationship with a marriage vow.

**How do the words of Christ Himself indicate that marriage is a life-long commitment?** *Matt. 5:32, 19:9.*

Those are very strong words, leaving what seems like little room for extenuating circumstances. Indeed, the principles stated in the *Church Manual* continue to provide a solid basis for our thinking:

“Central to God’s holy plan for our world was the creation of beings made in His image who would multiply and replenish the earth and live together in purity, harmony, and happiness. He brought forth Eve from the side of Adam and gave her to Adam as his wife. Thus was marriage instituted—God the author of the institution, God the officiator at the first marriage. . . .

“The church adheres to this view of marriage and home without reservation, believing that any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal. The belief that marriage is a divine institution rests upon the Holy Scriptures. Accordingly, all thinking and reasoning in the perplexing field of divorce and remarriage must constantly be harmonized with that holy ideal revealed in Eden.

“The church believes in the law of God; it also believes in the forgiving mercy of God. It believes that victory and salvation can as surely be found by those who have transgressed in the matter of divorce and remarriage as by those who have failed in any other of God’s holy standards.”—(Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assoc., 2000), pp. 194, 195.

**Focus on the last paragraph of the *Church Manual*. What hope does that give you if you have, indeed, violated the biblical standard of marriage? At the same time, what should Christ’s words above tell us about how important it is that we do everything possible to keep our marriages intact?**

## The Joy of Sex

**Read** Genesis 1:27, 28; 2:24, 25. What do they tell us about sexuality? Who originated it? Who encouraged it? Was there anything “dirty” about it in the context in which it is presented here?

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Through the centuries there have been Christians who have rejected sex as dirty, unspiritual, and sinful, even to the point that many believed that those who wanted to dedicate themselves to the Lord in a special way ought to remain celibate. Throughout church history, in many religious communities, sex was, at least officially, outlawed, even among married people.

On the other hand, immorality has, at times, been hailed as true freedom, with all inhibitions set aside in the name of advanced religious truth.

The Christian view of sex is a balanced view. There is more to life than sex. But the enjoyment of our sexuality is definitely a precious part of life—a gift of our Creator, who made us “male and female,” and within the right context it can be a beautiful expression of both human and divine love.

Like all God’s gifts, however, it can be abused, and few gifts have been more greatly abused than this one. The key for the Christian is to understand under what circumstances the Lord wants him or her to benefit from and enjoy this blessing. When is sexual activity appropriate, and when is it not? These are important questions, because our world is filled with sad results of those who have misused one of God’s greatest manifestations of His love for humanity. How like the devil to take something so wonderful and turn it into something that will lead to the ruin of many souls.

**All of the following texts talk, in one context or another, about human sexuality: Genesis 2:24; Proverbs 5:15-23; Ecclesiastes 9:9; Song of Solomon; Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 7:5. From these texts and any others you find, write a paragraph for someone who isn’t a Christian, explaining the biblical view of sexuality.**

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## **When There Are Problems** (*Matt. 5:27, 28;* *Heb. 13:4*).

We live in a world full of temptations. Never should we underestimate the determination of the devil to divert the followers of Christ from their life of discipleship; and one of the most effective ways of doing so is to lead them into sexual immorality. The apostle Paul was specifically addressing instances of immorality among church members when he stated: “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall” (*1 Cor. 10:12, NIV*).

**What principle ought to be kept in mind and to be pursued with firm determination by all who are married and claim to be followers of Christ? *1 Cor. 10:13, Heb. 13:4.***

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Ellen G. White makes an important point when stressing the role of our will in remaining faithful to a marriage vow. A determination to focus our mind on spiritual matters will help us when we face sexual temptations: “Christ presented before His disciples the far-reaching principles of the law of God. He taught His hearers that the law was transgressed by the thoughts before the evil desire was carried out in actual commission. We are under obligation to control our thoughts, and to bring them into subjection to the law of God. The noble powers of the mind have been given to us by the Lord, that we may employ them in contemplating heavenly things. God has made abundant provision that the soul may make continual progression in the divine life. . . . We give our time and thought to the trivial and commonplace things of the world, and neglect the great interests that pertain to eternal life.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1145.

But not all is necessarily lost when we do succumb to temptation. Although sin may result in consequences that can not be undone, God is always willing to forgive. And to forgive impure thoughts, sexual indiscretions, or even blatantly immoral conduct is no more difficult for God than to forgive a lie or an act of pride or selfishness.

**What practical steps can both men and women take in the area of alleviating sexual temptation, not only for themselves but to make sure they aren’t a stumbling block to others? How do what we read, watch, or wear, and where we go all play a role in how well we deal with this problem?**

## **Christ Endorsed Marriage** (*John 2:1-11*).

Some of the advice given by the apostle Paul would suggest he was not overenthusiastic about marriage. Statements to that effect (*such as in 1 Corinthians 7:8*) should, however, be read in their context. They were written in response to a specific question (*vs. 1*), under circumstances we do not know in detail. Just two chapters later, Paul claims the right to marry and refers to the “other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas,” who traveled together with “a believing wife” (*1 Cor. 9:5, NIV*). The overall message of the Bible is undeniable: Marriage not only is permitted but it is a great gift, in particular, for believers who know the One who instituted it.

**What** does the prominent place given in John’s Gospel to the story of Christ’s attendance at the wedding in Cana suggest? *John 2:1-11*.

It is quite significant that John includes the story of the wedding in Cana among the very few miracle stories he recounts. The account makes abundantly clear that Jesus was happy to be associated with this wedding feast and that, by His very presence, He underlined not only how good it is to have a party but that it is good when people get married.

**How** does the use of the imagery of the wedding feast further underline the value and importance of marriage? *Matt. 22:1-14, Rev. 19:7-9*.

“In Biblical times a marriage involved two major events, the betrothal and the wedding. These were normally separated by a period of time during which the two individuals were considered husband and wife and as such were under the obligations of faithfulness. The wedding began with a procession to the bride’s house, which was followed by a return to the house of the groom for the marriage feast. By analogy, the church, espoused to Christ by faith, now awaits the parousia when the heavenly groom will come for his bride and return to heaven for the marriage feast which lasts throughout eternity.” —Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977), p. 340.

**Christ gave Himself totally and unselfishly for His people; we, as a people, are to give ourselves totally and unselfishly to the Lord. How does that model of giving one’s self to another reveal essential principles of a strong Christian marriage?**

**Further Study:** Comments on marriage and related topics by Ellen G. White are found in a number of different compilations. Her book *The Adventist Home* contains much relevant material. See, for example, Section III: “Choosing a Life Partner,” pp. 43–75, and Section V: “From the Marriage Altar,” pp. 99–127.

“Like every other one of God’s good gifts entrusted to the keeping of humanity, marriage has been perverted by sin; but it is the purpose of the gospel to restore its purity and beauty. In both the Old and the New Testament the marriage relation is employed to represent the tender and sacred union that exists between Christ and his people, the redeemed ones whom he has purchased at the cost of Calvary. ‘Fear not,’ he says; ‘thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel.’ ‘Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you.’”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, December 10, 1908.

“It should henceforth be the life study of both husband and wife how to avoid everything that creates contention and to keep unbroken the marriage vows.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 85.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 If sex is to be enjoyed only within the context of marriage, how do those who do not have a partner, or those who have lost their partner, experience their sexuality? Should they simply forget they are sexual beings? Can one be fully *male or female* without having any sexual relationship? What does Christ’s example offer them?
- 2 Look at the second Ellen White quote above. What practical things can both the husband and wife do in order to protect the sanctity of their marriage vows?

**Summary:** Many marriages fail. As Christians we can never go along with a situation in which unfaithfulness, in word or thought, is condoned. At the same time, a forgiving spirit can save and restore many a relationship that would otherwise be doomed. The Lord deems marriage as something sacred; we, as humans, should do no less.

## Flee Into His Arms:

### Part 1 *by* CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

Maryam's eyes burned from crying. Her body ached from the beating she had received. *A failure, she thought. I can't even kill myself. If life isn't worth living, why is death so hard?*

Maryam was born into a Muslim family in a Middle Eastern country. When Maryam was born her father shouted at her mother, "Why did you have to have a girl? Can't you do anything right?"

Maryam feared her father and hated the abuse that she and her mother faced. She was not permitted to invite any of the neighborhood children to her home, for they were "filthy infidel Christians." If she even talked to a Christian child, her father would beat her. And when she cried, her mother simply told her to pray, pray. Maryam prayed, but her prayers were never answered. She became convinced that no one heard her prayers. Maryam hated her life, hated what her father was doing to the family, but she saw no way out.

When Maryam's father made some bad business deals and was sent to prison for five years, Maryam found work to help her mother support the family.

After several years Maryam's father convinced a friend to pay for his release from prison. He returned home and announced that Maryam would be married to the son of his friend. When Maryam learned that her father had agreed to give her in exchange for his freedom, she was devastated. Once more she realized that she was only an object to her father, never a cherished child.

Maryam did not know the man she would marry, but she knew that he had a terrible temper. He was powerful and rich and had great influence in the government. Maryam did not consider this a marriage. She felt like a slave, sold to a man for her father's freedom.

From the beginning Maryam's husband oppressed and abused her. He beat her for almost any reason. Maryam lived in fear. When she learned that she was pregnant, she was secretly pleased, for she thought at last she would have someone who would love her back. But her husband's constant beatings killed the child and left Maryam badly bruised. Heartbroken, she tried to commit suicide. But she failed. *I can't even kill myself*, she thought.

Maryam desperately wanted out, but Islamic law forbade her to get a divorce. And her husband would never allow her to have a passport, so she could not run away. Her own family would not listen to her when she tried to tell them her troubles. She had to get out, but how?

*(continued next week)*

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