

# **MARRIAGE: GOD'S GIFT TO THE WORLD**

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A local newspaper reports what the scientists at our California universities trumpet as a great discovery: "Happily married women recover faster from workday woes." Well, anyone who believes the Bible could have told them that long ago.

A loving Creator made woman to be loved in a forever fidelity, which the Bible says is marriage. Such love is a precious gift which we receive from Jesus; and gifts are to be appreciated and thanks to be said for them.

For example, our "daily bread," our literal food, is to be appreciated with thanksgiving; never should we wolf it down without humbly thanking the Lord for it. And love of man and woman is to be celebrated in holy marriage as a gift from Himself to us. Marital romance is not to be wolfed down as animals do.

Love in marriage is a faint reflection of the love in the "marriage of the Lamb" when Heaven rejoices in Hallelujah choruses (Rev. 19:1-8). Christ marries one "wife," not multiple ones; and His conjugal love singles "her" out as His one choice in love. In God's delightful plan that our University professors have apparently just discovered, He plans for woman to be treasured in lifelong love by one man who sees in her his one dream of life companionship.

Of course "she manages stress well;" she comes home at day's end to what is a relationship more solid than Gibraltar, for it is pure and holy love. A

fornication-relationship is not our Creator/Savior's plan; far too often the "love" is only temporary; it's not dedicated to the Lord.

Purity in romance relationships are built solidly on the truth that our physical organisms, our bodies, do not rightfully belong to us: "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? . . . Flee sexual immorality" (1 Cor. 6:15, 18). The reason why the apostle says this is because the Son of God purchased us with His eternal life that He gave up for us; His life is holy; therefore we have been bought with a holy, immeasurable price.

Temptations to indulge romance outside of holy marriage are bewildering and compulsive; young people are afraid of marriage because they are afraid of true love. But fornication is destructive of it. "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (vss. 19, 20).

Does God forgive? Yes, but He saves one in the process.

For one who has loved sincerely and truly, who has been true to his/her marriage vows, to be betrayed and rejected by the one you have loved—this is a very painful experience.

Such have not asked for divorce; they have pleaded with God to spare them that humiliation and pain. And He has heard their prayers. But He cannot force a human heart, even if many people join in prayer.

The one who is rejected will not be forsaken by the Lord, even if he/she has made mistakes; his/her prayers for forgiveness are recorded at His throne.

Christ has an especially tender regard for such because He has known the exquisite pain of such rejection by one whom He deeply loves in a conjugal sense, yes, His Bride-to-be, His church.

All through the Bible, Christ's relationship to His people is likened to that of a Bridegroom waiting for the consummation of the wedding. Ezekiel writes of how the Lord fell in love with this attractive, delightful girl and proposed to her (16:8, 10-14). Hosea's painful ordeal with a woman whom he loved but who was unfaithful is a classic in love literature; his sufferings are a picture of Christ's sufferings because of His people's infidelity. Even to this day, the "marriage of the Lamb" has been long delayed (cf. Rev. 19:7, 8). Jesus has become one of us; He has become incarnate in humanity, never to cease being human as well as divine. But therein is all the passion of His love betrayed.

The one among us who has loved and lost must not throw away his life in despair. As surely as the Father resurrected Jesus from the grave, so surely will He resurrect your life, you who have been betrayed. "Fear not," He says especially to the rejected one, giving special assurance of forgiveness and understanding cf. Isa. 54:4, 5).

There is a special promise of forgiveness extended to people who have been healed of wounds, whether physical or emotional: "The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise

him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him" (James 5:15).

Cherish that word: "the Lord shall raise him [her] up." You have all the rest of your life before you in which to be "raised up." Even in the excruciating pain of divorce there is something to thank the Lord for, some little spark of gratitude to shine on still, and to grow.

Marriage counselors who try to help troubled couples generally advise them never to let the "D word" escape their lips. There is solid biblical or theological reason for this counsel.

Whether or not the troubled married couple are active church attendees, if they are seriously disturbed in their marriage they have very likely in some way breathed a prayer that God would save their marriage.

If, after so praying, they talk about the possibility of divorce ending it, this betrays unbelief on their part, and thus virtually nullifies their prayer.

The Lord Jesus has told us, "All things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matt. 21:22). Jesus strongly implies that Satan cannot know what we say to our Father in secret prayer (Matt. 6:6); but we also know that where there is strife and bitterness, there Satan is for sure, listening in.

Now, when we talk words expressing doubt and unbelief in the miracle-working power of the Holy Spirit, we are in effect inviting the Enemy to listen in.

The counsel about the "D word" applies to all our prayers. The Lord takes a special delight in His

people who trust Him in the face of discouraging circumstances. To trust Him before others, before the world, is itself a form of missionary work, because people are “reading” your Christian experience before they read your tracts and books.

Jehoshaphat leading unarmed Israel by faith, with hymns of praise to God, to face a huge opposing army—this is a grand example of trusting the Lord in the face of apparently hopeless opposition (2 Chron. 20:15-22). If King Saul, even though he had sinned grievously against the Lord, had led Israel likewise to face the Philistines in humble, honest, confessing faith, the Lord would not have abandoned him (the sad story of his unbelief is in 1 Sam. 31). The Lord loves repentant sinners!

Your battle of faith is as precious to the Lord as was Jehoshaphat’s; his story is written “for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor. 10:11). The writing of the Bible is already finished, but your story of trusting the Lord can still encourage others and give you the joy of witnessing for the Lord.

Suppose a husband and wife are both church members, even “leaders,” but they can’t be happy together: the first question they usually ask is, What can we do in order to learn to be happy together, to save our marriage from collapsing?

They are both ever so sincere. You meet them both individually, they are the loveliest people on earth, the nicest neighbors you can imagine.

But together they’re in an unending lovers’ quarrel. It’s not what they need to DO but what they need to LEARN and BELIEVE.

Now suppose you are a third party who loves them both as friends and fellow believers in Christ: how can you help them? Granted, of course, you “pray” for them; but you are so helpless in just “praying.”

Then you remember the New Covenant promise the Lord, the God of Abraham, has made to you as a “descendant of Abraham” by faith”: everywhere you go throughout the earth, throughout your whole life, “You shall be a blessing” (read it in the original, Genesis 12:2). That means the Lord intends that you as a third party will be a healing agent to these two quarrelers. (And that introduces you to some deep thinking: do you believe the New Covenant? Yes, you do: you “believe” but then immediately you pray, “Help my unbelief,” Mark 9:24.)

And then you remember what Jesus promised on that “last day . . . of the Feast” of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, when He “stood and cried out, . . . ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me, and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:37, 38). A parallel promise to the one in Genesis 12!

The Lord is perfectly capable of healing this troubled marriage; He longs to do so. Now, when your soul is deeply humbled before Him, your prayer enables Him to do what otherwise He is not able to do: yes, His omnipotence is hindered by our heart-unbelief and self-sufficiency. Now, broken-hearted, humbled but repentant sinners have a tremendous, special advantage: they are the ones who have been “grant[ed] to sit with [Him] on [His]

throne” because they are “overcom[ing]” (Rev. 3:21). You can’t get closer to Him than that!

What’s the difference between a New Covenant marriage and an Old Covenant marriage? Or are they the same?

Under the Old Covenant, you promise God faithfully that you will obey your marriage vows, come whatever. But maybe it doesn’t go right; your spouse turns out to be ornery, happiness seems difficult or apparently impossible. Still, your marriage is “under the law.” “The law” keeps you together which says, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” You grit your teeth and hang on. You see somebody else who’s nice; but you determine not to “fall” in love. Let’s give the Old Covenant its credit, its due: it saves many marriages from going into divorce, and has done so for thousands of years.

Under the New Covenant, God’s promise takes over. The seventh commandment which once was a stern prohibition becomes His happiness-filled promise: you shall not “fall” into an illicit love; you shall not become Satan’s plaything. Your marriage shall not be poisoned with infidelity; you two shall not become alienated. Hearts are changed.

Husbands, the New Testament command, “love your wives,” becomes fulfilled—you actually learn HOW to love them. HOW to make them happy. And how do you learn? You kneel at the cross of Christ and identify with Him “even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it” (see Eph. 5:25). Yes, it’s not impossible theory; you see how it’s truth.

And lo and behold, your wife is enabled to respond. Many a woman becomes irritable simply because she feels betrayed into a loveless bind, and then the worst impulses of a disappointed heart become manifest. Peter tells you the New Covenant Good News: “Ye husbands, dwell with [your wives] according to knowledge, giving honor 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). There’s a New Covenant marriage!

Wives, you too have some New Covenant promises which it becomes your job to believe. It’s generally supposed that husbands are difficult to deal with. Verses 1-6 tell of the wit and wisdom that God’s New Covenant promises impart to you—who otherwise are bewildered about what to do. Give them a good read—on your knees. You can learn.

What’s wrong with fornication? In our modern world, temptations are terrific; can’t God just forgive? Is fornication really sin? Is it the same as adultery?

“Adultery” is sex or familiarity with anyone who is not your God-given, lawful spouse. Fornication is the same. Even if you are engaged and looking forward to marriage, not yet has the Lord given you that personal intimacy; it’s a gift with His blessing that comes only from His hand and fornication is prematurely taking it out of His hand, trying to force God to do your own will, not His. It’s the direct opposite of Jesus’ prayer in His Garden of Gethsemane, when He prayed, “Not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39). His whole human soul

revolted against going to the cross because He knew that it meant dying the forever-second death, and it cost Him sweating blood to say No! to His own will and Yes! to the Father's.

Seen in this light, fornication is crucifying Christ afresh (cf. Heb. 6:6). It's denying what He died to establish: He wants you to have a truly happy marriage and solid foundation home that will lighten this dark world. Fornication loads you with guilt God doesn't want you to have; it's destructive of domestic peace.

God has placed the seventh of His ten commandment in the center of His holy law, like your heart, your most sensitive, valuable organ enclosed within the defense of your rib cage. No sword could penetrate your physical heart until that outer defense is first broken. Thus it's impossible to break the seventh until you have first already violated the preceding six; and it's impossible to find forgiveness for breaking the seventh until you find repentance and forgiveness for breaking those preceding six.

For example, it's impossible to break the seventh until you have first broken the fourth—you have been violating the holy Sabbath first, cherishing unholy thoughts and purposes; and you've broken the fifth, for illicit sex is a violation of holy parenthood; and you've broken the first for you have made it your "other god" which you have placed before the one true God.

But there is Good News: come to Jesus just as you are, filthy with sin; He "receiveth sinners" (Luke 15:2). With His New Covenant gospel He

transforms the ten commandments into ten glorious promises. This happens when you believe that Preamble to the ten—a reminder of what Christ has already accomplished on His cross to deliver you from "Egyptian bondage" (Ex 20:1, 2).

Jesus said that anyone who is healthy doesn't need a doctor (Luke 5:31). It would follow likewise, that any married couple who know what love is don't need a marriage counselor.

But we live in a fallen world where the healthiest sometimes need a physician and the happiest of couples sometimes need some encouragement and reproof.

What a blessing when that Physician is Christ Himself and that Counselor is our Savior. In each instance, He is the One of whom it is said, "Unto us a Son is given" (Isa. 9:6); Christ became one of us, a member of the fallen human race who was Himself never sick and who never sinned. Yet whenever He healed the sick, He took their sickness upon Himself: "He . . . healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet saying: 'He Himself . . . bore our sicknesses'" (Matt. 8:16, 17). A supremely healthy Man bore sickness in His own body! (Let anyone who is sick ponder this.)

As a Marriage Counselor He is also "unto us a Son is given," One of us. The most painful experience a good man can suffer is to be despised, rejected, hated by the one woman in all the world whom he truly loves, and Jesus has had that experience—in an infinite dimension. Because

the “woman” is the “church” on which He has bestowed His supreme regard.

“Church” isn’t necessarily synonymous with the word “denomination,” but it is distinguished in Revelation 12:17 and 14:12 as the one that stands out distinctly different in that it “keeps the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” Thus it is different from “Babylon” which is “fallen” (14:8; 18:2). If this church keeps the commandments of God, it has had to “follow the Lamb wherever He goes,” and “in whose mouth there is no guile,” who is “without fault before the throne of God” (14:4, 5). There has been something in its earthly history that is different: there was a time when it eagerly and sincerely accepted every ray of truth that God permitted to shine on its pathway. No resistance; a betrothal that brought joy to the heart of the Son of God who is still and will be forever a human being as well, but “God with us.”

And then as “she” grew to maturity, “she” turned on Him in “cruel” rejection. “Impossible,” you say? It’s portrayed in Scripture in the Song of Solomon chapter 5. It’s the love story of the ages. And the alienation must and will be healed in at-one-ment, reconciliation, repentance. Don’t “divorce” yourself from the church. It is to become the bride of the Lamb when it learns to appreciate what the Lamb has suffered and given for it.

The marriage is on the rocks and healing seems impossible; a flood of bitter memories is almost all they have left between them. Yet they are church members and they both dread divorce and each knows he/she is unworthy (and incapable!) alone to

raise the innocent children whom they have brought into the world. What once was love (or was it just fun for sex?) seems dead.

But there’s that nagging remembrance: our marital failure brings shame and disgrace on the Lord Jesus Christ, for He is the One who invented marriage, and the universe is watching.

When we think of Him as a cold infinite institution even bigger than the Pentagon, that doesn’t disturb us because what we do is a mere pinprick. But when we think of Him as a real human (divine) Person forever intimately given to us, a purpose begins to form in our souls—we can’t heap further pain on Him. Our marital failure is a re-crucifixion of the One whom the Jews nailed to a tree, and He still feels pain (and nakedness-shame).

Marital failures are serious; they drive spikes in His wrist and ankle bones. And He must bear listening to the sobs of innocent children.

Satan says this couple must have the pleasure of divorce so they can start again with someone else, or at least, find peace alone; and the children? Better off with the divorce, at least that’s what the world says (and if we forget Christ and heaven that seems true).

But we don’t want spiritual disaster; and yes we both love the children. So let’s welcome the path to healing; the Savior shows it to us in His word:

(1) Spend a full hour alone with Him, the best Marriage Counselor ever; accept the “chastening of the Lord”(read Heb. 12:4-12). (2) Be serious: turn off TV, radio, CD’s; humble your soul in quietness alone. (3) Welcome this “chastening of the Lord;”

stop resisting it. (4) Let Him “slay” you (Job 13:15). Our text says “every son whom He receiveth,” so the “houseband” is the one primarily in need. (5) Don’t resist identifying yourself as “less than the least of all saints” (Eph. 3:8). In your broken-heartedness don’t reject that last word—you are one of His “saints.” (6) That’s a tremendously healthy gift of self-respect. (7) Rejoice, you’ve taken the first step in saving your marriage.

The path to happiness and stability for any marriage lies via the cross of Christ. Even in the case of those who are not [yet] Christians, the happiness they have is the gift of Christ, for He is “the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world” (John 1:9).

Christ is the world’s Creator, and He is also the world’s Redeemer and Savior (4:42); it was He who said “‘it is not good that man should be alone; I will make a helper comparable to him.’ . . . And He brought [the woman] to the man. . . . Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they [two] shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:18-24).

But it was at the holy moment of the cross that the world caught a glimpse of what love (*agape*) means. That word includes love of man for woman and her response to his love—sexual love, for we read, “Husbands, love [with *agape*] your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. . . . So ought husbands to love [with *agape*] their own wives” (Eph. 5:25, 28). The command of God to love becomes the most exquisite joy man can know.

Thus, says an insightful writer, “Love [between husband and wife] is a precious gift which we receive from Jesus.” *Adventist Home*, p. 50. It’s a miracle seen all over the world in all time, that the Lord Jesus gives that “precious gift” of true sexual love for one woman to one man; love is by its very nature “jealous” (S.S. 8:6, 7). It would be cruel for the Lord God, our Creator and Savior, to give that true jealous love for one woman to two men, thus creating a lifelong pain for one. (There must be a distinction between sexual infatuation that dies overnight, with that “precious gift” which is “strong as death.”)

The Lord Jesus has warned us that in the last days “because lawlessness shall abound, the love [agape] of many will grow cold” (Matt. 24:12). The “light” that is yet to “lighten the earth with glory” (Rev. 18:1-4) will include the light of *agape* shining in the hearts of husbands and wives who have been awakened by the ministry of the last-days “Elijah” (cf. Mal. 4:5, 6; 2:14-16).