



Conducted by
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“In view of the fact that marriage, so far as the world is concerned, is looked upon as a matter of convenience, why is so much importance placed on marriage by the church?”

IT is undoubtedly true that marriage has been degraded in the world, so much so, in fact, that some people are saying that it is an out-of-date institution and should be abolished. I personally have little doubt that if the voices which are raised should prevail then we shall see a further denegation of this God-given tie; one can only say that should this take place then it would be a great detriment to the society in which we live. It is quite true to say that marriage was made by God for man. There are deep purposes of God for man, which find their realisation in the life-long union of one man and one woman in marriage.

A Popular View

There are some people who view man, and try to explain his existence, from a purely animal level. Unfortunately, they do great harm when they attempt to explain, especially to the young, the significance of the sex-life of man and woman from the level of its manifestation in the animal world. It seems to me, although modern human behaviour would seem to disprove it, that man's ideals and achievements are not the result of a blind struggle from the animal level, but are the responses of the spiritual part of his make-up to the guidance and promptings from the spiritual source of his creation. If we persist in attempting to explain the sexual relationship inherent in marriage from the purely animal standpoint, then we must not be surprised if some of the responses result in animal-like behaviour.

The Christian View

How must the christian view marriage? Well, I believe that he must always have that regard for the sanctity of marriage as related to man's spiritual nature. He must believe, as the Bible teaches, that man was created body, soul and spirit, and that the sanctity of the manifold relationships into which he enters is determined by his responses to the guidance from the highest-order spiritual source, namely, God Himself. Nothing less than this conception will suffice for the christian.

Why do I say this? Well, it seems to me that the teaching of Jesus emphasises this spiritual concept of marriage. He does not point to some ideal which lies in a future state of evolution, but He speaks of a purpose and a design of God which has existed from the beginning. He goes back beyond Moses when he said, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: *but from the beginning it was not so*" (Matt. 19:8). He emphasises this divinely directed relationship in the same passage of scripture when he says, "Have ye not read that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female?" (19:4). Jesus here indicates that God deliberately created this polarity of sex in human nature, with its tremendous urge upon each to come into union with the other; drawn together by the sex instinct in their physical make-up and the love instinct in their souls, into the most intimate relationship of body and soul.

This, as you will appreciate, goes far beyond the conception of a relationship at animal level. It is God's intention that the man and the woman shall be joined together in body, soul and spirit into a relationship which is more than transitory.

One Man and One Woman

Many people say to me, "Well, why does the church teach that it should be between one man and one woman only? I suppose that such people have in mind the modern idea that you can try marriage and if it doesn't work out then you can separate and try again at some later date with another person. It is as well to remind such that Jesus said, "I came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister". This statement leads our thoughts to the selflessness as demonstrated in Jesus and the selfishness often found in man, and is the basis of the contrast between free love and true love,

Free love is, quite simply, self-fulfilment. In the modern idiom one is 'with it' if one thinks and acts like this, but when free love is strictly analysed it simply means that one is determined to satisfy oneself come what may, and with scant regard for the feelings and emotions of the other, not worrying too much of the ultimate consequences. Needless to say, such a conception of love often ends in disillusionment.

In contrast true love is the offering of oneself, both physically and spiritually *for the fulfilment of another*, and in it there awakens more clearly the sense of personal fulfilment. This is the type of love that Jesus showed us; this is the AGAPE love. Applied to the married state, each becomes part of the others very being. As Jesus taught, "They are no more twain, but one". To break such a relationship is to tear away part of the other's very being. The finest testimony to the divine purpose in marriage is a love relationship maintained undiminished in old age. It takes a lifetime together to attain it, but when seen it is extremely beautiful to behold.

Why is Marriage Permanent?

Marriage is permanent because there are others besides the married couple involved in it. "For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife". This is the basis out of which human society was in the end to be fashioned, the unit of the freely chosen union of two persons in mutual love. This relationship, under normal circumstances, produces children who add to and deepen the relationship. It is, I believe, the permanency, of the family unit in trust and love which stabilises our society; when these units fail then the structure of society is in jeopardy..

The only relationship which passes beyond the possibilities of marriage is the relationship of the soul to God. Paul contrasts the relationship between husband and wife with that between Christ and the church (Eph. 5); the church being composed of those souls who in faith seek to

know Christ in the intimacy of love towards Him. This love cements the relationship and makes it permanent so long as the individual soul is willing to continue in faith and love; in this way the church upbuilds itself in love.

Guidelines to Marriage

From the foregoing we can see that the marriage which ought to have the greatest hope of success is the marriage between two people who have the greater relationship in the Spirit between themselves and God, activated through faith in Christ. The intimacy which exists between God and man ought to project itself into the complete fusion of those who marry in the Lord. (See 1 Cor. 7:39; also 2 Cor. 6:14).

But even when we appreciate this, there must be no marriage of convenience even between christians. There is no automatic success simply because two people happen to be in the church. There is no automatic success in relationship with Christ simply because one has been immersed. Salvation has to be worked at with fear and trembling; a marriage has to be worked at or it will founder on the rocks.. Joys and sorrows must be shared, as must be work and responsibility. There must be mutual esteem, and complete communication and understanding. There must be times when each must support the other; the ecstasy of love must survive the burdens that each or both may have to bear; the thrill of riding on the cloud must be tempered by the realisation that one may have to call on hidden resources in order to pick oneself up off the floor. If these things can be appreciated and worked on, then by God's help the marriage may be successful.

Conclusion

Yes, so far as the church is concerned, the permanency of successful marriage is extremely important. We *must* acknowledge that God had important reasons for initiating it and is desirous that it should continue undiluted. We must also realise that Satan, through his agencies, is trying to destroy that which God set up. Let us, then, see that our marriages conform to the deep purposes of God so that they may be examples to future generations perhaps, as yet, unborn. (All questions please to Alf Marsden, 66 Mitchell Street, Newtown, Wigan, Lancs.)