Marriage by God’s Design, Order & Will

*by Harry Osborne*

Our society is cursed with the prevalence of family violence, infidelity, abuse and a great lack of commitment to marriage vows. In some areas of the country, the number of divorces equal or exceed the number of marriages per year. On average in this country, one in two marriages end in divorce. Why do two people start out their lives together thinking of “happily ever after,” but come to “irreconcilable differences” only a few years later? Is there any way to change the modern mess made of marriage?

The Word of God tells us of the origin of marriage in Genesis 2. After God had pronounced that all other things in creation were good, He looked upon the state of man without a companion. Though the garden in which he dwelt was beautiful beyond our imagination and peaceful beyond words, God saw that it was not good for man to be alone. Therefore, as the crowning jewel of creation, God caused the man to sleep and formed a companion perfectly suited for him from the rib of the man. By submitting to God's order and design for marriage, we can realize the completeness God intended as a “man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife and they two become one flesh.”

While on earth, Jesus reaffirmed God’s original will for marriage and required all to submit thereto with these words:

*“And he answered and said, Have ye not read, that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh? So that they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder”* (Matt. 19:4-6).

Through the inspired apostle, God decreed the order and design of marriage in these words. Let us heed and obey them: *"Wives, be in subjection unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it.... Even so ought husbands also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his own wife loveth himself: for no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as Christ also the church* (Eph. 5:22-29).

A man’s greatest responsibility in marriage is having the love God commands of every husband towards his wife. A love that seeks her best, even at his own sacrifice. A love that is kind and gentle, giving a place of honor to the wife. Such a love was described by God in these words:

*"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things"* (1 Cor. 13:4‑7).

Even if a husband would seek to escape his God-given responsibility of leadership within the home, his love should cause him to act as God commands. Most of all, this kind of love should aim at drawing each spouse closer to God. This is the husband’s primary obligation and he will answer to God in judgment for the way he fulfills it. No matter what success he may achieve in material things, if his love and leadership are not used to direct both parties towards heaven, he will be a miserable failure. If his love and leadership are so used, no one could be a greater success.

The woman’s greatest responsibility in marriage is showing the example of godly submission required of every wife. That submission is not based upon her inferiority, but upon her role in God's plan for marriage. It should be the natural response to her husband's love for her above any other upon this earth. The Bible says, *“Wives, likewise, be in subjection to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward--arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel-- rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves”* (1 Pet. 3:1-6).

In following God's design, a wife can be the strength binding the family together even in difficult times, fulfilling her role as God's reminder in the family of the peaceable and righteous character desired of all. In all of this, she must remember that one day she must answer before God for the way she kept His charge in her life and family.

Marriage was designed by our Lord to bring joy to a husband and wife throughout the journey of life. Solomon exhorted the man to *"rejoice in the wife of thy youth . . . and be thou ravished always with her love"* (Prov. 5:18-19). He closed the Song of Songs by noting that the love between a husband and wife is more valuable than all of earth's treasures. A love that never strays from the goal of seeking the other's good is a love that will see the married couple well through life, whatever it may bring. Both of them should realize that life will have its heartaches, sorrows, trials and problem for we live in an imperfect world. But if they determine from the start to meet and overcome them hand-in-hand, those problems will become stepping stones to a stronger love.

The covenant of marriage is not a frivolous one. It is of such a solemn and binding nature that only death can honorably severe the bond. God does not mean for this bond to be cast aside in violation of His law, for He said, *"For the woman that hath a husband is bound by law to the husband while he liveth; but if the husband die, she is discharged from the law of the husband. So then if, while the husband liveth, she be joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress"* (Rom. 7:2-3). We enter into marriage with vows exchanged by the husband and wife. Those vows are not to be taken lightly, because they are viewed very seriously by our Maker. Of the taking of vows, God says, *"When a man voweth a vow unto Jehovah, or sweareth an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth"* (Num. 30:2). No vows are more tender and no ties are more sacred than the vows through which a man and woman promise their love, devotion and faithfulness to one another before the God of heaven.

Though dismissed as a small thing by many in our society, betrayal of the marriage vows is not only a sin against one’s spouse, it is the breaking of an oath before our God with eternal consequences to be imposed at the judgment. Are you being faithful and true to the vows you made to your spouse? If you are not yet married, are you thinking about the seriousness of the commitment vowed in marriage? The solution to the problems of divorce, infidelity and marital friction so common in the world is really very simple — be true to your vows!

The words of the inspired apostle give instruction to be heeded by all who seek loving and peaceful relationships: *"Finally, be likeminded, compassionate, loving as brethren, tenderhearted, humbleminded: not rendering evil for evil, or reviling for reviling; but contrariwise blessing; for hereunto were ye called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For, He that would love life, And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips that they speak no guile: And let him turn away from evil, and do good; Let him seek peace, and pursue it"* (1 Pet. 3:8-11).