

TEACHINGS OF CHRIST ON MARRIAGE

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When Jesus was asked about whether it was lawful for a man to put away his wife he responded, “*And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder*” (Matt 19:4-6). When the Pharisees questioned Jesus about the law of Moses concerning divorce, Jesus responded with “*...but from the beginning it was not so*” (Matt 19:8). The Lord uses the marriage relationship and God’s work through marriage as a way to correlate between the relationship between Christ and the church. While this could be a very lengthy discussion, there are two points I’d like to highlight where many, including those in the Lord’s church, seem to have lost focus. The first point is that God’s work in marriage is to join man and woman, and the second point is that God’s design for marriage creates the requirement for a man to separate himself from father and mother.

Joining man and woman

Over the course of time, the Lord used numerous references that likened His people to those in a marriage (and therefore a covenant) relationship (e.g. when they went to idolatry He called it adulterous, Jer 3:6-9). His work in marriage is to join male and female and He doesn’t desire that work to be undone or taken as a trivial thing such that undoing it becomes commonplace, easy, and an acceptable alternative. While He allows for it under the New Testament law in the case of adultery, He did not design marriage to be temporary. And it’s not surprising because it’s reflective of how He views His people. Once we are joined by covenant to God with Jesus as the mediator (Heb 12:24), we are to be faithful to Him and not seek to join ourselves to others or break away from the covenant. The Hebrew writer notes, “*Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul* (Heb 10:38-39). Obviously our Father will never be unfaithful to us, so there will never be an acceptable circumstance to draw back from the covenant.

Leaving father and mother

There aren’t many revelations of causality for commands in scripture but it’s

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revealed the result of God's design for marriage is that a man leave father and mother and cleave to his wife: *"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church"* (Eph 5:31-32). It's been commonly reported and generally accepted that many young adults are either staying at home longer or moving back in with their parents. In many cases this includes those who are married. The number of "multi-generational" households is on the rise. The economy over the last few years had a lot to do with some of these trends but it's something we should consider when teaching our young people about marriage. In other cases, while there may be physical separation of households, many are still 'tied' to father and mother in their financial dependence, decision making, loyalty, affection, child rearing, etc. such that they do not cleave to their spouse as God commanded. Unfortunately this can lead to divorce or other difficulties in a marriage. Obviously my point is not that parents must be cut off from any contact after marriage, but there is a commanded separation designed by God as a part of marriage, and many today often neglect to consider the proper separation. Whether it's physical separation from living in the same household or what it means to 'cleave to his wife' through other aspects of decision making involving independence from the parents and in-laws, we should understand God's will and obey.

Coming out from the world

But again, when we understand marriage in the context between Christ and the church, it's not all that surprising. We have been called out of the world to separate ourselves from it: *"And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty"* (1Cor 6:16-18). As Paul noted, we cannot take ourselves out of the world (1Cor 5:10), but we are not to be conformed to it (Rom 12:2). So often those in the church are pulled back into the world because they have not separated themselves properly and are ultimately corrupted by the influences. If we understand and heed God's design for marriage and our covenant to Him, we as family units will be blessed, and so will the church.