

# MARRIAGE IN THE BIBLE

## The Teachings of Jesus

The teachings of Jesus about marriage, are taken mostly from his reflection on divorce. They can be summarized into three statements.

1. **Marriage is not the main purpose of one's life.** There are other things that are more important than marriage.
  - a. **The Kingdom of God is our main purpose in life.** In Matthew 6:33: Jesus said: *"But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* Jesus came to preach about the Kingdom of God, and he considers the Kingdom of God to be more important than marriage. According to Mark 1:15, Jesus began to preach, *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."* Jesus considered the acceptance of his Kingdom to be more important than anything, including marriage.
  - b. **The Kingdom of God comes before the family.** Whenever anyone wanted to follow Jesus, he would warn them; but then, he would also demand loyalty to the Kingdom of God, a kind of loyalty that was higher than that given to the family. One man wanted to stay with his father until he died; another, simply wanted to say good-bye to his family. In both cases Jesus demanded that they obey the Kingdom of God first. Luke 9:57-62 illustrates the point:

*As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*
  - c. **All Christians become members of the same family.** If one must obey the Kingdom of God even before his own family, this does not mean that he is without a family. His family becomes even larger, for his family consists of all those who make the Kingdom of God first in their lives. Mark 3:31-35 illustrates this in Jesus own relationship with his mother and his brothers and sisters. When the crowd told Jesus that his family was asking for him, he replied, *"Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."*
2. **Marriage has a divine purpose.** Although marriage is not the main purpose of our lives, it still has a divine purpose, for it was God who brought man and woman together.
  - a. **Man and woman become one in marriage.** Jesus answers a question on divorce, by quoting Genesis 2:24 from the Hebrew Scriptures, which says: *"From the beginning of creation, continues Jesus, "'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man*

*shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”*

- b. **Marriage has two purposes.** The first purpose of marriage, according to Genesis 1:27-28, is reproduction. *“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”*

The second purpose is Partnership. Genesis 2:18-24 describes the partner in marriage as woman. *“Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.’”* Reproduction and partnership were intended to be part of the making of the man and the woman into becoming one flesh. Reproduction and partnership were to be held together in marriage. Who drove a wedge between them? Some blame Augustine, but Charles Mathewes suggests that we cannot blame Augustine for the split. It seems to me that the blame lies somewhere in the Protestant movement. Why do I say this? I say this because it was within the Protestant movement that we wanted partnership to take priority over reproduction.<sup>1</sup>

3. **Marriage is meant to be permanent.** This was God’s original intention, but this does not carry over into heaven. It is only meant to be permanent in this world.

- a. **Divorce is not allowed.** Divorce is not permitted for any reason. Even adultery is not a good reason. A woman caught in adultery was stoned to death, and therefore, there was no need to divorce her. Nothing is said about the man.

Jesus defined adultery spiritually. It is not only having sexual intercourse with someone else, but it is looking at another person with sexual lust. If his definition were accepted today, no-one could get a divorce. This, however, is a misunderstanding of what Jesus taught. According to Matthew 5:31-32, Jesus said:

*But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (Matthew 19:3-12)*

- b. **There is no marriage in heaven.** Can one marry again after his wife has died? There is no reason for remarriage, for there are no marriages in heaven. Jesus does not forbid remarriage after the death of one’s wife or husband; but since there is no marriage in heaven, a marriage won’t be permanent. Luke 20:27-40 illustrates the point Jesus is trying to make.

*Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless;*

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Mathewes, *The City of God*, (The Teaching Company, 2016), p. 121. Mathewes uses *passion* instead of partnership.

*then the second and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. Finally the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.” Jesus said to them, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.” Then some of the scribes answered, “Teacher, you have spoken well.” For they no longer dared to ask him another question.*

### **The Teachings of Paul**

Paul’s teachings about marriage are derived from his belief that Jesus will return soon to establish the Kingdom of God, and that in this coming Kingdom men and women will not marry. Therefore it is better to remain single.

1. **The Responsibilities in the Family.** Paul deals with these responsibilities in Ephesians 5:21 –6:4. The following summaries can be made:
  - a. Wives: *“Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.”* (Ephesians 5:22)
  - b. Husbands: *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...”* (Ephesians 5:25)
  - c. Children: *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”* (Ephesians 6:1)
2. **Stay single for the Kingdom of God.** This is Paul’s advice not to marry. The Kingdom of God will be here soon, and marriage will no longer be necessary.
  - a. **Paul’s Advice:** *“To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am.”* (1 Corinthians 7:8) *“Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy. I think that, in view of the impending crisis, it is well for you to remain as you are. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife.”* (1 Corinthians 7:25-27)
  - b. **The Usefulness of the single person.** Paul describes the usefulness of the single person in 1 Corinthians 7:32-34.

*I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband.*

*If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his fiancée, if his passions are strong, and so it has to be, let him marry as he wishes; it is no sin. Let them marry. (1 Corinthians 7:36)*

3. **Marriage is not sinful.** Although Paul prefers that Christians remain single, he does say that marriage is not a sin. If a person is married, he or she should remain married. If a person finds it difficult to remain single, then it is ok to get married.
  - a. **It is not a sin, but it does bring trouble.** Paul simply gives advice because he wants Christians to avoid everyday troubles.

*“But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin. Yet those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that.” (1 Corinthians 7:28)*
  - b. **It is a question of divided loyalties.** The only difficulty Paul finds in marriage is that one is divided between the Kingdom of God and his or her spouse. Who should be served first? The answer is obvious: God and his Kingdom.
4. **Believers should not marry unbelievers.** In this issue, we must consider the the single person as well as those who find themselves already married to unbelievers.
  - a. **The single.** Believers should not marry unbelievers because they have nothing in common.

*“Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14)*
  - b. **The Married.** What should one do who finds himself or herself already married to an unbeliever? One should not seek a divorce, but should set an example and pray for the unbeliever’s conversion.

*“To the rest I say—I and not the Lord—that if any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. ... Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife. “ (1 Corinthians 7:12-13 and 15)*
  - c. **The Unbeliever.** If the unbeliever does not want to continue in the marriage, Paul gives the following advice: *“But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. It is to peace that God has called you.” (1 Corinthians 7:15)*
5. **Divorce and Remarriage Laws.** Paul accepts Jesus’ teachings about divorce and remarriage. If one gets a divorce, he or she cannot remarry until the former marriage partner has died. Paul claims that this is a commandment from the Lord.
  - a. **Divorce and Remarriage.** Paul gives the following advice: *“To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord—that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.” (1 Corinthians 7:10-11)*

- b. **Death and Remarriage.** *“A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies,”* says Paul, *“she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord.”*

### **The Teachings of the Church**

The way in which the Church discusses the issues around marriage can be reduced to the following questions and answers.

1. **What is the purpose of marriage?** There are at least two answers to this question. The first answer comes out of the first creation story in the Bible and has to do with reproduction.

- a. **Reproduction:** Then God said, *“Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”*

*So God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.*

*God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”*

- b. **Partnership:** Then the LORD God said, *“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.”* So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

*“This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
this one shall be called Woman,  
for out of Man this one was taken.*

*Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.”*

All Christian Churches define marriage from one or both of these Biblical passages. The Catholic Church emphasizes the first purpose, and most Protestants emphasize the second purpose. This is why they differ in regard to the use of birth control and abortion.

2. **Is Marriage Essential?** Does one have to get married? The obvious answer is, “No.” This does not mean that celibacy is better than marriage. Jesus and Paul did not marry, but Peter did, and so have many other great Christians.

The Roman Catholic Church has usually lifted celibacy up, while Protestants have considered marriage and celibacy as being of equal value. One does not have to marry, but this does not make the single person more holy.

3. **Can a Christian obtain a divorce?** When Christians choose to marry, they also open themselves up to making a serious mistake. What should they do if their marriage does not work out. Very few churches take the advice of Jesus or Paul.
  - a. **The Teachings of Jesus and Paul.** According to Jesus and Paul, divorce is never the will of God. Anyone who gets a divorce, cannot marry again. While the spouse is alive, reconciliation is possible, and should be sought. Only after the spouse has died, can divorce even be considered.<sup>2</sup>
  - b. **The teachings of the Church.** The Church usually makes a distinction between the “guilty” and the “innocent.” person. The innocent person can get a divorce and marry again, and still be considered in good relationship with the Church. The Roman Catholic Church takes divorce and remarriage much more seriously than the Protestant churches; and as a result, they have a lower divorce rate than the Protestant churches. Very few churches follow the teachings of Jesus and Paul on marriage and divorce.

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<sup>2</sup> See Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:9; Mark 10:10-12; Luke 16:18