

The Definition of Marriage

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – The definition of the institution of marriage, its divine nature, and its purpose in the world
2. aim – To cause us to understand the nature of marriage as part of God's nature and decree
3. passage – Genesis 2:24

b. outline

1. The Institution of Marriage
2. The Divine Nature of Marriage
3. The Purpose of Marriage

c. overview

1. opening remarks re: **China Bridge Conference 2013**
2. **reality #1:** the *waning importance* of marriage
 - a. in America, there are less people **currently married** (by percentage) than ever before
 1. in 1960, 72% of all adults were married; in 2017, 54% of all adults were married
 2. reasons: cohabitation acceptance, high divorce rates, sexual liberation from marriage
 - b. in America, young people are waiting **much longer to marry** for the first time
 1. in 1960, the average age = 21 (women: 20, men: 22); in 2022 = 29 (women: 28, men: 30)
 2. reasons: a heavier focus on post-secondary education, prolonged adolescence, financial
 - c. in America, the number of **children born out of wedlock** has skyrocketed
 1. in 1960, 5% of children were born to unwed mothers; in 2020, 41% (black: ~70%)
 2. reasons: less marriages, single-parent cultural acceptance, less “need” for marriage
 - d. **conclusion: marriage is no longer seen as “fundamental” to Western culture**
3. **reality #2:** the *changing reasons* for marriage:
 - a. **note:** over against the *traditional* belief that marriage was a *normal* part of adult life
 1. **i.e.** some marry because there is still a cultural sense of marriage being “normal”
 - b. but ... many marry *to fill a need*, generally emotional, because it is only *transitional* (**i.e.** easy to break), or to reap certain economic benefits (**e.g.** the *primary* argument of Obergefell)
 - c. **conclusion: although there is still a small traditional sense of marriage in adulthood, it appears that marriage is treated now as much more of a personal choice amongst many**
4. **thesis: marriage is a foundational institution established by God, and how we understand marriage is fundamental to a Christian worldview**

Paras 1 & 2: “Marriage is to be between one man and one woman; neither is it lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband at the same time. Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and the preventing of uncleanness.”

I. The Institution of Marriage

Content

a. marriage is a **universal** institution

1. marriage has existed in virtually every human civilization, as seen in the *earliest* historical records
 - a. marriage in the ANE is well-documented, as well as in China from its very earliest history
 1. **e.g.** the Code of Hammurabi (Mesopotamia; c. 1700BC), laws 128-184 all deal with marriage
 2. **e.g.** the Torah (Israelite; c. 1400BC) has a number of *laws* re: marriage (**Deut. 24**)
 3. **e.g.** the Fu Xi / Nüwa legend (China; c. 2800BC) is similar to the Adam/Eve story of marriage
 - b. marriage has been a *core* institution in virtually every human society
 - a. paternity, family lines, societal structures, etc. have revolved around marriage for millennia
 - b. procreation has been a *primary* purpose of marriage in virtually every civilization ever known
3. marriage has been a *universally* understood *social* and *cultural* concept
 - a. different cultures have established different *means* and *ways* over time
 - b. and, its connection to *religion* throughout time is undeniable (even in largely *secular* societies)
 - c. but, marriage is a concept *well-understood* within virtually every culture on the planet

b. marriage is a **mixture** of secular and religious interests

1. **reality:** marriage is *not* primarily a “Christian” institution, nor is it primarily a “religious” one
 - a. marriage preexisted *Israelite history* itself (by >1000 years; **see Genesis 2**)

- b. marriage preexisted *Christianity* by several thousand years (inside and outside of Israel)
- c. marriages continue to be sanctioned *outside* the church for the non-religious (*i.e.* by the state)
- 2. **reality:** marriage is (in general) a *mixture* of both *secular* and *religious* interests
 - a. **secular:** the stability and longevity of a society, as traced to its basic family unit (via marriage)
 - 1. it is in the “best interests” of government to promote healthy family life (**e.g.** birth rates)
 - b. **religious:** the promulgation of morality and the control of human sexuality (along with its dangers)
 - 1. virtually every religious system recognizes the need for sexual *restraint* (**e.g.** laws re: incest)
 - c. **e.g.** in America, (most) states grant *authority* to ministers to legally marry individuals – this flows out of a *Judeo-Christian* worldview which sees marriage as a function of society as a *whole*

II. The Divine Nature of Marriage

Content

a. marriage is a ***theological*** concept

1. **problem:** largely *ignored* by theologians within soteriological or redemptive historical discussions
 - a. **e.g.** neither Grudem nor Berkhof deal with it in their Systematics; Calvin only *briefly* touches on it
 - b. **i.e.** because of: 1) the *secular* nature of marriage (**see above**), 2) marriage as something *we* do, 3) the Protestant resistance to the Roman Catholic idea of marriage as a “sacrament”, and 4) marriage not being *directly* related to the concept of salvation itself
2. **question:** but ... if marriage is an *ancient* institution, and *common* to the entire civilized world, then **where do we find a specific definition of it**, and where do we find its *larger* purpose articulated?
 - a. **IOW:** if marriage predates recorded history, then where is its *genesis*?
 - b. **answer:** marriage must be seen through the lens of *biblical* revelation – *no other source* adequately explains the ubiquitous nature of marriage throughout the world (an *objective* source)
3. **principle: marriage is a theological idea, established by God at the outset of humanity, integral to history as the very foundation of civilization itself**
 - a. thus ... marriage is included in the Confession as an aspect of *faith* and central to **Baptist life**

b. marriage is a ***creative act*** of God (Genesis 2:18-24)

1. the **formation of Adam** in the **Genesis 2** account
 - a. God forms Adam from the dust of the ground and makes him a “*living being*” (**vv. 1-8**)
 - b. God places Adam in the Garden to maintain it (**vv. 15-17**)
 - c. God says “*it is not good for the man to be alone*” (**v. 18**) – a strange statement:
 1. given there were animals all around (**vv. 19-20**), angels (**e.g.** the serpent in **3:1**)
 2. given that God himself relates to Adam *physically* (*i.e.* the pre-incarnate **Christ** in **3:8**)
 - d. but ... there is no one on the same *strata* (or *level*) as Adam
 1. the animals and the angels are *unlike* him (as was God himself; **Psalms 8:5-8**)
 2. Adam had been created for a *peer-to-peer* relationship (like God himself, the *Imago Dei*)
 3. Adam needed a “*helper*” (**v. 18**) – not just to tend the Garden, but to *fulfill* his existence
2. the **formation of Eve** in the **Genesis 2** account
 - a. God forms Eve from a “*rib*” of Adam (**vv. 21-22**)
 1. he does not create a *new* creature from the dust of the ground; he “*extends*” Adam
 2. he forms a creature *similar* to Adam, yet *different* from him
3. the **formation of marriage** in the **Genesis 2** account
 - a. **v. 24** becomes the **definition of marriage** – God gives Eve to Adam to *fulfill* his existence
 1. the “*therefore*” of **v. 24** indicates the *conclusion* (or *purpose*) of God creating Eve
 2. *why* do people get married? as a *completion* of the divine purpose for humanity
 - b. the *core* of marriage being: “... *they shall become one flesh*”
4. **principle: marriage is the creative act of God in which he forms a new creature from two separate and different persons in the image of God himself to fulfill his divine purpose**
 - a. we call this *new creature* “Mr. and Mrs.” or “husband and wife” – two *distinct* persons becoming *one flesh* (*i.e.* with one nature; more than just the “physical” joining of flesh in sex; cleaving [KJV])
 - b. Paul quotes **Genesis 2:24** in speaking of this “*one flesh*” unity in **Ephesians 5:28f**
“In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself ...”
 - c. by creating Eve *similar* to Adam (yet *different*), and then joining her to Adam as his wife, God formed a new creature as the basis for human civilization itself
 - d. thus, all “forms” of marriage outside of the heterosexual, monogamous, life-long, commitment of one man and one (unrelated) woman is inconsistent with God’s creative act (**note para. 1**)
 1. **fact:** homosexual “marriage” is (also!) *outside the bounds* of God’s creative act – such a union can *never* become a “one flesh union” since it was never sanctioned by God *to make it so*

III. The Purpose of Marriage

Content

a. marriage is a creation ordinance (Genesis 1:27-28)

1. **i.e.** foundational to the very *existence* of humanity
2. the **larger purpose** of God in marriage (**i.e.** the *creation ordinance*; **Genesis 1:27-28**)
 - a. the creation (and marriage) of “*male and female*” (**v. 27**) is to *obey* the following commands:
 - b. **command #1:** be “*fruitful and multiply*” – *procreate* and reproduce the race
 1. for the continuing *existence* of the human race (the *only* command we have “succeeded” at)
 - c. **command #2:** “*subdue*” the earth and take “*dominion*” over all other creatures
 1. for the establishment of *human civilization* (**i.e.** the care and feeding of humanity)
3. **principle: marriage is a central part of the creation ordinance, at the heart of the dominion of humanity over this planet in accordance with God’s purposes throughout**
 - a. **IOW:** God ordained marriage *at the very beginning* as the institution *through which* humanity would carry out God’s purposes within creation itself
 - b. **IOW:** any other “view” of marriage that defines the union differently or fails to take into account these two *creation mandates* fails the test of authenticity (**e.g.** Obergefell)

b. marriage is a covenant relationship

1. **i.e.** a relationship of *promise* illustrating God’s promise-keeping nature
2. **principle: marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman, authorized by God himself, and held to the same standards that God makes in his covenant relationships**
 - a. the standards of *promise, witnesses, faithfulness, consummation* (**i.e.** offspring; **note Para. 2**)

c. the purpose of marriage

1. **marriage is a divine institution, established for the welfare of society as a whole and the betterment of individuals, as well as an example of the relationship God has established between himself and his chosen people in Jesus Christ**