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Why Do People Marry?

BEFORE WE LAUNCH into a discussion of *how* to make a marriage work, perhaps we ought to pause long enough to ask, “What is the purpose of marriage?” What are we trying to accomplish in marriage?

If you asked a dozen friends those two questions and asked them to write their answers privately, how many different answers do you think you would receive? Here are some of the responses I’ve received from both singles and marrieds:

- Sex
- Companionship
- Love
- To provide a home for children
- Social acceptance
- Economic advantage
- Security

Current national debates over the meaning of marriage have pushed these questions to the forefront. Some proclaim, “But you can have all these things

without marriage!" You don't have to be married to have sexual relations—our society decided that one decades ago. In an era when half of all households are occupied by singles, according to the latest census, being married no longer guarantees social acceptance or economic advantage. Cohabiting is on the rise. What of love, security, companionship, and a home for children? Can these not be accomplished to some degree without marriage? Then why marriage?

To fully respond to these questions, we need to look through the eyes of faith, seeking God's wisdom. And in the Bible, we see a much different picture. Beginning with Genesis, the first book of the Bible where we read the creation story, we find that God's idea of marriage is the blending of two lives in the deepest possible way into a new unit that will both satisfy the individuals involved and serve the purposes of God in the highest possible manner.

COMPANIONSHIP AND COMMITMENT

The heart of humankind cries out for companionship. We are social creatures. God Himself said of Adam, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). I would remind you that this analysis was before the fall of humanity, and that this man already had the warm, personal fellowship of God. Yet God said, "That is not enough!"

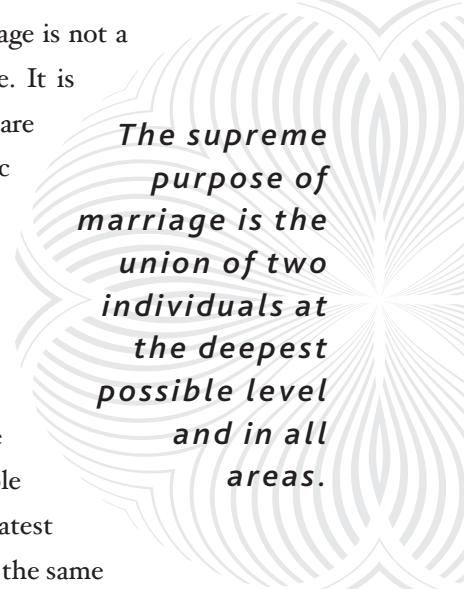
God's answer to man's need was to create woman (Genesis 2:18). The Hebrew word used here is one that literally means "face-to-face." That is, God created one with whom the man could have a face-to-face relationship. It speaks of that kind of in-depth personal relationship whereby the two are united in an unbreakable union that satisfies the deepest longings of the human heart. Marriage was God's answer for humankind's deepest human need—union of life with another.

This unity is to encompass all of life. It is not simply a physical relationship. Nor is it simply the giving and receiving of emotional support. It is rather the total union of two lives on the intellectual, social, spiritual, emotional, and physical levels.

This kind of union cannot come without the deep and enduring *commitment*

that God intends to accompany marriage. Marriage is not a contract to make sexual relationships acceptable. It is not merely a social institution to provide for the care of children. It is more than a psychological clinic where we gain the emotional support we need. It is more than a means for gaining social status or economic security. The ultimate purpose of marriage is not even achieved when it is a vehicle for love and companionship, as valuable as these are.

The supreme purpose of marriage is the union of two individuals at the deepest possible level and in all areas, which in turn brings the greatest possible sense of fulfillment to the couple and at the same time serves best the purposes of God for their lives.



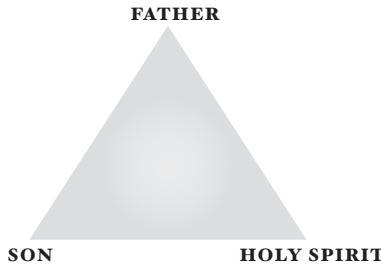
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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE “ONE”?

Obviously, simply getting married does not guarantee unity. There is a difference between “being united” and “unity.” As the old country preacher used to say, “When you tie the tails of two cats together and hang them across the fence, you have united them, but then unity is a different matter.”

Perhaps the best biblical example that we have of this kind of unity is God Himself. It is interesting that the word used for “one” in Genesis 2:24, where God says, “This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into *one*” (italics added), is the same Hebrew word used of God Himself in Deuteronomy 6:4 where we read, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is *one*” (NIV, italics added).

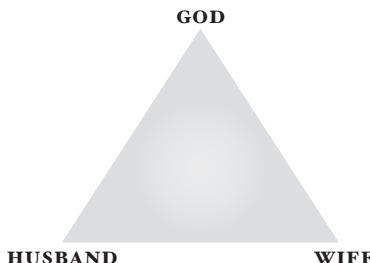
The word “one” speaks of composite unity as opposed to absolute unity. The Scriptures reveal God to be Father, Son, and Spirit, yet one. We do not have three Gods but one God, triune in nature. Illustrations of the Trinity are many, and all break down at some point, but let me use a very common one to illustrate some of the implications of this unity.



The triangle may be placed on any side, and the *Father*, *Son*, and *Spirit* labels may be moved to any position. It makes no difference, for God is one. What we cannot do is erase one side or remove one title. It must all stand together. God is triune, and God is one. We cannot fully understand this statement, yet we must speak of God in this manner, because this is the manner in which He has revealed Himself. We would not know that God is triune unless God had revealed Himself as triune. We would not know that the Trinity is a unity except that God has revealed it as such.

God is *unity*. On the other hand, God is *diversity*. We cannot rightly say that there are no distinctions among the Trinity. Strictly speaking, the Holy Spirit did not die for us upon the cross. That was the work of the Son. As believers, we are not indwelt by the Father but by the Spirit. The members of the Trinity do have varying roles, yet unity. It is unthinkable that members of the Trinity would ever operate as separate entities. From Genesis 1:26 where God said, “Let *us* make human beings in *our* image” (italics added) to Revelation 22:16–21, we find the Trinity working together as a composite unity.

What implications does this divine unity have for marriage? Here is a second triangle:



This time the triangle may not be tilted to rest on another side. God must remain at the apex of a Christian marriage. We can, however, exchange the labels *husband* and *wife*, for they are to be one.

In our individualistic age, “unity” is not a prized concept. Yet marital unity is not the kind of unity that eradicates personality. Rather, it is the kind of unity that frees you to express your own diversity, yet experience complete oneness with your mate. You are free to be all that God intends you to be, while experiencing all that God intended when He united us in marriage. No truth could be more liberating and satisfying.

Whether you are just beginning your new life as husband and wife, or are marital veterans working your way through some challenges, I hope that you have clearly in mind the goal of marriage—unity on the deepest possible level in all areas of life. Maybe that is only a dream for you, but if you are willing to work at it, it can become reality. Can you imagine what it would be like to have a degree of intellectual oneness? Social oneness? Spiritual oneness? Physical oneness? Do not give up. You may be on the brink of a new discovery.

“But my spouse is not interested in working with me,” you say. “I can’t do it all by myself.” True, but you can do *something* by yourself. And that something just may be used of God to stimulate change in your mate. I believe that the principle discussed in the following chapter is the number one principle for marital happiness and good health. Read carefully, think clearly, and do not forget the assignment at the end of each chapter.

Your Turn

1. Take a good look at your marriage. We must recognize weaknesses before we can initiate improvements. On a separate sheet, make four parallel columns with the following headings:

Intellectual

Social

Physical

Spiritual

Under each of these headings, list the characteristics you feel you hold in common with your mate. In which area is your oneness weakest? What could you do to stimulate growth in this area? What will you do?

2. Suggest that your mate read the chapter, make a similar list, and answer the above questions. When you are both feeling good and open to growth, share your results and agree upon action that will increase your oneness. Concentrate on one area at a time.