

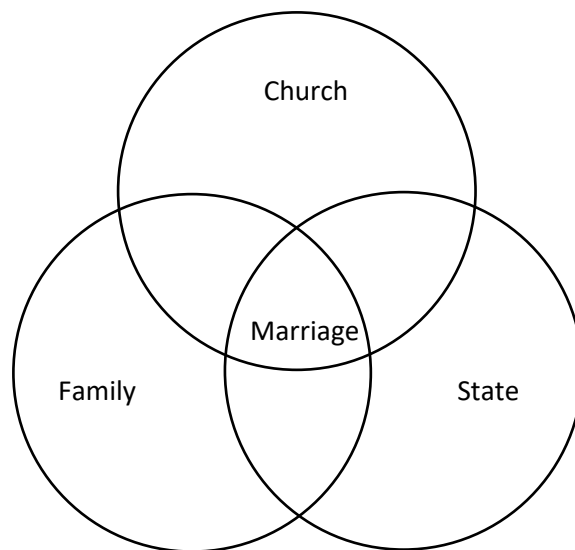
What is Marriage and Why is it Under Attack?

'nor shall you walk in their ordinances' (Lev 18:3)

Christians continue to languish in these evil days as the institution of marriage further haemorrhages within the culture. I want to survey the bond of marriage with a view to prompting Christians to seek its defence and Christian reconstruction. God commands us, in Scripture, to bring every thought captive to the Word of God (2 Cor 10:4). Accordingly, we want to know what God's estimation of marriage is. Alas, we live in a post-Christian culture; what in previous generations could be simply taken for granted must now be argued for cogently. My analysis may not be accurate, so I welcome its scrutiny and correction.

The Marriage Covenant

Marriage is uniquely that covenant between one man and one woman which stands at the centre of civilisation. It establishes the **family** as an independent (sovereign) sphere providing for the generation of new citizenry; it is solemnised by the **Church** whose special role is to nurture its well-being and to provide instruction to fathers, mothers and their children concerning their duties within society at large. The Church's primary calling is priestly - i.e. a source of mercy, reconciliation and support. Finally, marriage is protected legally by the **State** which, under God's jurisdiction, lawfully prosecutes justice against those who undermine it through infidelity, adultery or general mischief.



It is striking in Scripture that all three spheres (Church, Family and State) collaborate in the promotion of marriage. Primarily, the family benefits from a strong and stable marriage bond. Children are raised and have modelled before them true human spirituality. For, before it is a romantic affiliation between one man and one woman, marriage is supremely a metaphorical depiction of the heavenly union between Christ and His Church. St Paul says this in (Eph 5:31-32).

For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

The Church's interest in the integrity of the family is therefore of paramount importance. Why? Because the family is God's flagship enterprise. Through it He advertises His cosmic redemptive purposes in Christ. History moves forwards towards the Marriage Feast of the Lamb when the families of the Earth fully become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ (Rev 11:15). It is within

the family unit that we find our natural identity. Through its various ties, loneliness gives way to meaningful relationships (Ps 68:6) and an honourable motivation is supplied to live purposefully for God's glory.

The State's function in society is distinct from the Church's. But both are commissioned to operate under God in accordance with His laws and His commandments. Whereas the Church exercises a teaching ministry promoting practical holiness via mercy, reconciliation and restoration wherever possible, the State exercises a ministry of justice and retribution (Rom 13:1). The conflation of these two roles has wrought enormous trouble on the contemporary Christian community. The worst possible outcome arises from the Church's misunderstanding of the State's proper function under God.

Many Christians and their collective Church affiliations, whilst seeking otherwise laudable objectives, fail to recognise the Biblical foundation of the state as Civil Magistrate and thereby shrink back from holding it to account. Instead of asserting the crown rights of Jesus Christ over the State, they tend to appeal to professional academics, lawyers, experts and even tradition as a basis for their lobbying efforts. In doing so, they fall prey to God's curse which OT prophets frequently reference, e.g. *'Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong, but who do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the Lord!'* [Isaiah 31:1]

But Jesus is Lord [Phil 2:11]. And, all power and authority in heaven and upon earth has been given to Him [Matt 28:18]. Secularisation has occurred here in the UK progressively over multiple generations principally because Christian leaders ceased to recognise the civil State as a religious institution and believed the lie that it could function in a religiously neutral fashion. Today, we're living with the rotten fruit of such thinking. We must ask Church leaders to acknowledge their failure to contend 'biblically' for the faith. These are the pertinent questions:

1. Is the civil magistrate (state government) a religious institution?
2. Is the civil magistrate (state government) a law unto itself?
3. Is it possible for a lawfully constituted civil authority to legislate 'injustice'?
4. Who rightly determines whether specific laws are just/unjust?
5. Is marriage a legal/civil contract?
6. Is the state at liberty to redefine Marriage?
7. Which institution has God ordained to call a wayward State to account?

Divorce

Seeing that all three spheres (Church, Family & State) have an interest in the well-being of the marriage bond it is not surprising that God says expressly,

Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of (his) youth. For I hate divorce," says the Lord, the God of Israel (Mal 2:14-16).

Evidently, divorce was sanctioned in Scripture to allow for the lawful dissolution of the marriage bond. The principal passage addressing divorce is found in Deut 24:

When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife, if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who

took her as his wife, then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance. (verses 1-4)

Under OT law, divorce could be formally enacted within the confines of the suspicious husband's household. However, certification signifies that it was a formal legal transaction – something which the State must sanction. The 'uncleanness' referenced here is ambivalent. No honourable husband (or father) however would invoke this right lightly. 'Easy divorce', which is commonplace today, was never the original motivation in God's mind. Jesus comments (Matt 19:8) that such an attitude is tantamount to 'formal adultery'. Rather, as plainly indicated, it was for 'actual adultery' that Moses' provided a way for an innocent party to formally dissolve the legal contract. By issuing of a certificate of divorce the profile of the wife's indiscretion within the community was raised. With it she was much less likely to find a replacement spouse! The prohibition against the divorcee being subsequently received back into the home of her first husband is indicative of God's high estimation of the marriage union as something typical of the relationship He enjoys with His own covenant people.

It is puzzling and certainly damaging that large swathes of evangelical Christians believe that divorce is a sin. Here in the north east of England several churches (some of which take may their lead from Rev. D. Holloway) routinely teach this from their pulpits. But divorce is plainly biblical and it's not too difficult to see why. As rehearsed above, marriage is a covenant bond between two parties for life. Husband and wife make solemn public pledges (oaths) to remain faithful to one another, for better or for worse, etc, until death nullifies the bond. Where infidelity occurs, the innocent party necessarily requires a formal way of proceeding through life without being a slave to misery. Divorce provides that.

Divorce then is not in the least bit contradictory to God's hatred of it which we read of in Malachi 2. No parent enjoys disciplining his wayward son and no executioner relishes swinging the axe! As God reluctantly denounced His OT bride (Israel), it is very easy to imagine the grief and heart-ache with which a cheated husband sends away his rebellious first love!

The civil penalty for divorce, should the innocent party press charges AND where due process left little doubt concerning the guilty party, was public execution (see Lev 20:10). However, it was probably rarely (if ever!) invoked. This may seem excessively severe to those of us raised in the politically correct twenty-first century, but God's foolishness is still wiser than humanistic man's wisdom! With the apostle Paul we affirm, 'Let God be true and every man a liar' (Rom 3:4).

Christian Marriage

Marriage is a Christian concept! We must guard against thinking that it is somehow religiously neutral. Alas, most folk – even most Christians! – tend to think of it in such terms. Its ideal realisation is only rarely exhibited to the watching world. Just as the various public institutions (healthcare, education, magistracy and general state-craft) have been corrupted by secular humanism, the institution of marriage has been bombarded from all sides and subverted by Hell itself from below. The LGBTQ lobby have very successfully persuaded a significant proportion of our nation to 'decriminalise' certain aberrant lifestyles. Vast multitudes now extol them as happy alternatives to be celebrated. Feminism has likewise undermined the role of the husband as the patriarchal leader and father of his household which he is commissioned, by God, to fulfil. Exclusively male leadership in the Christian Church is in decline and many Christian mothers today think nothing of returning to professional employment after becoming a mother then paying professional nannies to look after their new-born infants.

All of this has tended to obscure the wholesome and good character that marriage, as defined by Scripture, was intended to be. In case what I've written isn't already excessively edgy, consider the following:

1. Marriage is foundational to man's vocation of dominion. Men are hard-wired to pursue cultural dominion to the glory of God. Marriage is in miniature what the cosmos is yearning for and moving forwards towards. Sexual union reaches its climax in orgasm which is itself symbolic of the final consummation of the world by Christ. This will result in mutual happiness and true soul satisfaction. It is significant that Scripture describes sexual union in these words: *'the two shall become one flesh'* (Gen 2:24). This corresponds exactly with the prospective unity yet to be eschatologically realised between heaven and earth (Eph 1:10).
2. The woman (wife) is to serve as a 'helper' in this calling (Gen 2:18ff). Man was to pursue cultural dominion (Gen 1:28) and mastery over all creation (Gen 2:19-20) to the glory of God. The Garden of Eden represented merely a start; the final goal is civilisation – a City made from the raw materials of creation and fashioned into a heavenly kingdom.
3. Alas, in her newly appointed role, Eve (representing fallen women) succumbed to the Tempter & brought temporal calamity upon herself and her offspring. As a token reminder of her mistake all future childbirth was to echo the original pain expressed by Adam and Eve. Eve's failure to discern right from wrong during her audience with Satan suggests that women, in general, are not to be trusted to teach nor admonish others. That role primarily was to be conducted by her husband as the federal head of the family. This will be contentious so read carefully Paul's NT admonition:

Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless, she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control (1Tim 2:11-15).

The prescribed silence referenced here relates particularly to Church meetings. It is there where formal instruction and encouragement to remain faithful as covenant members is designed to take place. However, it is surely not exclusively the remit of the Church to supply religious instruction. Rather, it is the husband's duty to teach and instruct his wife and their children (Ps 78:5-8).

4. This passage further indicates that the raising of godly children is a wife's primary vocation. If children are withheld from her, she is naturally at liberty to pursue commercial business enterprises and further assist and support her husband in whatever honourable way she can.
5. That a godly wife should dutifully submit to her husband's leading is both expressly and implicitly taught consistently throughout Scripture. Traditional wedding vows require the bride to promise publicly 'to love, honour and obey' her husband. That's not to say that a scoundrel is to be likewise honoured. A godly wife may ever appeal to the Church or even civil authorities where the husband's *modus operandi* is abusive.
6. Therefore, let's pause and rehearse briefly the flip-side of the coin. A godly husband is to love his wife – as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her! It ought ever to be the chief goal of the husband's efforts to bring pleasure and happiness to his wife. She is God's gift and it is through her that God's supreme source of blessing and encouragement flow.

Others far wiser and more eloquent than I have fleshed-out this territory. I reckon that where a godly man truly demonstrates solid leadership in the home coupled with warm-hearted affection towards his wife, that home will be especially blessed of God. Similarly, where a godly wife humbly yields respect and full-blooded encouragement of her husband's efforts to exercise dominion under Christ, she will experience the full measure of God's blessing upon herself (Ps 81:10).

Notwithstanding the many helpful books and sermons on this subject, I fear the forces of cultural Marxism, feminism and political correctness have brought much ruin on many Christian households. May God open wide our eyes and supply us with the richness of His grace to overcome.

Steve Layfield – July 2019