



The Joy of Christianity

God's Institution of Marriage "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh," (Genesis 2:24).

God established marriage at the very dawn of time as He said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him," (Genesis 2:18). God not only created the first couple, Adam and Eve, He also served as matchmaker for what would be the first marriage. Try as they might, governments and societies do not have the de facto ability to redefine marriage because nature and nature's God have given it but one immutable definition: the joining of one woman and one man in the strongest union that can be found within humanity. The recent history of our country demonstrates the superiority of marriage over other family arrangements, as it is only in recent decades that the rise of numerous societal ills have vastly increased coincident with the increasingly weakened family unit.

As just one example, in 1940 there were 38 births outside of marriage for every 1,000 babies born; today the ratio is approximately 400 per 1,000 babies, a 10-fold increase. Whereas in the past, bearing a child out of wedlock was often a source of great embarrassment to the mother and her family, there is a trend today for single women to choose to have multiple children without marriage to the father(s). These kinds of so-called lifestyle choices have consequences and costs, not only for the individuals involved, but for society as a whole. Marriage, on the other hand, has significant and demonstrable benefits—for the family and society—that exceed those of any other form of living arrangement, as is borne out by statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau, and countless research studies:

- Prosperity: Marriage creates greater wealth for most people compared to life without it. Married families experienced an 8.8% poverty rate in 2010, compared to a 40.9% poverty rate for single-mother households. However, single, unemployed mothers in poverty who marry the father of their children reduce the likelihood of being in poverty from 100 percent to 35 percent.

- Personal safety: Married women with children suffer far less abuse than single mothers. In fact, the rate of spousal, boyfriend, or domestic partner abuse is twice as high among mothers who have never been married as it is among mothers who have ever married (including those separated or divorced). Married women are less than half as likely to be victimized by violent crime as are those who are single and living alone, or with a boyfriend. A study in Great Britain in the 1980's demonstrated that marriage is the safest relationship for raising children. The fatality rate of children from in-home violence where the mother cohabitated with a boyfriend was 73 times higher than for children living with their biological parents.

- Health: Children of divorced parents are much more likely to smoke than those whose parents stay together. In a study of 5,000 children, those whose parents divorced were twice as likely to have a dependence on Ritalin compared to those from intact families. A University of California at Berkeley study found that overall health of children was affected by "very significant stress" related to divorce.

- Education: A University of Wisconsin-Madison

study in 2011 found that children of failed marriages are more likely to suffer low self-esteem, stress and anxiety, and often lag their classmates in social skills and math. Such children are also more likely to drop out of school before graduation.

Rather than learn from past mistakes, it appears that many are prepared to run with reckless abandon toward different forms of "marriage" that will compound those errors. The possibilities for calling various and sundry living arrangements "marriages" are limited only by society's imagination. But there is a better way. When God's plan for marriage is embraced and implemented, it is vastly superior to any other plan that frail humanity may devise, which comes as no surprise to those who know the Scriptures: "It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps," (Jeremiah 10:23).

Although no marriage partner or marriage is perfect, the design of marriage is perfect and has a number of distinct attributes, all of which must be present in order to obtain the greatest blessings from this relationship:

- It is monogamous, per the Genesis texts cited above. There are but two individuals, a male and a female, involved in this union.

- Marriage is to be, as is commonly stated in many marriage vows, for "as long as you both shall live," (Romans 7:2). "For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence," (Malachi 2:16). Jesus taught that only in the case of marital infidelity may the innocent partner divorce and remarry (Matthew 19:9).

- It has a hierarchical arrangement in which the husband is the "head" of the wife and the wife is to submit to her husband (1 Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:22). Far from being a dictatorship, however, this arrangement is intended to result in gentle leadership enhanced by love and kindness.

- Within marriage and marriage alone are couples authorized by God to enjoy sexual intimacy. "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge," (Hebrews 13:4). The white wedding dress has symbolized the purity of the bride in some societies, which corresponds to the portrayal of the chaste bride wearing white in Revelation 19:7-8.

- The home is to be a refuge of mutual love and respect between the married couple and their children. "Admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children," (Titus 2:4). Numerous studies have demonstrated the essentiality of a father and mother in the home to nurture children. Mothers and fathers bring very different, but complementary, strengths to raising the kinds of children who will become solid, productive members of society.

- The home, not the school or "village," is where children should be taught the most profound and fundamental moral precepts. "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord," (Ephesians 6:4). Children are to be taught to obey and honor their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3) among many other necessary life lessons.

Marriage is a Divine blessing; it can and should be used as it was intended to derive the maximum benefits from it for the married couple, their children, and society at large.