

Understanding Marriage

The word "marriage," as a verb, describes the joining of complimentary parts into a unit that is the sum of the parts joined. As a noun, a marriage is the sum of the combined, complimentary parts. Let us examine the first verse in the Bible that establishes and defines the marriage of persons. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh (Gen. 2:24)."

Marriage as a verb is biblically defined as leaving (father and mother) and cleaving (to a wife). As a noun, marriage is defined as "one flesh." "Therefore" reflects back upon two previously established facts: (1) that after having been introduced to every animal, and having given them names, no helper was found among them that was comparable to Adam (2:20b), and (2) that the woman was made of the same substance as the man, being taken from the man (2:21-23), and made into the only being in all of creation that was uniquely designed to fill the role of a counterpart suitable to him. The word "man" is from the Hebrew *ish*, meaning "a man as an individual or a male person." The word "wife" is from *isha*, meaning a "woman, female." Consequently, a man cannot be a wife, and neither can a woman be a husband; a man cannot marry a man, and neither can a woman marry a woman. The word "flesh" is from *basar*, meaning, "flesh; by extension body, person." A marriage, therefore, is the cleaving together of one male person with one female person as one flesh, or one body. The word "cleave" is from *dabak*, meaning to "cling, adhere" in the sense of a permanent bond. An individual male may leave his father and mother, but he is to "adhere" to a particular and individual female. This establishes the marriage relationship as closer, more intimate, and more durable, than the parent-child relationship which may be broken at an appropriate time in favor of marriage. The permanence of the marriage bond is reinforced by Jesus, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder (Mat. 19:6; Mk. 10:9)." Finally, among all possible relationships with a sexual aspect, only marriage "is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge (Heb. 13:4)." All possible sexual relationships which occur outside of the Bible's narrow definition of the marriage are defined as either fornication or adultery, both of which God will judge.

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