

Two Views of Relationships: His and Hers • Ephesians 5:33

How do you think most marriages in America are doing? What percentage of marriages do you think end up in divorce? How do you think marriages in the 21st century in America compare to the quality of marriages in the 1st century when the New Testament was written?

Many people think that marriages in America are in deep trouble and that most marriages are unfulfilling and unsuccessful. The common belief is that half of all marriages end in divorce. And many people assume that marriages in New Testament times were a lot better than marriages are today.

Consider some of the facts. For example, half of the marriages in America do not end in divorce. It's true that there are twice as many marriages as there are divorces every year, but those are two comparisons that shouldn't be fit together because there are over 55 million people who are married in the United States. More accurately, about one in four American marriages end in divorce. In other words, at least 75% of American marriages do not come to divorce.

Ninety-four percent of Americans say that their most satisfying relationships come as a result of marriage. For most this means the marriage itself, but a smaller percentage are referring to their children and other family members. Sixty-one percent of currently married people are completely satisfied with their marriages. Another 31% say they are mostly satisfied, 7% are somewhat satisfied and only 1% say they are not satisfied at all with their marriages.

Men are generally more satisfied with their marriages than are women, although the numbers are fairly close. Religious people are more satisfied with their marriages than those who are not religious.

Marriage in the 1st century was a mess. Husbands legally "owned" their wives. Women had virtually no legal standing. Many wives were not allowed out of their houses. A wife's purpose was to bear legitimate children and raise them, but she did not appear socially. Men frequently had concubines and mistresses. Divorce was extremely com-

mon and very easy to obtain. Marriage as an institution was at great risk for survival. Immorality was epidemic.

It was into that context that the teachings of the New Testament came. These teachings were counter-cultural and radical. To many they must have seemed virtually impossible.

Marriage in America may not be all that we want it to be, but it is far stronger than you would guess from the popular press. As Christians today we want to influence our generation just as Christians back then influenced the first century. The way to do that is to teach the same New Testament truths and principles. Ephesians 5 is one place where there is strong teaching. It deals in part with the different approaches men and women take to Christian marriage.

Who would have thought that anyone could make a 4-million-copy best seller out of a book that says men and women are different? But that's exactly what happened with Dr. John Gray's *Men are from*

Mars; Women are from Venus. In it Dr. Gray starts with the obvious—that men and women are physically different. He says:

Men generally have thicker skin than women; thus women tend to get wrinkles at an earlier age than men. (*Aren't you glad to hear that!*)

Women have shorter vocal cords than men, so men tend to have deeper voices than women.

Men have heavier blood and about 20 percent more red corpuscles than women. This means that men get more oxygen and have more energy. Men also breathe more deeply than women, while women breathe more often.

By and large, men have larger bones than women. Women's bones are not only smaller, they're arranged differently

Men have a higher ratio of muscle to fat, which makes it easier for them to lose weight than it is for women (*You're really glad to find that out!*)

On the other hand, women have an ex-

Marriage is a major opportunity to act out Christian beliefs.

tra layer of fat just underneath their skin, which keeps them warmer in winter and cooler in summer. This extra fat also gives women more energy reserves, so they have more endurance than men.

Some men and women may find here some areas with which they disagree. But there is even a wider range of agreement and disagreement when the list of psychological characteristics is spelled out. We have many different points-of-view about men and women, relationships and marriages; however, almost all of us can agree that: 1.) Men and women are very different from one another; 2.) Relationships are very important; and 3.) Successful marriages are desirable.

So let's learn, not from a modern pop psychologist, but from the designer of men, women and marriage - - from God himself. Let's look at Ephesians 5:21-33:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

There are parts of Ephesians 5 that sound wonderful and lovely. There are other parts that seem

politically incorrect and almost embarrassing. It is even more interesting when this part of the New Testament is read from older translations of the Bible that say that women should “obey” their husbands. As recently as 20 years ago it was common to hear these lines read at a wedding and to hear a bride promise to obey as part of her vows. Not much any more!

Which raises a very basic question for us as Christians. Is the Bible relevant for today? Is it out of touch with our times? Is it even accurate? Do we now know better? Or, are there powerful principles from God that apply to every generation and every culture?

What we have here is the Designer's point-of-view. God created us and wired us. God invented men and women and marriage. His Bible is intended to transcend all times and trends. God's goal is to give us a perspective on rich marriages and poor marriages, new marriages and veteran marriages, American marriages and Japanese marriages, good marriages and bad marriages. So I invite you to do your best to take off the colored glasses of 21st century America and try to see God-the-Designer's point-of-view.

Let's start with the Christ-factor because the main message of Ephesians 5 is not most of all about men or women or even about marriage. It is talking most of all about how we live out our Christian lives. It then uses Christian marriage as an example of each person's relationship with Jesus Christ.

The introduction to the marriage teaching in Ephesians 5 says: “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.” And then it goes on to say: “. . . be filled with the Spirit.”

Therefore, the guidelines for Christian marriage are based on the assumption that a person is a Christian who wants to be wise and careful and desires to understand God's will and be controlled by God's Spirit. Then that person is invited to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” In other words, relate to your husband or wife based on your commitment to Jesus Christ. Don't approach marriage as if it is primarily for the man or woman you married. It is primarily for Jesus Christ. Marriage is a major opportunity to act out Christian beliefs.

Two extreme opposite examples may help to

Even when we have behaved wrongly, each of us still wants to be treated with respect. If I exceed the speed limit and a police officer pulls me over, that police officer can either demean me or treat me with respect even though I am clearly guilty.

I have a friend who one day went out in his backyard with a holster and a 22 revolver to practice his “quick-draw”. This is a middle-aged man who should have known better, but in the process he shot himself in the foot. Literally! Think about going to the emergency room and how embarrassing it must have been to explain the gunshot wound in his foot. The people in the emergency room could have said told him this was one of the stupidest things anyone has ever done or they could have treated him with respect.

You see, treating someone with respect is not necessarily connected to what that person does. It is a choice that is made by the other person. The Bible especially calls for wives to give that kind of respect to their husbands.

When the Bible gets specific with men it calls on husbands to “love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” Of course, all that was written to Christian wives can also be said to Christian husbands. But there is also a special emphasis here that Christian husbands are to love their wives the way Christ loves the Church. The point here is that it is to be self-sacrificing.

Somebody might say, “What if she’s unlovable?”; “What is she’s unfaithful?”; “What if she never gives me the kind of respect she’s supposed to?” That’s the whole idea! Husbands are to behave like Jesus Christ. Husbands are to give that kind of love even to someone who may be unlovable or unfaithful or disrespectful. It is a call that is based on Jesus Christ and our relationship to him more than it is based upon the person to whom we are married or on the way somebody else behaves or treats us. It is our relationship to Jesus Christ that determines our behavior toward others.

Why would the Bible specifically emphasize that husbands should love their wives? Perhaps, at least in part, it is to show what the love of Jesus Christ looks like. So, if you want to see what Jesus’ love looks like, a Christian marriage is the place to look.

But perhaps God also recognized that many women especially need love. It’s not that respect is unimportant, but that love is particularly important.

Love is her source of security. It is the fuel for her self-esteem. It strengthens her and helps her to give back the respect that the Bible calls for. It is for her the glue that bonds and holds the relationship together. When a man loves a woman as Christ loved the church, it means that he is willing to die for her. That’s what self-sacrifice, in its ultimate definition, calls for.

That is unlikely to occur in our time and in our culture. So his love for her shows up in other ways. It defers to her needs and her interests. It is being willing to give up his plans when he discovers there’s something she wants to do or there is something she needs. Self-sacrifice says, “I am really interested in what are your concerns and especially in what is best for you. I want to be your No. 1 cheerleader. I want to help you realize your greatest potential.” Any husband who will love his wife as Christ loves the church is the kind of husband that every Christian woman should want and can respect.

Here are some practical suggestions in order to have a marriage in which we live out what it means to be a Christian. Try to think things through from your spouse’s point-of-view. What does he most need and want? What does she most need and want? What can I do to make my marriage all God wants it to be?

Then try this. If you are a wife, give extra special respect to the man who is your husband. If you are a husband, give extra special love to the woman who is your wife. And remember to “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

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