

(This is part 1 (“What Is Marriage”) of the Seventh Commandment from the book *NOT Ten Suggestions*. Part 2 of the Seventh Commandment is “What Is Adultery?” Adultery cannot be defined until we know what marriage is. This is **offered free** in pdf file that cannot be printed or the text highlighted to be copied. It is hoped that the reader will want to have the whole book. Please go [here](#) to see or purchase the book.)

Seventh Commandment: What Is Marriage?

You shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14).

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (Genesis 2:24).

[Jesus speaking:] ⁴ And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made *them* at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ ⁵ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? ⁶ So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore **what God has joined together**, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:4-6).

²⁸ If a man finds a young woman who is a virgin, who is not betrothed, and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are found out, ²⁹ then the man who lay with her shall give to the young woman’s father fifty *shekels* of silver, and she shall be his wife because he has humbled her; **he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days** (Deuteronomy 22:28-29).

Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; **but fornicators and adulterers God will judge** (Hebrews 13:4).

My duty towards my neighbor is . . . To keep my body in temperance, soberness, and chastity (Book of Common Prayer).

Introduction

Someone has said:

I learned that there is little difference in husbands. You might as well keep the first one.

Consider another witticism.

A woman accompanied her husband to the doctor's office for a checkup. Afterwards, the doctor took the wife aside and said, "Unless you do the following things, your husband will surely die. Every morning make sure he gets a good healthy breakfast. Have him come home for lunch each day so you can feed him a well-balanced meal. Make sure you feed him a good, hot dinner every night. Don't overburden him with any household chores. Also, keep the house spotless and clean so he doesn't get exposed to any unnecessary germs." On the way home, the husband asked his wife what the doctor said in private. She replied, "You're going to die, and there is nothing that can be done about it."

Our culture is fighting for a definition of marriage. Who gets to define it? Is just living together marriage? If two people keep house together and pretend marriage, is that it? Can any two consenting adults do what they wish in private, and everyone else is required to honor the relationship? Who is sovereign in this world? Whose word counts?

This article was sent to me by email:

NY recognizes Canadian same-sex marriages

Kelly Patterson, Ottawa Citizen

In a landmark case, an American court has ruled that gay couples who tie the knot in Canada can be treated as legally married in the state of New York.

Justice Joan Lefkowitz of the New York Supreme Court ruled last week that same-sex marriages performed outside the country are valid, even though gay New Yorkers cannot be legally married in their home state.

This is the first time Canadian same-sex marriage laws have triumphed in U.S. court, according to Alphonso David, a lawyer for the gay rights group Lambda Legal, which intervened in the case.

“Couples can *go to sleep at night* without worrying about the security of their status,” says David.

“I feel vindicated,” his client, Robert Voorheis, told reporters after the March 12 ruling. “When I say, ‘I’m married,’ I’m married.”

Voorheis and his *partner*, both of Yonkers, N.Y., were married in Niagara Falls, Ont., four years ago.

“This is extremely important,” says Andrew Koppelman, a Northwestern University law professor and expert on the issue.

If the ruling holds up on appeal, “it will mean for all practical purposes, same-sex marriage is legal in the state of New York,” because people can easily cross the border to get married, said Koppelman.

While the lower-court ruling is not technically binding on other state courts, it’s significant in that “it says you can recognize a (same-sex marriage) even if locally you can’t perform it,” and lays out historical examples of that recognition, explains Mark Strasser, a law professor at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio, who has written extensively on same-sex marriage.

The case centered on a 2006 order by Westchester County Executive Andrew Spano that county officials must recognize same-sex marriages from other jurisdictions.

A conservative Arizona-based group called the Alliance Defense Fund took Spano to court, arguing his order violated the state's constitution and municipal laws.

Last summer, the New York Court of Appeal upheld the state's century-old definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

But Lefkowitz found that ruling did not address the issue of marriages performed outside the state.

She then applied the legal test of comity, the principle that countries should recognize each other's laws on marriage and other such issues as long as they don't offend community values or run strongly against public policy.

With the ever increasing Islamic presence in the USA, it won't be long until polygamy is also recognized. Perhaps the Mormons will re-adopt their view on polygamy. When you don't have a bottom line to morality except what is popular, anything goes.

My wife and I were in Manitou Springs, Colorado to go up Pikes Peak, and while there we saw two men walking on the streets holding hands. What is the definition of marriage?

One cannot define adultery until one knows what marriage is? Is it wrong for a homosexual to cheat on his civil union partner? Is that adultery?

That is not adultery; it is sinful just to be in that relationship in the first place. Yet God through Christ will forgive all those who repent. Adultery is cheating on your heterosexual spouse that you've married by covenant vows, or it may be serial marriages where one marries one person after another without biblical divorce. (See the next chapter.)

The point of this Seventh Commandment on sexuality in marriage is that all sex outside heterosexual marriage of one male and one female is wrong. I've been giving you the flip side of each commandment each time we've looked at one of the Ten

Commandments, such as the commandment not to murder means to support life as well as to condemn murderers to death. Now this Seventh Commandment means that sexual relations can only be practiced in a heterosexual marriage; all else is sin.

The essence of this commandment among humans is that God gave us families, one male and one female, who are to be in covenant with one another for life, which includes sexual intimacy. This closeness is not to be violated – ever.

What Is Marriage?

Notice the two passages printed first in this chapter: Genesis 2:24, and the Lord’s interpretation of that passage in Matthew 19:4-6. We know that marriage is a covenant, which means a commitment to one another by vows in the presence of the appropriate witnesses. (More on this below.)

Often when something is first mentioned in Scripture, especially in Genesis where all begins, we can derive a definition of that doctrine. But this is even truer in the case of marriage since the Lord Jesus Himself used this Genesis passage to derive His definition of marriage.

(1) The *condition* for entering the marriage covenant is that there must be a man and a woman, for God created Adam and Eve, one male and one female. Moreover, He created only two to make a family. One of the reasons for this one male and one female is that God commanded the first couple to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:27-28), which meant to have many children. Through many children the earth would be subdued:

“Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:28).

It is a fact that homosexuals cannot reproduce, so how can they spread their views except by converting others to their ways? If all “marriages” were two of the same sex, it would mean the end of the

human race, for no children would be produced. If the first two humans had been gay, we would not have a human race.

And if cloning is ever possible for humans and catches on so that gays can “reproduce,” the gay rights movement will gain more momentum. However, the child will only be the product of one partner, not both, and perhaps there will be a degenerative gene weakness from one generation to the next. And if they “divorce,” will not the child belong to the one from whom he was cloned? What will that child grow up with? God threatens diseases for those who violate His sexual commands (Exodus 15:26; Deuteronomy 7:15; 28:60). Indeed, sexually transmitted diseases ensure that sex is no longer a private matter.

According to the Lord Jesus, two people, one male and one female, is what constitutes a marriage. Two *complement* one another while three *complicate* the matter exceedingly. For example, if you have one husband and four wives as in Islam, the man is the father of all the children. What kinds of rivalries will this produce between the wives to promote their offspring as the favored one? Who will get the inheritance? For an answer to this, just see what happened to Jacob in the Old Testament with his wives, Solomon and his wives who led him into idolatry, or David and his wives.

We see that the son cleaves to his wife and becomes one flesh with her (Genesis 2:24), which is more than just sexuality. So what do we say of a son who cleaves to four wives? Are they all one flesh? That is not possible. The *two* have become one, not the three or five have become one.

In Genesis 2:18 God says:

And the LORD God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”

From this we can see that the woman was made to complete the man. The “not good” of the *one* man alone was made good by the *one* woman. The one woman completed the one man; that is, she was to be his “helper,” which in Hebrew is often used of God helping His people but here means that man was created in such a way that it is unnatural to be alone, that he can do more with his wife than he can

do without her. Someone said that woman was not taken from man's head to rule over him, nor from his feet to be walked on, but from his side to complete him.

Also, the idea in the words "comparable to him" means corresponding to him, essential to him, suitable for him. In this case, since neither is complete without the other, one plus one equals one, not two. They are like two halves that form a whole. Thus, marriage is one male and one female that make one new covenant, one new family. (In so doing, they are to reflect the unconditional love of Christ for His Church (Ephesians 5:22ff). Moreover, we are not dealing with those who have the gift to remain single (Matthew 19:11; 1 Corinthians 7:7), and who are still complete in Christ.)

God made all the things that reproduce, the whole animal kingdom, to have a male and a female. There is distinction here along with sameness. The distinction is male and female, and the sameness is the same species. We can see why the first three chapters of Genesis have been so vehemently attacked, for if these are true, those who "marry" as same sex unions are in serious trouble with God.

To have one husband and many wives implies that females are worth less than males, that females are worth less as created beings than males, which explains why women are treated so terribly in Islam, as for example in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, in polygamy full personhood is denied to the women, who often have less rights than men, not to mention less place in the marriages.

To put this another way, there are to be two parents, not more than two since the two become one. But there can be many children, for they are not joined as one. Moreover, since children are not joined as one, their relationship to parents and to one another is temporary, but the relationship of husband to wife is permanent. In other words, children marry and leave their parents to form a new home.

(2) The *basis* for human marriage is Christ's love for the Church, Christ as groom and the Church as bride, as St. Paul says in Ephesians 5:25-27. We learn about human marriage from the divine marriage of Christ with the Church. To put this another way, God deliberately has made the human marriage to be a reflection of the

divine marriage. Christ as male has one bride who is female, the Church.

Even those who are not Christians still seek love in marriage, not knowing they are doing so because God is love and they are made in God's image. Hollywood presents romantic love as the meaning to love, but this love makes another creature the highest good. Therefore, this love self-destructs, for Christ must be the highest good. When we love Him more than all else, human marriage will be fulfilling; otherwise, we will be disappointed. We humans *always* disappoint. Moreover, Christ's love for His Church is the standard for marriage, and no one can find true fulfillment until they know God. Yet they seek Him in human relationships, which by themselves do not satisfy the longing heart to know full pardon for sin, to have unconditional love, and to rest in the arms of one whom to know means a relationship that never ends, going beyond death.

How is a husband to love His wife? Paul commands that we do so like Christ has loved the Church, which is an *unconditional* love, a love that is not conditioned on what the object of that loves does. Christ did not love us because we were lovely; indeed, we were (are) sinful. But He loves us because of what is in Him, not in us. If His love for us depended on us, He would love us one day and not the next. There would be no security in the relationship. Human marriages that are not grounded in Christ tend to fall apart because the object of love (spouse) is so flawed.

Moreover, a husband is to love His wife *self-sacrificially*, as Christ did the Church and gave Himself for her. A husband must spend his life in serving his wife, and be willing to die for her. This means he provides for her in every way, financially, emotionally, spiritually, and supports her with his time and care.

Also, when a husband marries, he must set a *goal* of making his wife and his family *holy*, that she "should be holy and without blemish." In other words, the Ten Commandments are God's terms of marriage, the standard, and the husband must run his home in humble obedience to these. If he does not adopt God's standard, his home will self-destruct.

The oneness in marriage should be because of their oneness in Christ; otherwise, the marriage loses perspective. Thus most Anglican marriage ceremonies do not use the unity candle, for it tends to put the unity in the couple rather than in Christ and His Church. It is a recent invention, perhaps 50 years old, and used mostly in the USA.

(3) A marriage is *created by covenant*:

... the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by **covenant** (Malachi 2:14).

The ideas of “leaving,” “cleaving” or “joining” are covenantal language (Deuteronomy 4:4; 10:10; Joshua 23:8). In other words, a *new covenant is made*, and a new home is created (see Hosea 2:14-23; Ephesians 5:22-32). If the son leaves parents and cleaves to his wife, the parents should be witnesses.

So what is a marriage covenant? This is an agreement between a man and a woman to be faithful to one another to death. The agreement is not a loose one, but solemn vows before the Triune God who is the One making the covenant (“What God has joined together”) and before all the human witnesses present, vowing to be faithful to death. They are vowing never to look for another spouse while the original one is alive, and are vowing never to question whether they have married the right person or not, for they have vowed that they have married the right one. After the vows of both the groom and the bride are pledged, the couple is declared married, *for the vows made to God, to the witnesses, and to one another constitute the marriage*. This is the solemn covenant to one another.

How can a person keep such a covenant? How can a person know that he will still love this person a few years down the road? Don’t people “fall in love” and then “fall out of love”? Love is not in our control, is it? Does not the other person control it?

Remember that marriage is based on Christ’s love for the Church, and His love for us was in *His* control. Remember also what we said in Chapter 3, that love is primarily a function of the will,

which means we can even love our enemies. We can never use as an excuse that we cannot control our love, saying that if we fall out of love we cannot help it; we can help it! Love is controlled by the will, not by emotions.

So how does this parallel Christ's marriage to the Church? We enter that relationship with Him by covenant in baptism, which covenant is a vow. This is an unconditional commitment to God through Christ by the vow of baptism, either as adults or as children who are represented by their parents or god-parents.

How does this work out in marriage? A man leaves his father and mother; and ideally in the presence of at least the two original families (the mom and dad of each person) and God's representative (minister), he and his engaged bride make an unconditional commitment to one another for life. In other words, this is a witnessed ceremony, not the private "commitment" of consenting adults who just live together. God requires the commitment of "baptism" as it were by witnessed vows before there can be "Holy Communion" (consummation of marriage). And by "witnessed," we mean the marriage covenant is made at least in the presence of other humans, especially the Church. Vows, to be valid, must not be taken in private, for they can easily be denied later. Public vows bind the couple, keeping them accountable.

Marriage is not an experiment to see if the couple is compatible but the giving of oneself to another by vows and by commitment for life to make the relationship work. If we can love our parents and siblings without experimentation, without trying them out, why can't we do the same with our marriages? We can, by God's grace! It is the soul of the other person we love, not just the body, and the relationship must be grounded in our spiritual relationship with Christ. Of course, the body is very important and we cannot have marriage without it, but the point we're making is that physical union is a reflection of spiritual union, not the reverse.

From the passages at the beginning of this chapter (Deuteronomy 22:28-29 and Hebrews 13:4), we can see what God says about the consenting adults' model (read these again). In Deuteronomy, if a single man takes advantage of a single woman,

and if the father approves to give her to him (assumed from other passages), the man must marry her and *may never divorce her*, which obviously meant that the sex they had was not marriage. They both consented, but that was not marriage.

Notice again what God says in the Hebrews passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter:

Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled;
but fornicators and adulterers God will judge (Hebrews 13:4).

Those who are consenting adults who have sex outside marriage (fornicators) fall under the judgment of God unless they repent. Those just living together are said to be fornicators. They cannot say that they are married because they said so, but marriage is God's for *Him* to join two people: "What *God* has joined together. . . ." This requires a covenant before other human witnesses, which means a covenant must be witnessed not only by the couple *but also by a third human party*, without which there is no covenant. The covenant justifies sexual union, not that sexual union makes the covenant.

Parallel adultery is condemned very strongly in the Old Testament, even to the death penalty in some cases (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22), but fornication, sex between those who are single and who are not engaged, is also condemned, but not to the death (Deuteronomy 22:28-29). Often today couples are just living together, have made economic commitments they cannot easily get out of, want to get married and for whatever reason have not married. The best cure for this type of sin is to get them married as soon as possible.

The problem today is that people engage in casual dating that leads to emotional and physical involvement without boundaries. In other words, physical involvement, such as kissing and then fondling, leads to living together, if not in an apartment somewhere, then in the car on a regular basis. Parents who let their teens date unsupervised are asking for trouble, for this circumnavigates the authority of parents and of the church. Scripture presents a courting model where the boundaries are established by the parents and the church, where the young man asks permission of the parents to court

a young lady, or if she is on her own, he would see her under the authority of the church. Then they see one another in a controlled environment, honoring God's authorities and determining if they want to marry one another. (This is too complex to consider all the details here.)

In the case of Christians, the Church must seal the marriage with an ordained minister under the authority of the Church, for marriage is a sacrament. We do not mean that it is one of the two main sacraments (baptism and Holy Communion), but that it partakes of sacramental properties as a means of grace when done under the authority and blessing of Christ in His Church. St. Paul specifically states that human marriage is a reflection of Christ's relationship with His Church.¹ Moreover, this covenant implicitly involves a commitment to rear children when they come along, not to destroy them by abortion. I know of no culture that does not have some way to publicly seal the commitment of a man and woman. See the First Helvetic Confession (A.D. 1536) that says a marriage is to be "confirmed in the presence of the church by a public exhortation and vow in keeping with its dignity." Though we Anglicans do not consider marriage a sacrament like Baptism and the Lord's Supper, nevertheless it is sacramental, and thus must be performed by the Church.

Moreover, the father is required to give his daughter in marriage, not that someone can sneak around and take her away from him privately. We see half a section in 1 Corinthians 7:25-40 where Paul says a father can give or not give his virgin daughter in marriage. Thus the idea is that the father (as the head but obviously the mother also) is the protector of his daughter. The custom we have in the USA of a father walking down the aisle to give away his daughter reflects this biblical idea. Often the minister says, "Who gives this woman to this man?" and the good answer is, "Her mother and I." In the case of a Christian lady who has been living by herself, supporting herself, the Church can be the covenant head to help her marry the right person.

¹ Ephesians 5:22ff. This is too involved for this book.

Giving away is part of the covenant commitment. The parents of the bride are agreeing to transfer the care of their daughter to a new head; they are implicitly making a vow to let her go to someone else to continue what they had begun—the making of a godly woman. This is not a light commitment, not a meaningless ceremony. The parents also take an implicit oath to support the new family, not to take their child’s side when problems arise.

Then both bride and groom take the vows. Traditionally, the man takes the vow first, for he has just received her hand from her father, and like Christ’s love for the Church, the groom is the initiator of their love relationship, so he vows to her first. Then like the Church that loves Christ *because* He first loved her (1 John 4:19), she responds to his love with her vows. Once the vows are made, the minister of the Gospel, the one who represents God and His marriage covenant with the Church, pronounces that they are married in the name of the Holy Trinity. *The covenant is now ratified; the couple are married.*

Moreover, the vows are *unconditional*, which means one commits himself or herself to the other person with no reservations. In other words, there are no prenuptial agreements.² A prenuptial agreement says: “I love you almost as much as my money, but not quite. I’ll try you out, and if you don’t do what I like, I’ll take my money and throw you away.” It is an escape clause in case we want out for whatever reason. It is difficult to think of this as a marriage but rather a selfish experiment. When we come to Christ for forgiveness of sins, we come without reservation, not trying Him out to see if things work out.

The man says to the woman in the Reformed Episcopal Book of Common Prayer for a wedding (p. 493):

² As a general rule, there are no prenuptial agreements. But for a marriage later in life where there are grown children, perhaps there could be prenuptial conditions to protect an inheritance, but there should be financial commitments between the new couple, not living as two separate, financial institutions, so to speak. This is too complex to handle here.

With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship,
and with all my worldly goods I thee endow. . . .

There is no financial reservation, no prenuptial qualification. One throws the dice as it were and puts all his eggs in one basket, to love this one person no matter what, to say to God and the world that by His grace, we'll make the relationship work to God's glory. That is the intent of the vows.

Since God requires that marriage be done with vows and witnesses, we can see that marriage does not belong to us to invent, change, redefine, or just do with as we please, but that *marriage belongs to God*. What did the Lord Jesus say in the Matthew passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter?

Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.

In other words, there is no marriage except God's marriage, and anyone who tries to change it, to nullify it with easy divorces, or just mock it by living together, is asking for judgment. And we have plenty of judgment today on families.

It is *God* who joins a couple together, and He loves the idea of marriage so much that He often refers to His relationship to His people as a marriage. God made the marriage between the Church and His Son, and He makes the marriage between one male and one female who humbly submit to His covenant model. He will bless such a union.

Conclusion

In Christian marriage, two people grow increasingly one with every passing year. They are "fellow heirs of the grace of life." *Each is helping the other on the way to eternity.*

Someone asked, "Is there anything more beautiful than a young man and young woman clasping clean hands and pure hearts in the path of marriage?"

The answer is, "Yes, there is a more beautiful thing: it is the spectacle of an old man and an old woman finishing their journey on that path. Their hands are gnarled, but still clasped; their faces are

seamed but still radiant; their hearts are tired and bowed down but still strong. They have proved the happiness of marriage and vindicated it from the jeers of cynics. Their covenant is complete.”
AMEN.