

## The design and sanctity of marriage

### **Marriage is God's idea; He instituted it.**

Marriage is not a private affair between two persons. Genesis 2:24 declare that it is God who instituted marriage. If this is so, marriage should also take on God's design and purpose.

- Marriage celebrates the communion nature of the triune God.

Marriage points to the oneness of the Trinity. As God is three-in-one, husband and wife are two-in-one. (Gen 1:26)

Marriage reveals the self-giving nature of the triune God. The Son submits to the Father's will (Heb 10:7, Jn 4:34, Jn 8:28) and the Spirit points to the Son (Jn 16:14-15). Similarly, the Bible instructs the husband to love his wife as himself, and the wife to submit willingly to her husband. This complementary relationship reflects the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- Marriage celebrates the communion between Christ and His Church.

In Ephesians 5:22-33, Paul describes the relationship between the husband and wife as likened to the one between Christ and the Church. The husband and wife's complementary relationship reflects the oneness between Christ and the Church. Therefore a Christian marriage is meant to point the church on earth to this oneness they possess in Christ.

## **Application 1: The Church will not marry couples who are in a relationship that is not in accordance to God's design.**

The following are not in accordance to God's design:

### **1. Unequal yoke: between a Christian and a Non-Christian**

“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?” 2 Cor 6:14.

It is impossible to experience spiritual oneness between a believer and a non-believer.

### **2. Incest: between family members**

In Leviticus 18:6-18, God forbids sexual relations between family members. This passage expresses a moral code; it is not ceremonial or civil in nature. Therefore the instruction is still applicable in NT context. (Note: 1 Cor 5:1, that Paul handling the case of incest in the Corinth church). Other passages that forbid incest include: Lev 20:17, Deut 27:20,23.

Though there were examples of sexual relations within family members in the Bible (see Gen 4, Gen 20:12, Gen 19, Ex 6:20, 2 Sam 13), note that not all are good examples (see cases of Tamar and Lot). Also, note that these examples happened prior to the commands of God in Leviticus/Deuteronomy which outlaw incest thereafter.

### **3. Homosexuality**

God clearly forbids homosexual relations in the Bible, OT and NT (see Lev 18:22, 20:13, Roms 1:18-32, 1 Cor 6:9-11, 1 Tim 1:8-10).

The church will not marry persons of the same sex.

#### **4. Bestiality**

God clearly forbids bestiality in the Bible (Ex 22:19, Lev 18:23, Lev 20:15-16, Deut 27:21). The passages listed are in the nature of moral code, which remains applicable in today's context.

### **Special Note**

#### **Remarriage relating to divorcees**

While the Bible permits divorce under a few circumstances (Mat 5:31-32, 1 Cor 7:15), divorce however is not accordance with God's original design (Mark 10:2-12, Mal 2:16). God's desire is for repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. In cases where reconciliation seems impossible, the divorcee should consider if God is calling him/her to return to a life of singleness.

The Bible teaches remarriage as an option for widows/widowers. It is however silent about remarriage for divorcees. In keeping to God's original design for marriage, the church will not conduct remarriage for individuals who are previously married but un-biblically divorced.

Nevertheless, all divorcees are welcomed to seek restoration and healing in the community of Christ. God's redemptive power is more than able to work through the brokenness and mistakes in our lives.

## Application 2: Courting couples must keep to the design and sanctity of marriage

Courting couples must observe sexual purity. Note that purity is more than virginity. A marrying couple should invest on spiritual intimacy before marriage and leave physical intimacy to after marriage.

- The Scripture clearly teaches that marriage is to be held in honor and the marriage bed be kept undefiled.

“Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.” Heb 13:4

- Courting couples should not mock the marriage vow by entering into physical intimacy even before taking the vow.

“I give you this ring as a sign of our marriage. ***With my body, I honour you, all that I am, I give to you, and all that I have, I share with you.*** In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” (vows made at the exchange of wedding rings)

Therefore courting couples are to:

- A. Abstain from pre-marital sex (with or without penetration, eg: oral sex, mutual masturbation) and from any physical act that is of sexual nature (eg. heavy petting, touching of private parts).**

God has designed sex to be consummated within marriage (Heb 13:4). Therefore all forms of sexual intimacy are to be kept within the boundary of marriage.

Before marriage, courting couples are to exercise self-control and to keep their passions in check. Physical intimacy can easily lead to

sexual arousal; it is therefore wise not to be engaged in any activities that will lead to it.

1 Thess 4:3-5

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality (fornication); that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God..

**B. Abstain from any activity that promotes or implies sexual relations before marriage (eg: cohabiting, going on trips alone as a couple).**

Biblical wisdom and Christ's love bid us to abstain from activities that will expose us to sinning against God and men. The Bible gave us three principles of living:

- **Principle of fleeing from sexual immorality**

1 Corinthians 6:18

Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body

2 Timothy 2:22

Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

1 Pet 5:8-11

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

1 Cor 10:12

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

Sexual temptations are not to be taken lightly. The Bible exhorts us

that the way to overcome sexual temptations is to flee from them. Proverbs 7:6-27 tells of an account of a young man who lacks senses, who did not avoid sexual temptation, but chose to walk the path that passes it. The passage shows how he was ultimately enticed by sexual lust and become a victim of its own foolishness.

- **Principle of walking in the way of love**

Rom 14:13-23

“Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother... For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died... It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble...”

1 Cor 8:9-13

“But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak... Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble...”

1 Thess 5:22

“Abstain from all kinds (all appearance) of evil”

Rom 14 and 1 Cor 8 clearly show that we are to choose the way of love. The love of Christ demands us to limit our freedom for the sake of our brethren. Having a clear conscience involves being conscious that our actions will not result in stumbling another brother in Christ.

For example, a young-in-faith unmarried couple may follow the example of a “spiritually mature” unmarried couple in going on trips alone as a couple. While the latter may have resolved to keep

to their sexual purity, the younger couple may not have done so and fall into sexual temptation during the trip. In this way, the conscience of the “spiritual mature” couple is being defiled because their action has stumbled the young-in-faith couple.

Choosing the way of Christ calls us to deny our rights for the sake of our brethren.

- **Principle of being a light to the world**

Matt 5:16

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

We are called to be salt and light of this world. We are to live out God's decrees and be God's beacon to the world regarding truth, purity and morality.

Cohabitation or going on trips alone as an unmarried couple suggests to outsiders (Christians or Non-Christians) that the couple is already behaving like they are married. Many will assume that they have already consummated their marriage. Therefore it does not matter if the unmarried couple has maintained their sexual purity. Their action does not bring glory to God rather result in a possible misrepresentation of God's regard towards marriage and sex.

### **Application 3: Married couples must practice their marriage in the context of the community of Christ**

God purposes that marriage is meant to point to the communion nature of His triune Being, and also the blessed communion between Christ and the church.

Therefore marriage is more missional than “redemptional”. God did not institute marriage to solve the isolation of mankind due to the fall. God instituted marriage before the fall.

God did not form Eve to solve the loneliness of Adam. In Gen 2:18 – the LORD God did not say: “It is not good for man to be **lonely**...” instead He said: “It is not good for man to be **alone**...” The word “alone” points to one’s physical state, while the word “lonely” points to one’s soul state. Gen 2:18 should be understood in a missional sense than “redemptional” one. The LORD God was revealing that it is His intent to create a community instead of an individual, for He meant the creation of man to be an expression of His triune nature – that is, a community of love between the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

While marriage is an exclusive relationship between a man and a woman, it is not meant to be a reclusive relationship. Christian marriages must be practiced in the context of the community so that it may point fellow believers towards the communion nature of our triune God and also the communion between Christ and the church.

Therefore the married couple should identify themselves with a local assembly, participating actively in the body life of the church. The married life should not hinder one from fellowshiping with fellow believers in the body of Christ and from serving God.

The marrying couple should hold their holy matrimony in the local assembly that they have identified themselves with.

## **What if the courting couple has fallen into sexual sins?**

Failure does not disqualify the couple from marriage. A repentant couple can look forward to God's wondrous blessing in their marriage days ahead!

Couples who have given in to sexual temptations should come before the LORD in confession and repentance and seek forgiveness from the LORD.

1 John 1:9 says: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Couples are advised to come clean before their solemnizing pastor or marriage mentors who can walk alongside them in the journey of repentance and restoration. The couple should be assured of confidentiality as the solemnizing pastor and marriage mentors are not seeking to condemn or to shame, but to love and minister to them.

Couples should note that by remaining in their sins, they are defrauding the solemnizing pastor, marriage mentors, brothers and sisters who had committed themselves to bless their marriage by walking alongside them in preparation for the wedding day.

Note: It is known to be true that as a marrying couple journey towards their wedding day, sexual temptations become more regular and intense. The couple should seek their marriage mentors to be their accountability partners in preparation for their wedding day.

Let us be an authentic community of Christ where sin is treated as it is, nothing less and nothing more.