

Marriage in a Changing Society

In many ways our present culture has deprecated marriage as instituted by God. On every hand we hear of those who are advocating same-sex “marriages,” communal families, and even the abolition of traditional marriage as a viable institution in modern society. The divorce rate is high, and it is not uncommon to hear of those who have been in and out of three or more marriages. Actually, the divorce rate is down slightly from its all time high after introduction of “no-fault” divorce laws enacted in most states in the early 70s. However, today our divorce courts still end roughly one marriage for every two made at the nation’s altars.⁸

The common view

The common view of marriage has changed dramatically over the years. A half century ago, a Jay Leno type survey of the common person on the street would probably have concluded that, except in unusual circumstances, the husband and father should be the head of the family, the “breadwinner,” who works and provides for the family’s financial needs. The wife and mother back then, on the other hand, would have been expected to stay at home under normal circumstances, “keeping the home fires burning” and being the primary caretaker of the children. Sex before and outside of marriage was considered immoral. Pregnancies among the unwed were frowned upon by society and almost invariably brought shame and reproach upon those involved, even upon the parents of an unwed mother.

Such views today are considered old-fashioned by many, if not most. Today, if Mr. Leno asked a passerby to describe

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the gender roles in a typical American marriage, he probably would get a lot of comments that bring into question the validity of any role distinction. The concept of a “head” of the family would be considered by most to be male chauvinism, and the idea of a wife submitting to her own husband would be rejected out of hand.

If asked to comment on marriage itself, many today would question the viability of the “old-fashioned” marriage. Some might even condemn marriage altogether in favor of just living together, or broaden the biblical concept to include same-sex marriages and communal arrangements in which several couples and their children live together as one family.

Of course, if one appeals to human wisdom, the way marriage is viewed will always be evolving. In such an appeal there can be no standard, no reliable source of knowledge about what marriage is and what makes it work. New York University Professor of Sociology Ray E. Baber has questioned the origin of marriage and stated that we can only guess as to how it began.⁹ Obviously, Dr. Baber is either ignorant of the Bible’s account of God instituting marriage or doesn’t believe it, yet he offers himself as an expert on marriage. Such human authority is unreliable at best.

Back to the beginning

The Bible presents marriage and the marriage relationship very differently than commonly viewed and practiced today. Today, too many professional marriage counselors do not prescribe biblical solutions to marital problems, yet the Bible not only provides instruction in building a successful marriage relationship, it explains how marriage began. The