

Holy Matrimony

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Not even a single day went by after creating Adam that God left the man alone. Upon seeing the inadequacy of all other companions, the Creator states, *"It is not good for the man to be alone"* (Genesis 2:18). Thus, Eve was created, a helpmeet suitable for every purpose, the perfect counterpart to the man, the culminating act of God's creative endeavor. Upon reflecting on this verse, most of us would probably agree that it was good for Adam to have human companionship in an emotional or physical sense, but would we also consider the spiritual ramifications? What advantage does marriage bring beyond companionship? Many passages clearly link marriage to fulfillment, lasting happiness, and mutual satisfaction (Deuteronomy 24:5, Ecclesiastes 9:9, Proverbs 5:18-19, 1 Corinthians 7:33), so in what ways does this manifest itself? Could it be that there is a component of marriage that not only makes us physically happy, but spiritually holy as well?

To Be Like Christ

One's first impression would be that Jesus is hardly a good model for our marriages, since He never was a literal husband, yet the scriptures closely link Jesus to our marriages:

- *"Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord"* (Ephesians 5:22)
- *"For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body"* (5:23)
- *"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her"* (Ephesians 5:25)

"If you want to become more like Jesus, I can't imagine any better thing to do than to get married. Being married forces you to face some character issues you'd never have to face otherwise" (Sacred Marriage, Gary Thomas, p. 21). There are aspects of marriage that also force us to commit ourselves, confront other people's failures, and sacrifice for another. In the manifestation of these divine ideals, we become more like our Savior.

It is not as if marriage itself produces holiness, because there are examples of marriage in the Bible that were seen as invalid in the eyes of God (Ezra 9-10, Matthew 5:32, Mark 6:17-18). In addition, not every great Bible character was married. Paul managed to expand his spiritual horizons without marriage, even to the point of encouraging others to seek a similar path. *"It is good for them if they remain even as I"* (1 Corinthians 7:8). Jesus explains in Matthew 19 that mature spiritual expression can be found in eunuchs who *"made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 19:12). Samson's marriage (Judges 14) certainly served a divine purpose, but was anything but expedient to a happier life for the man or woman.

Even with all that being said, a few verses stand out to me:

- *"Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge"* (Hebrews 13:4)

- *“But because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband” (1 Corinthians 7:2)*

Focusing on the needs, concerns, and dreams of your spouse fits the essence of Ephesians 5:22ff perfectly. *“Whenever marital dissatisfaction rears its ugly head in my marriage – as it does in virtually every marriage – I simply check my focus. The times that I am happiest and most fulfilled in my marriage are the times when I am intent on drawing meaning and fulfillment from becoming a better husband rather than from demanding a ‘better’ wife”* (Thomas, p. 101). This must be one reason why Jesus gave us only one cause for divorce (Matthew 19:9). The narrowness of an escape route from marriage forces us to focus on solutions to our problems. Too often in our culture, people are so intent on changing spouses that they fail to change themselves. Remember that love is a learned process, not a feeling. It is a decision, and when somebody says, “I will always love you,” what they should actually mean is, “I will always act like Christ toward you.”