

## THE SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE

It was, I think Groucho Marx who when he was asked what he thought of marriage as an institution, replied: "Fine – for those who like living in institutions!".

The comedian's throw-away remark, funny as it is at first sight, reveals however a widely held view of marriage today – as a limit on our freedom, an obstruction to our self-fulfilment. Life-long faithfulness to one other person, having children, changing nappies and growing old together as a couple, have become seen as boring and undesirable. The result? For the first time in the recorded history of western civilisation, the very concept of marriage is being rejected by vast numbers of people; and of those who do take the plunge, nearly half end up in divorce.

Does it matter? Is this just another feature of modernity we've got to get used to? What has God got to say on the matter? Is what He says still to be taken seriously? And how can what He says help you if you are one of those whose marriage is on the rocks, or who has rejected marriage as out-of-date?

Whatever our views on the subject may be, and whatever situation we're in ourselves, there are four vital things we need to know about marriage in God's eyes.....

- **The first** is that every marriage is in God's book, a "covenant", not a "contract". What does this mean? Quite simply, that marriage is not a bargain, some sort of mutual agreement in which the wife promises to act in a certain way.....as long as the husband does the same, or vice versa. No! When I get married, I covenant before God to act in a certain way whatever my marriage partner decides to do. I act in other words, unilaterally. That after all, is how God acts. He doesn't sign agreements or contracts with us. He makes covenants. Legally binding commitments to do us good, however we behave in return. And we are to imitate Him. That's why in the last book of the Old Testament, God accuses the Jews of having been unfaithful to their wives, "although she is your wife by covenant" (Malachi 2.14)
- **Secondly**, every marriage involves God. This is true whether we're Christians, Moslems, Buddhists, Jews, agnostics or atheists. What do I mean? Well, on one occasion Jesus was asked by some "religious" leaders what he thought of the practice of easy divorce then popular in Israeli society. His response? To take these people back to the beginning of human history, to the very first "marriage", and claim that this marriage was meant to be a model for mankind from then on. In fact, Jesus tells His questioners that the union of a man and woman in every marriage, including this first one, was an act of God, and that "What God has joined together, let not man separate". In other words, if you're married, whoever or whatever you are, you've been united not by a vicar or a registrar – but by God!
- **Thirdly**, we need to know that the God-given grounds for ending a marriage are extremely limited. In fact, there are just two – sexual immorality (such as adultery or child sexual abuse), and desertion of a Christian by his or her non-Christian partner (see Matthew 5.32 & 1 Corinthians 7.15). Incompatibility is not a reason God recognises for divorce. Nor is the fact that you don't "love" your wife or husband any more. Even less the fact that you've "fallen in love" with someone else. Indeed, Jesus teaches that to divorce and re-marry for any other reason than those given above, makes me an adulterer.
- **Finally**, we need to realise the model God is working from when He talks to us about marriage. Human marriage is a reflection of a far greater thing, a relationship that will outlast marriage as we know it. This relationship is the one that exists between God and His people, between Jesus and His "church". What does this greater relationship involve? Total unity. "One flesh", as the Bible puts it. Jesus Christ comes to live in me, and I live "in" Him. In such a relationship, talk of divorce is unthinkable. Instead, unconditional love and daily forgiveness are the order of the day.

All of which means that marriage is something special. Something sacred. Something given to us by God to limit our lustful instincts, and give us a framework and security we wouldn't otherwise have. Do you need to re-think your ideas about it? Do you need to marry the person you're living with? Do you need to stop being concerned with what your husband or wife is not doing, and start acting unilaterally? Do you need to stop thinking "contract", and start thinking "covenant"? Does your marriage need to be built according to God's model? Then why not turn to God through Jesus, the divine architect of marriage, right now, and ask Him to help? Because "the Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth" (Psalm 145.18)

Contact us: [info@word7.org](mailto:info@word7.org)