

Universal Laws: Marriage

We think of God's laws or commands in terms of concrete statements. We might hear someone refer to the "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" in discussions of religious topics. In the beginning God created the Earth and established a natural order for all things. The way in which some things were created by God, set a precedent that implies God's will for the natural order. The union of the first man and woman, brought together by the Lord, serves as the model for the most fundamental social relationship between humans. The nature of the relationship is defined by God as he instructs the pair to "***Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.***" (Gen 1.28). Companionship, shared tasks, sexuality and reproduction are included in these instructions defining the characteristics and scope of the relationship as God brought Adam and Eve together. Additional attributes of Adam and Eve's relationship are stipulated following their sin of violating God's command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3.16-19).

Moving forward in time we see this fundamental social relationship practiced in cultures throughout the world. Typical of humanity however, is the choice to violate the parameters of this arrangement and transform it to meet ideas more suitable to us. The precedent set by God, in the creation of Adam and Eve, bringing them together and defining their activities describes marriage from God's perspective. A simple formula on the surface, but as we can see humans continually violate and change that order.

The first marked departure from following God's model for marriage can be seen in the description of the world in the time of Noah. "***And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.***" (Gen 6.1-2). This is followed by God's limitation of human lifespan (Gen 6.3) and precedes a description of the violence and evil that became pervasive. Historically, violations of the marriage arrangement and what we recognize as the nuclear family, is accompanied by social unrest and chaos. Adultery, fornication and polygamy have been noted in the earliest times and was even a practice among the children of Israel as we read their history recorded in the Old Testament.

These examples demonstrate how humans alter God's commands in favor of what we want and like. An age-old strategy is to change the arrangement in favor of more modern variations intended to grant greater freedom to those involved. This is what was going on during Noah's time and hasn't changed since then. Sexual attraction and the need for companionship are powerful forces that are turned into reinterpretations of the marriage relationship and arguments used to justify the changes. Trial marriage, open marriage, group marriages, same-sex marriage or living together without getting married at all, are solutions arrived at to counter the supposed restrictions of traditional marriage. Again this is the same mentality applied during Noah's time. But, there are some things we need to remember,

Marriage, as a universal condition, or law, is one that God put in place in his sanctification of the first union. It was defined by the Lord in the joining of one man with one woman. It is a relationship defined by sexual consummation and is the only sanctioned avenue to meet sexual needs in God's sight. Marriage is a relationship that is to continue through time in the family of man which is verified by Christ as he answers questions about divorce.

In the first century Jewish men were divorcing their wives for a number of reasons abusing a provision in the Law of Moses that allowed them to put away their wives and marry another. When asked about this by the Pharisees (Matt 19.3) Christ described God's design for marriage. "***Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall***

a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” (Matt 19.4-6).

The point is clear in this conversation. Marriage originated with God in the beginning. It had continued from the beginning and was still in effect. One man was to marry one woman committing themselves to one another for life. They were to remain faithful to one another sexually and otherwise. The bond, sanctioned and recognized by God, was not to be broken. The prophet Malachi, speaking of the rampant divorces during his time stated, “***For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away...***” (Mal 2.16). Men had dealt treacherously with their wives, mirroring their attitude toward God’s law as well. Malachi rebuked them stating, “***the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.***” (Mal 2.14).

If marriage was for life, the Pharisees asked Jesus why Moses had given them instructions for divorcing. Christ answered, “***Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.***” (Matt 19.8). Provisions for putting a wife away under the law had restrictions that weren’t being respected. Sexual infidelity is one of only two ways in which marriage is to end. Christ stated, “***And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.***” (Matt 19.9). The only other way in which God intended for a marriage to end is through the death of the partners. In the following verses of **Matthew 19**, even Christ’s disciples had trouble accepting these restrictions which was also answered by Christ (Matt 19.11-12).

Marriage is one of the oldest universal conditions or laws put in place by God. Over time the relationship has been abused, misused, transformed and rejected. For many it has been the fulfillment of a good life. Marriage, like many other things God has set in motion, is an arrangement that provides companionship, comfort and stability in the midst of a turbulent and ever changing world. Problems that arise in marriage aren’t due to the inherent design, they’re the product of human emotion, misdirected lust and self-indulgent attitudes. Marriage stands as one of the greatest achievements we can accomplish in life and it’s design teaches us how to understand God’s care for us and his desire to be close to his creation.

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A second universal law is one that arises from a failure to respect God and others. Following marriage, murder is one of the greatest problems humans have faced throughout history. We’ll discuss this second universal law in the next lesson and review the sanctions against it.