

Builder's Marriage Seminar© for Church Leaders and Counselors

Glenn H Strauss, M.D. 2009

I. Introduction-

A. God's Word is the final authority in marriage. (II Timothy 3:16)

1. The Bible is the only authoritative source for God's Word
2. Other sources may be valuable and true but truth is not determined by what we believe.

B. It is sometimes difficult to understand the biblical truths clearly, particularly in regard to marriage.

1. Cultural norms versus biblical standards
 - every society conflicts with God's standards in some ways but also have God-given distinctives that reflect His creativity and purposes for that culture.
 - Satan wants to use these distinctives to lead us into sin though the practice itself may not be sinful. Examples: wedding ceremonies, work plan, money management, sex practices, family arrangements, dowry, arranged marriages, child rearing practices, etc
 - Some distinctive must be addressed as sin - polygamy, wife beating, divorce for infertility, adultery, widow sacrifice, etc.
2. **We must learn to apply the truth in context but we must never determine the truth by context.**
3. **We must take sin seriously.**

II. Marriage: God's institution for the good of mankind

A. Four principles of marriage: God's design and plan for men, women and marriage

B. God has provided three tools to help mankind build strong marriages.

God's desire is for us to enjoy what He has designed.

C. Maintaining our marriage: God's sustainability plan. Because we live in a world that is fallen, there is constant need to protect the marriage. We must also maintain the marriage by repairing any damage that can lead to collapse.

Note 1: Developing your marriage is much like building a house. We need to know what we are building, how to build it, and how to fix the mistakes.

Note 2: God designed marriage as the foundation for society. It is this institution that determines the strength of a nation.

III. Biblical principles for marriage – building a house that will stand

A. Four principles of marriage: God’s design and plan for men, women and marriage

1. God created both men and women to be of **equal value, both created in His image. (Genesis 1:27)**
 - a. Marriage is not about a man and his property.
 - b. This is a key principle for healthy marriage because it is the **foundation for mutual respect.**
 - c. An intimate relationship is possible because both partners are in the image of God.
2. God created men and women to **compliment each other (Genesis 1:28)**
 - a. God created woman to be a **“suitable” helper** for man. Someone of equal value but needed to make the whole complete (**Genesis 2:18**)
 - b. designed to “do life” together not separately. It was not good that man was alone even though God proclaimed “it is good” about all of creation.
 - God planned the perfect mate for Adam. God gave Adam the responsibility of naming the animals so he can understand the need for a mate for himself.
 - share equally in the responsibility** for living according to God’s design. (**Malachi 2:14-15**)
 - **designed to be the perfect partnership.**
3. God has designed marriage with **roles that bring order and effectiveness to the relationship.**
 - a. Leadership role (Ephesian 5:23, 25, 28, 29): a man’s divine calling to provide Christ-like leadership for his wife and family by loving them and protecting them. The man approaches leadership with the heart of a servant as Jesus did... (**Mark 10:45**: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”)
 - the husband is ready to **give up his life to serve** his wife.
 - the husband **lovingly provides** for his wife’s needs before his own. (the “Kephelae” – Greek word for “head”)
 - the husband is **not a dictator** or owner over his wife.
 - the husband’s **authority is delegated** from the Lord.
 - b. Submission role (Ephesian 5:22, 24): a woman’s divine calling is to honor and affirm the husband’s leadership and carry it through according to her gifts.
 - like the three Persons in the Trinity, all are equally God but have different roles and the Son, Jesus Christ submits to God the Father.
 - c. Both are designed to be parents. They are called to care for their children, work the land and rule over the creatures of the earth. **Neither can do this alone. (Genesis 1:28)**

4. God designed **marriage as the exclusive model** for bringing one man and one woman together for a lifelong relationship representing Him
- a. **God called both to leave their parents and to cleave to one another (Genesis 2:24)**
- Commitment is the foundation for growth. It allows for imperfections but encourages change.
 - The biggest problem in the preparation for marriage is the willingness and ability to make a commitment and keep it.
- b. **the purpose of marriage is not our personal happiness but rather the joy that comes from representing Christ together. (Ephesian 5:30-32)**
- this purpose is achieved in our commitment not just to each other, but in our commitment to represent the Lord in our relationship.**
 - non-christian marriages can be happy but not complete without this purpose.

Note: The curse is a consequence of sin.

It affects marriage and can only be undone in Christ.

-**Genesis 3:16b** is part of the curse and not God's plan.

"desire shall be for your husband" = woman will want to dominate husband

"he shall rule over you" = husband will struggle to love sacrificially.

-They shared equally in the responsibility for the fall and the consequences. (**Genesis 3:6-8**)

B. God has provided three tools to help mankind build a strong marriage.

God's desire is for us to enjoy what He has designed.

1. Knowledge (Ephesians 5:17)

- a. God has revealed Himself- a loving God who engages with man for their good and His glory.
- b. God has revealed who we are- fallen creatures living in a fallen world with individuality and ability to choose
- c. God has revealed his design for marriage

2. The power of the Spirit (Ephesians 5:8-10)

- a. Transforming our character as husbands and wives
(**2 Corinthians 3:18**)
- b. Expressing the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**)
- c. Following the Lord all the way home (**Colossians 3:17**)
Just like our walk with the Lord, marriage is about trust and obedience.
- d. Remember we all grow at our own pace and in different areas. God works with us as individuals *and* as couples.

3. **Wisdom (Ephesians 5:15-16, James 1:5-6)**
 - a. No formulas for the “perfect” marriage. We must live by faith.
 - b. Variety is the rule (**Ephesians 5:33**) each of you “in particular”. God has designed each marriage to be as unique as the individual partners.
 - c. Husbands love, wives respect (**Ephesians 5:33**)
Our key to undoing the power of the curse.
 - d. Expressing loving commitment by walking in the light (**I John 1:5-10**)
 - No secrets, forgiveness, open communication = “living in the light”
 - a distant recollection of the openness in the garden before sin.
 - remember that forgiveness by itself does not restore trust.
Only loving commitment restores trust over time.
4. These tools are fundamentally **designed to eliminate fear** from the relationship.
 - a. Perfect love casts out fear. (**I John 4:18**)
 - b. **Fear and shame are the greatest enemies of intimacy** in relationships.
 - c. Money, sex, and the pursuit of personal power are the most frequently used **tools of Satan** to destroy a marriage. He uses lies to bring God’s design and tools into question. (**I Corinthians 7:1-6**)

C. Maintaining our marriage: God’s sustainability plan.

1. **Avoid obvious problems** before they start. The reality of a fallen world is that imperfect people have the potential for making mistakes. This makes building a marriage difficult.
2. **Communicate** – do not let the sun go down on your anger.
Find the way for your marriage that glorifies God.
(**Proverb 25:11 and Ephesians 4:26**)
3. **Seek to understand** (**I Peter 3:18**)
4. **Forgive and rebuild trust.** Seek God’s way for reconciliation. Works towards realizing an effective and fulfilling marriage. (**Matthew 18:21-22**)
5. **Seek council** (**Proverbs 26:16, Proverbs 15:22**) - this is an important place for the family to be involved
6. Remember you must keep building on the foundation of commitment!

IV. Conclusions: these principles provide tools for counseling

A. The wise counselor will practice them in their own home first.

Remember: wisdom and credibility comes from obedience to what you know

B. Most troubled marriages need to be encouraged in a relationship with the Lord.

C. Remain objective and insist on counseling both partners.

Protect your own testimony

D. A simple counseling format for marriages in trouble

1. Evaluate each partners' relationship with the Lord
 - Christian?
 - Disciple actively growing?
 - Note: a marriage where one partner is not Christian is special consideration (**I Corinthians 7**)
2. Try to help them discover wrong thinking about commitment to their spouse and to representing the Lord. Remember: most problems come from lies that Satan has subtly planted in their thinking
3. Directly address their willingness to change but do so with grace and understanding. Remember that God is the change agent.
4. Address all unique circumstances – children, family, living place, work, finances, previous sin, children outside of marriage, other wives, physical and mental health of the partners, etc.
 - Remember: none of these are an excuse for continuing in sin.
5. Make a plan for reconciliation for any specific sin involved. Remind the couple that their personal happiness is not the goal but God can bring happiness to a broken marriage.
 - Confession (remember the sin started before the event).
 - Repentance
 - Reconciliation