

Restoration



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:26-28; 2:24, 25; Gen. 3:1-24; Matt. 19:3-5; Luke 17:21; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 1:4; 6:2; Eph. 3:17-19.*

Memory Text: “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral” (*Hebrews 13:4, NIV*).

The Week at a Glance: Though the institution of marriage was distorted by sin, the gospel can restore marriage to its original purity and beauty.

Marriage was divinely instituted by God as a permanent, monogamous union of a man and a woman. It was meant to be a blessing, another aspect of His great work of creation. Marriage was, perhaps, the greatest pre-Fall manifestation of His infinite love for humanity. How tragic, then, that the openness, equality, and mutuality of the first human pair were supplanted by the curse brought on by their sin. The race has been living with those dire consequences ever since. With Christ, however, a new day dawned for the institution, as well as for the marital experience of couples. In Him, husband and wife may know a restoration of God's plan for marriage.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 21.*

The Genesis Marriage

Jesus discussed marriage in reply to a question about divorce. What source did He use? What points did He make? *Matt. 19:3-5.* Compare *Gen. 1:26-28; 2:24, 25.*

Using Genesis 1 and 2, Christ reaffirmed God’s creation plan for marriage. Genesis 1:26-28 presents humankind in two genders, male and female (*compare Gen. 5:2*). They stand as equals before God, both in His procreative blessing and in the stewardship over the earth. Genesis 2 shows how the male and female were created and how marriage got started. The need of the first human being for companionship and sexual fulfillment led God to plan a “helper” for him (*Gen. 2:18, NIV*). The word *helper* frequently describes God in relationship to humankind (*compare Deut. 33:7, 26, 29*). Following the extraordinary surgery and the exquisite fashioning of this partner, God joined them in marriage (*Gen. 2:21, 22*). Ecstatically, the man acknowledged his companion as “woman” (Heb. *ishshah*)—connected to him but separate from himself as “man” (Heb. *ish*).

What are some of the elements of marriage as outlined in Genesis 2:24?

Marriage—a permanent, exclusive union between a male and a female—includes (1) leaving father and mother, (2) being joined to each other, and (3) becoming one flesh. “Leave” implies the creation of a distinct family unit with specific inviolable boundaries. “Joined” refers to the couple’s mutual commitment expressed in a formal marriage covenant. “Becoming one flesh” describes both the sexual union and the lifelong process of growth in intimacy, unity, and fulfillment that God intends a couple to experience in all aspects of their lives.

In what ways does the Eden marriage reflect principles that should help define our relationship to God?

Crisis and Consolation

How does the account of the fall into sin present the changed situation of marriage and of the marriage partners in their attitudes toward God and toward each other? *Genesis 3.*

The first couple donned clothes made from fig leaves and hid from God in the bushes! Here can be seen the tragic loss of physical, emotional, and spiritual oneness they had known with their Creator and with each other. Neither took responsibility for their actions. Each put the blame elsewhere—he blamed her, and she blamed the snake. In reality, they put the blame on God, who had created both.

How does Genesis 3:16 present the change in the marital relationship that resulted from sin?

Effects of the Fall on marriage. The original mutuality, coregency, and equality were replaced by the subjection of the wife to the rulership of the husband. Down through history, wives often have been viewed as the property of their husbands. Abuse has made many women's circumstances very hard. Ellen White comments on the effects of the Fall: "But after Eve's sin, as she was first in the transgression, the Lord told her that Adam should rule over her. She was to be in subjection to her husband, and this was a part of the curse." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 484. The subjection was not because she was female but because "she was first in the transgression." Also, the subjection was "part of the curse."

In what ways do you see in your own life the tendency to shift blame for your actions on others? What practical steps can you take to change and be more open to responsibility for what you do?

Upholding Marriage

Read the following texts. What principles do they present that are absolutely essential for a good marriage?

Exod. 20:14, 17

Prov. 5:15-20

Gal. 6:2

Phil. 2:4

In biblical thinking, close relationships are bound together by covenants. The predominant covenant is one between God and His people (*Gen. 9:9-17, Isa. 55:3, Heb. 13:20*). Human covenants are binding commitments that include promises, privileges, and obligations—key factors in any marriage. These commitments, made before God, endeavor to bring the qualities of divine faithfulness into human relationships, where promises are so often unreliable (*compare Deut. 7:9*).

The prophet Ezekiel uses the human marriage covenant to describe God in His relationship to His bride, Israel (*Ezek. 16:8*). The marriage covenant is violated when the marital union has in some way been desecrated; for example, when an adulterous wife leaves “the partner of her youth,” ignoring “the covenant she made before God” (*Prov. 2:17, NIV*), or when a husband repudiates the wife of his youth, the wife of his “marriage covenant” (*Mal. 2:14, NIV*). Sacred promises made at the beginning of marriage—in one’s “youth”—are intended to be honored throughout life.

Why is death to self so important in keeping any marriage strong? In what areas might you need more of this *death* in any of your relationships?

Restoration in Christ

“Marriage has been perverted by sin; but it is the purpose of the gospel to restore its purity and beauty.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 64.

How does the Bible portray the work of Christ in restoring what was lost through sin? *Luke 17:21, 2 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 1:4, Eph. 3:17-19.* What are the implications of these texts for marriage?

Though they await the release from the presence of sin, subjects of Christ’s kingdom of grace are freed from sin’s penalty and power. Believers seek to pattern their lives and relationships in harmony with Christ’s will. For marriage, the Creator becomes Re-creator. By His indwelling Spirit He calls and enables couples to exhibit love and grace in their marriage. Eden lost can be Eden regained. By the study of His plan, by prayer, and by His power married couples may grow more and more toward marriage as it once was, with its spiritual, emotional, and physical intimacy.

What principle helps counteract the power of sin? *Matt. 20:20-28; John 13:4, 5, 12-17; compare Phil. 2:5-8.*

What specific words does Paul give to wives and to husbands? *Eph. 5:22-33.*

“The gospel emphasizes the love and submission of husband and wife to one another (1 Cor. 7:3, 4; Eph. 5:21). The model for the husband’s leadership is the self-sacrificial love and service that Christ gives to the church (Eph. 5:24, 25). Both Peter and Paul speak about the need for respect in the marriage relationship (1 Peter 3:7; Eph. 5:22, 23).” —*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assoc.)* revised 2000, 16th edition, pp. 192, 193.

If married, what changes can you make in order to allow more fully the principles of the gospel to control your marriage? If unmarried, in what ways can these principles help you in other relationships?

The Creation Plan in a Fallen World

How did Jesus acknowledge both the divine plan for marriage and the reality confronting marriage in a fallen world? *Matt. 19:3-9.*

Jesus restated God's plan for marriage as a permanent union of a man and a woman. Christ's followers seek to uphold this plan, knowing that what He desires He also enables by His grace and the indwelling of His Spirit. Christians have a special obligation to approach marriage prayerfully, to choose their partners wisely, and to prepare carefully for the transition to marriage. Then, in marriage, they must sacredly guard their commitment to each other, seeking diligently for God's grace in the work of adjusting to each other and growing together.

Hardness of human hearts. While marriage is divinely instituted, its subjects are fallen human beings. Marriages between Christian men and women do sometimes break down. Jesus acknowledged that hardness of human hearts led to the concession of divorce by Moses (*Matt. 19:8; compare Deut. 24:1-4*), though Jesus Himself was very explicit about how He viewed divorce.

When a marriage is in crisis, those who are able to minister to them should do everything possible to help them experience reconciliation. Divorce never should be taken lightly. Scripture provides guidance for restoring damaged relationships (*Hos. 3:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:10, 11; 13:4-7; Gal. 6:1*). When divorce has occurred, former partners should be encouraged to seek divine grace to help them examine their experience and to learn the will of God for their lives. God provides comfort to those who have been wounded. He also accepts the heartfelt repentance of individuals who commit the most destructive sins, even those that carry with them irreparable consequences.

How is it possible for the church both to uphold God's plan for marriage and to be a community that shows understanding, provides compassion, and assists believers in rebuilding their lives after divorce?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “The Eden Home a Pattern,” *The Adventist Home*, pp. 25–28; “The Builders of the Home,” *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 356–362.

Entering marriage intelligently. “The family tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred, of any on earth. It was designed to be a blessing to mankind. And it is a blessing wherever the marriage covenant is entered into intelligently, in the fear of God, and with due consideration for its responsibilities.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 18.

Rulership. “Neither husband nor wife is to make a plea for rulership. The Lord has laid down the principle that is to guide in this matter. The husband is to cherish his wife as Christ cherishes the church. And the wife is to respect and love her husband. Both are to cultivate the spirit of kindness, being determined never to grieve or injure the other.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 47.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read the second Ellen G. White quote aloud in class. Discuss the principles expressed there. What, if followed, would these principles do for just about any marriage?
- 2 Keeping your answers to the previous question in mind, answer, as a class, this question: What factors are, so often, the cause of divorce?
- 3 How, at least in certain ways, are the principles of a good marriage similar to the principles that could help someone maintain other kinds of healthy relationships?
- 4 As a class, make up a single paragraph, a kind of *official* declaration, of what marriage vows should be.

Summary: Though sin has damaged marriage, God through Christ is working in us to restore what we have lost.

Pathfinders Open Doors

by SETH NYARANGA

The Turkana people of northern Kenya knew little of the Adventist faith. But when believers in the region organized a Pathfinder Club for these people, many of the Turkana children joined.

The children took part in many of the activities Pathfinders around the world enjoy, but they also engaged in their own form of evangelism, visiting villages where groups of believers met and leading out in Pathfinder Clubs there. Children from other Protestant denominations begged to join Pathfinders and were welcomed into the clubs. Some Protestant churches even asked if they could organize their own Pathfinder Clubs.

A camporee was planned that would incorporate these other Protestant Pathfinder Clubs, using the camporee to introduce young people from other faiths to the Adventist beliefs.

Marching and drilling attracts much attention and interest in Africa, and many young people join just to learn marching skills.

The watchman at a Pathfinder camporee watched the young people take part in their activities. He visited the evening meetings and listened to Bible stories and the Christian songs the children eagerly sang. Later he asked some of the leaders how he could enroll his son in Pathfinders and was delighted to learn that there was a Pathfinder Club nearby that his son could join. The watchman brought his son and stayed to watch the program for a few minutes.

The boy continued to attend Pathfinders, though it was a long walk from his home. He found a church with a Pathfinder Club closer to home. Because of this boy's involvement in Pathfinders, he and his parents have been baptized.

This story has been repeated over and over as parents see the benefits of Pathfinders for their children. Children invite their parents to attend special events held in the church, and the parents are introduced to Adventist beliefs.

Once, while Pathfinders were holding a camporee, they learned that a neighbor's calf had fallen into a reservoir and was in danger of drowning. Some of the Pathfinder leaders quickly rescued the calf. When the owner learned what had happened, he was impressed. Some members of this man's family have begun attending church because of the Pathfinders' help.

Every activity of our churches can become a means of evangelism when we invite those around us to join.

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