

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?

Key Text: *Romans 12:2*

Teachers Aims:

1. To establish that marriage was instituted by God to be a permanent and binding relationship.
2. To show how sin has affected the unity of man and woman and their unity with God.
3. To show how marriage can be restored to the blessing God intended it to be.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Essential Elements of Marriage (*Matt. 19:6*)

- A. Man and woman join in marriage to form a distinct family unit.
- B. Marriage was established for companionship, for procreation, and for sharing responsibilities.
- C. The family has specific God-given boundaries that should not be violated.

II. The Consequences of Sin (*Gen. 3:8, 12, 14-19*)

- A. The oneness that man and woman once shared is now marred by sin.
- B. The unity between humankind and the Creator was lost as a result of sin.

III. The Sacredness of Marriage Is Restored Through Christ (*Phil. 2:4, Eph. 5:28, 29*)

- A. Through the Holy Spirit, married couples can display the love of God.
- B. Each partner in the marriage union should seek to meet the needs of the other.
- C. Through the power of God, couples sacredly can guard their marital vows and their commitment.

Summary: When sin entered the world, the trusting relationships between man and woman and between humankind and the Creator were broken. But God, through Christ and the indwelling Spirit, seeks to restore unity in the marriage relationship and ultimately restore humanity's relationship with Himself.

COMMENTARY

I. Introduction

In this week's commentary we will share lists of negative and positive reasons for getting married. We also will take a look at the marriage of James and Ellen White, who lived during the era of the *Institutional Family*. Finally, we will share some letters written by the Whites to each other. Considering the context of their times, do they reflect more the culture of their society or the culture of heaven?

II. Reasons to Marry

Some years ago Christian writer and counselor H. Norman

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?

Wright and a colleague pastor, Wes Roberts, shared a list of ten negative reasons why couples marry, which was compiled by recognized marriage and family-life-education specialists. It was suggested that during counseling, couples should submit their own list of why they were marrying then compare their list with the following negative reasons:

1. To spite their parents
2. Because marriage will make you feel worthwhile and will give meaning to your life
3. To be a therapist or counselor to your fiancée to try to *fix* your fiancée
4. The fear that you might never be married
5. The fear of independence or thinking you need to be with someone to feel safe and/or fulfilled
6. To ease the pain of just having broken up with someone else
7. Being worried over what will happen to your fiancée if you break up, even though you know this marriage should not occur
8. To escape an unhappy home
9. Because your fiancée is pregnant
10. Because you already have had sex

(Adapted from Wes Roberts and H. Norman Wright, *Before You Say "I Do"* [Irvine, Calif.: Harvest House Publishers, 1978], pp. 6, 7).

In addition to these ten negative reasons, the experts listed five healthy reasons why couples marry:

1. Companionship
2. To work together and fulfill your own and each other's needs
3. To fulfill sexual needs in the way God intends
4. Love
5. Because you are convinced that it is God's will for you to marry this person

(Wright and Roberts, p. 7).

It might be interesting to have your class members share some of their reasons for having married. Note that the above information was compiled years ago. What would be the negative and positive reasons for marrying today?

Marriage readiness also involves personal growth in many areas of the fruits of the Spirit (*Gal. 5:22, 23*), being appropriately adaptable and flexible, having the ability to empathize, being able to work through problems, being able to give and receive love, being emotionally stable, having things in common, having certain communication skills, and having similar family backgrounds.

We have discovered some level of incompatibility with virtually every couple we have worked with. Two people coming from different gene pools, being reared by different parents, perhaps even from different cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds, and being different genders—it is no wonder there are incompatibilities that must be dealt with from time to time. Our best advice is to confront

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?

them lovingly, do not turn them into battlegrounds, and if an impasse is reached, prayerfully agree to discuss it at an agreed time. This implies processing incompatibilities, not trying to change the other for your sake, healthy communication and conflict resolution, and faith and trust in God.

III. The Marriage of James and Ellen White

Because James and Ellen lived and worked together, and because both of them were driven by a belief that they must accomplish

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Genesis 2:21, 22; Matthew 19:3-9; Ephesians 5:22-33*

- 1 When Adam and Eve fell for Satan's deceptions, not only was their relationship with God damaged, so was their relationship with each other. As you look back on your marriage experience, what are the biggest threats to marital happiness? If you've never been married, what do you think the greatest challenges would be? What biblical principles provide the remedies to those situations?
- 2 Read Matthew 19:3-5. Who were the questioners? What was the reason for their question? What did it reveal about the way they regarded marriage? What is it about marriage that leads many to regard it as a sentence rather than a blessing?
- 3 God created Adam and Eve as equals, but the entrance of sin into the world redefined their relationship (*Gen. 3:16, last part*). Is the *lordship* of the husband over the wife something that should be maintained until Jesus comes, or should couples strive for equality in their relationship as part of God's original ideal for them? Explain why, or why not.
- 4 Sin is a fact of life. At one time or another, each partner in the marriage relationship will have to ask for, and extend, forgiveness to the other partner. Yet, divorce courts are full of people who find themselves unwilling or unable to forgive their spouses. What is the solution? What biblical principles apply?
- 5 Do you agree or disagree with this statement: *In a divorce there are no innocent parties?* Let your class discuss this declaration. Have each speaker support his or her point with a Bible verse or passage. How should the church treat couples involved in a marital breakup?

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?

what God had called them to do, they did not have an easy marriage. James “firmly believed that his wife’s messages came from God,” but her “straight words” about his working too much were difficult for him to accept.

After James suffered a series of strokes between 1865 and 1881, he became subject to mood swings and suspicions. James, meanwhile, was responding quite defensively.

Sometime later, Ellen wrote to James, “Forgive me and I will be cautious not to start any subject to annoy and distress you. . . . Wherein I have done this, I am sorry.”—George R. Knight, *Walking with Ellen White* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publ. Assoc., 1999), p.76

James countered with an apology of his own.

Whatever the tensions and frustrations of their marriage may have been, their love was real. After James died in 1881, Ellen reportedly missed him very much. Twenty-five years

Witnessing

In today’s world, marriage is the butt of many sarcastic and suggestive jokes. The general assumption is that after the sensual joys of marriage fade, it becomes a yoke of bondage and a battleground between husband and wife, as well as a breeding ground for adulterous intrigue; and the best that can be hoped for is a seldom-violated truce between mates. This is a cynical travesty of the true purpose and potential of marriage.

God’s stated ideal for marriage is that husband and wife should blend into a sanctified unity that preserves, while it enhances, the individual identity of each partner.

In order for ideal marital relations to be fulfilled, as set forth in Ephesians 5:20-25, both partners must consistently ask themselves, Is my conduct and attitude Christlike? Am I patient, considerate, forgiving, helpful, generous, and tenderhearted?

Each partner must strive to be worthy of the other’s respect and trust and avoid the futile trap of trying to make the other reveal all the gracious qualities lacking in both.

Of the three options below, which seems the best for the restoration or maintenance of a fulfilling marriage?

1. I will periodically give my mate a gift book on how to be a better husband or wife.

2. I will systematically (and tactfully) bring to my mate’s attention the exemplary acts and traits of others that I wish to see reproduced in my own partner.

3. I will seek to exemplify in my own conduct the virtues and graces that I prize in others.

Point to ponder: Of these three, which stance comes closest to the golden rule of Matthew 7:12?

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?

after James died, Ellen described him as “the best man that ever trod shoe leather.”—Page 78.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: The word *cleave* holds an inherent contradiction: At the same time that it infers a split, or a breaking apart, it also embodies the idea of clinging, or fastening, to the new. Divorce is one of the most traumatic breakages a person can experience, and its meaning emphasizes what is broken or lost. But when a person’s marriage breaks, or cleaves apart, what is there to cleave to in the wreckage and debris that divorce leaves behind? How can cleaving to Christ make a difference, even when the marriage is beyond repair?

Thought Questions:

1 Study the following passages: Matthew 18:10-14, Mark 8:1-8, Luke 7:11-15, John 19:25-27. What lessons of compassion can you learn from Christ? The next time you know of someone in your human family or your church family who is going through difficult times, ask yourself, In what specific ways am I able to help?

2 William Barclay points out six virtues in Romans 15 that should characterize Christian fellowship: hope, harmony, praise, consideration of one another, study of the Scripture, and an optimistic attitude of the heart toward life. Barclay then concludes his summary with these words: “The essence of the matter is that the Christian fellowship takes its example, its inspiration and its dynamic from Jesus Christ.”—Barclay, “The Letter to the Romans,” *The Daily Study Bible*, revised edition, p. 197. Think of situations within your church that could benefit from these six traits. How can these traits be converted into Christlike actions?

Application Question:

Romans 15:1 sets the stage for this week’s memory text. “It is significant that when Paul speaks of *bearing* the weaknesses of others [Romans 15:1] he uses the same word as is used of Christ bearing his Cross (bastazein).”—Barclay, p. 197 Without the original meaning, or context, of the word *bearing*, it is easy to take this verse lightly and say to oneself, “I need to put up with the aggravation!” *Bearing*, however, means more; it involves the element of selfless sacrifice and love. Keeping this in mind, how can your church strive to be more supportive of a member going through divorce? Think of at least two specific ways we may help to bear his or her suffering.

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.