

# *An Introduction*

## *Marriage Is By God's Design*

When a man and a woman marry, they are to be congratulated! Marriage is the state in which God intended human beings to live, and the state in which people can find the greatest blessings human life provides.

People today fail to respect marriage in a number of ways. Some joke about it. Certain religions teach that the single life is spiritually superior to the married life; therefore, they require those serving as full-time religious workers to remain single. Perhaps more harmful to the public good is the fact that the view of marriage presented by the popular media is often negative. For example, few current television programs are about married people. Of those few, how many are about happily married couples? A negative view of marriage is also evident in the number of couples who live together without being married.

In contrast to this negative perception of marriage, the Bible tells us that marriage is by God's design. Human experience confirms the blessedness of marriage.

### **MARRIAGE IS FROM GOD**

*God instituted marriage.* He performed the first "wedding ceremony." According to Genesis 1, God made everything "good" (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). After He had made man, He saw that everything He had made was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Then, for the first time, something is described in Genesis 2 as "not good": God saw that it was "not good" for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). Therefore, God took a rib from the side of Adam and made woman. The creation of woman and God's presentation of her to Adam resulted in the first marriage. When Jesus was

asked about marriage, He looked back to that event as setting the standard for all the marriages that were to follow (Matthew 19:3–9). God approves of marriage because He Himself recognized that it was not good for man to be alone. That is why He instituted marriage. The Bible always speaks approvingly of marriage.

*Marriage is throughout the Bible.* The Old Testament features stories about love and marriage: the stories of Jacob and Rachel and of Ruth and Boaz, for instance. One book—Song of Solomon—has romantic love as its main theme.

In the New Testament, Jesus showed His approval of marriage by attending a wedding feast (John 2:1–11). The beauty of marriage is seen in that Christ's relationship with the church is likened to that between a husband and a wife (Ephesians 5:22–33). Heaven is pictured as "a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2). Paul indicated his approval of marriage by saying that it was right for a man and a woman to marry even when conditions for Christians were difficult (1 Corinthians 7:26–28). The writer of Hebrews specifically endorsed marriage, saying, "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4; NKJV).<sup>1</sup> In fact, the New Testament says that one characteristic of the great apostasy is that some will forbid marriage (1 Timothy 4:3).

When a couple marry, therefore, they enter into a state of life that has God's approval. While the Bible implies that most people will, in fact,

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<sup>1</sup>An alternative rendering of the first part of Hebrews 13:4 is "Let the marriage bed be kept undefiled" (NRSV). This phrasing is a command rather than a statement. Either translation is possible.

marry, it does not teach that anything is wrong with remaining unmarried. Jesus never married. Paul was not married. Paul even argued that under certain circumstances it was better for Christians to refrain from marrying, if they could do so without sinning (1 Corinthians 7:38). Single (unmarried) people have their place in the kingdom of God.

## HUMAN EXPERIENCE CONFIRMS THE BLESSEDNESS OF MARRIAGE

That marriage is a good thing—a blessed state, the natural state in which man was intended to live—is evident from the fact that all cultures have practiced some form of marriage between men and women.<sup>2</sup>

*Marriage blesses the marriage partners.* Social scientists have accumulated considerable evidence to indicate that marriage confers blessings on the marriage partners. For instance, researchers make the following claims:

(1) “Married people are far more likely to be happy . . . than any other group of people.”<sup>3</sup>

(2) “Married people have better emotional and physical health and live longer than do unmarried people.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Most cultures, all over the world and throughout history, have practiced some form of marriage. Obviously, not all societies have viewed marriage as God originally designed it. Some, for instance, have practiced polygamy; but no culture has ever consistently practiced homosexual marriage.

<sup>3</sup>Harry Benson, “The Public Benefits of Marriage: Not Just a ‘Selection’ Effect” (<http://www.2-in-2-1.com/university/publicbenefit/index2.html>; Internet; accessed 23 October 2008). Other good references are given at the end of the article.

<sup>4</sup>Bridget E. Maher, “The Benefits of Marriage,” Family Research Council (<http://www.frc.org/get.cfm?i=IFO3Jo2&v>; Internet; accessed 18 July 2005). More information on the benefits of marriage can be found in Youmasu J. Siewe, “The Beauty and Benefits of Marriage,” *Health*, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service ([http://74.125.95.104/search?q=cache:vW8nun6P8Ikj:fcs.okstate.edu/health/articles/articlef/The\\_Beauty\\_and\\_Benefits\\_of\\_Marriage.htm+Youmasu+J.+Siewe,+“The+Beauty+and+Benefits+of+Marriage,+Health,+Oklahoma+Cooperative+Extension+Service&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=us](http://74.125.95.104/search?q=cache:vW8nun6P8Ikj:fcs.okstate.edu/health/articles/articlef/The_Beauty_and_Benefits_of_Marriage.htm+Youmasu+J.+Siewe,+“The+Beauty+and+Benefits+of+Marriage,+Health,+Oklahoma+Cooperative+Extension+Service&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=us); Internet; accessed 24 October 2008) and Todd E. Linaman, “Marriage Does Have

(3) “Married people are less likely to suffer from long-term illnesses” and are less likely to die in the hospital after surgery.<sup>5</sup> “Mortality rates are 250% higher for unmarried men and 50% higher for unmarried women compared to those who are married.”<sup>6</sup>

(4) Marriage makes men more successful and families more prosperous.<sup>7</sup> “Married couples have greater incomes than do single adults, and the longer they stay married, the more wealth they accumulate.”<sup>8</sup>

(5) “Married couples enjoy greater sexual satisfaction than do unmarried people.”<sup>9</sup>

(6) In some parts of the world, married people also have legal advantages.<sup>10</sup>

Why do those who are married, as a rule, have better lives? Several reasons might be suggested. Married people are in better condition *physically* because husband and wife tend to watch out for each other. They are healthier *psychologically* and *emotionally* because, ideally, they know they are loved and they share their problems with one another. They are in better situations

*financially* because two can, in fact, live together more cheaply than they can live separately. They have advantages *socially* because, first, the married person always has at least one friend—his or her spouse—and, second, it is often easier for couples to make friends. Married couples relate to others more naturally than single people in a society in which most of the population is married. Finally, if they are Christians, married people are likely to be stronger *spiritually* because the Christian husband and

Its Benefits!” Family Life Facts (<http://www.myflr.org/Article.asp?ID=32>; Internet; accessed 24 October 2008).

<sup>5</sup>Benson.

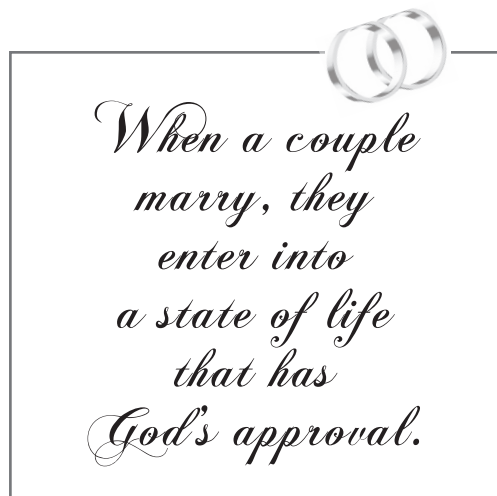
<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Maher.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>“On the order of 1,400 legal rights are conferred upon married couples in the US, for example” (“Legal and Economic Benefits of Marriage” [[http://www.religioustolerance.org/mar\\_bene.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/mar_bene.htm)]; Internet; accessed 29 October 2008]). This article lists twenty-one state and federal benefits.



wife encourage one another to live for God.

In the end, all these reasons add up to the one fact announced by God in the beginning: It is “not good” for human beings to be alone.

*Marriage blesses society.* Not only does marriage bless the married couple, but marriage also provides benefits for society as a whole. Bridget Maher wrote,

Marriage makes homes safer places to live, because it curbs social problems such as domestic violence and child abuse.

Communities with more married-parent families are safer and more attractive places to live, because they are less likely to have substance abuse and crime among young people.

Marriage is the best antidote to poverty and welfare dependency.

Married people are more likely to be healthy, productive, and engaged citizens, benefiting businesses and, ultimately, the economy.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, the children of parents who are married (compared to children in single-parent families) are less likely to be abused and less likely to “engage in . . . risky behaviors, such as premarital sex, substance abuse, delinquency, and suicide.”<sup>12</sup> They are likely to do better in school and usually enjoy better circumstances economically.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, when you get married, you choose a life that will not only bring you great personal benefits but will also benefit society. You do deserve to be congratulated!

## THE BLESSINGS OF MARRIAGE ARE CONDITIONAL

While it is true that, in general, marriage blesses individuals and society, not every marriage is a blessing to the individuals involved.<sup>14</sup> Some marriages become torment for one or both of the partners. These marriages, rather than blessing society, tend to produce criminals and

<sup>11</sup>Maher.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>In the case of marriage, as in the case of other areas of research, the statistics that social scientists gather reveal something about the general situation in a country or area but say nothing about a particular marriage. For example, if 60 percent of the couples interviewed in a particular study said that they were happier because they were married, the researchers would conclude that married people are more likely to be happy. However, that would not prove that a particular marriage was likely to be happy. In this illustration, 4 out of 10 couples would have said they would have been happier if they were *not* married.

result in poverty and misery. The fact that two people get married does not necessarily mean that they will stay married. In the US, close to half of all marriages end in divorce.<sup>15</sup> In addition, many marriages which are not broken by divorce are unhappy marriages. Not all married couples live “happily ever after,” as is suggested in fairy tales.

Those who are planning to get married must recognize that the blessings of being married do not come automatically. Rather, they are conditional, just as many of God’s blessings are conditional. For example, God blesses us with a bountiful world, but our survival in that world is conditional on our working to acquire the food we need to live. The blessings that God gives us in regard to salvation are conditional on our faith and obedience. Similarly, God has blessed mankind by providing the institution of marriage; but for people to receive and enjoy the blessings involved in marriage, they must meet certain conditions.

What are those conditions? The lessons that follow are intended to help answer that question. Nevertheless, one truth should be emphasized from the beginning: For a marriage to be successful—that is, for a couple to remain married *and* to be happily married—both the husband and the wife must strive toward that goal. Nothing worthwhile was ever achieved without effort. Neither will your marriage automatically become all that you want it to be. Remember: Your marriage will work if *you* will work!

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<sup>15</sup>The divorce rate in America has been widely reported to be about 50 percent, but an article in *The New York Times* said that the real divorce rate has never been higher than about 41 percent (in 2001) and has recently begun moving down. (Dan Hurley, “Divorce Rate: It’s Not as High as You Think,” *The New York Times* [19 April 2005]: F7.)

## *The Blessings of Marriage*

“An excellent wife is the crown of her husband” (Proverbs 12:4a).

“He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD” (Proverbs 18:22).

“House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD” (Proverbs 19:14).