

Marriage Partnership

Years ago I saw an old b&w movie titled “Marty” (1955) starring Ernest Borgnine, who plays 30-year-old butcher who is still living at home with his overbearing mother. He is lonely and has tried dating, but he’s a rather homely, stocky guy and has problems attracting girls. Marty’s mother persuades him to go to a dance, and there he meets a girl, Clara, who is much like him—rather homely and shy. But the two strike up a friendship, and Marty thinks that the relationship has potential. But when his friends and family meet Clara, they are not impressed, and they encourage Marty to drop her. Marty follows their advice and drops Clara, thinking that he can do better. But then his feelings of loneliness return, and he finally realizes that Clara’s homeliness and lack of sparkling personality doesn’t really matter to him. They get along well; Clara is a nice girl who makes him happy. She seems to like him. So Marty reaches out to Clara again, they reconnect, and, although the movie doesn’t end in their marriage, it suggests that the two of them live happily ever after together. It’s a sweet movie if you ever get a chance to see it.

Marty found a relationship that was mutually beneficial for both himself and someone else. The two characters together create something special that they could not experience apart. Marty and Clara began a partnership that, we imagine, resulted in great happiness and satisfaction.

Of course, we don’t base our relationships on Hollywood movies, even good ones. Our ultimate and highest authority for family life is the Word of God, and God says a lot about family relationships in his Word.

We know that one of the purposes for marriage is companionship. God said that it was not good for the man to be alone. He needed a partner suitable for him.

Today I want to talk about marriage partnership. I want unmarried people to adopt a biblical understanding of marriage partnership, and I want to encourage married people to conform their partnership to the biblical model.

Let’s consider a few things regarding marriage partnership.

I. Marriage is a partnership of equals.

Gal 3:28 *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is **neither male nor female**: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*

- A. Of course, Paul is speaking about our spiritual condition before the Lord. In our standing/position before God, it does not matter whether we are male or female. Gender, ethnicity, social status, financial condition have no bearing on our relationship with God.
- B. The Bible tells us that God created man and woman in his own image. Both men and women reflect the image of God equally and fully. And both fail to reflect that image equally. Men and women are equally capable of both spiritual devotion and sinful depravity. Men and women can be equally righteous and equally wicked. There is no difference between men and women regarding their standing before God.
- C. A marriage works best when the two partners share the same theological commitments and standards. I.e., a common set of goals and expectations reduces conflict. If husband and wife are both on the same page spiritually and theologically, it creates unity; both members of the team are pulling the same direction.
- D. The Bible also describes the opposite condition—two people being unequally yoked (2 Cor 6:14). In this case, one member of the team is a believer, while the other member is an unbeliever. They have opposite spiritual conditions; one is saved and the other lost. So they naturally are pulling in two different ways. The Bible commands us to avoid that situation; we must avoid being unequally yoked with unbelievers.
- E. In many cases of an unequal yoke, the unbeliever is willing to tolerate the believer. The unsaved partner has no commitment to Christ, but he/she is not hindering the other person from pursuing his/her spiritual goals. The two can live together with some measure of happiness. The Bible addresses this situation:

1 Cor 7:12-14 *If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.*

1Pet 3:1-2 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.

So even in a situation where a believer is married to an unbeliever and there is an unequal yoke and an unequal standing before God, the marriage is still valid and the potential exists for the unbeliever to be converted to Christ. The believing parent can still raise the children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

E.g., Timothy

But it's best to avoid the unequal yoke, and it's best to avoid a partnership with someone who is significantly different spiritually from you. Ideally, you want a marriage partner who is your spiritual equal, who wants to serve God like you do, who wants to participate like you do, who has the same standards and expectations as you do.

Obviously, no two people are perfectly aligned in all their commitments. There is always some adjustment that each partner must make. And you never know how it's really going to be until you start living with the other person. But it's best when the partners are well-suited to one another—when the two are spiritually equal and when both have the same desires, values, and expectations. The more you agree on these things, the better.

“Opposites attract” is a myth. “He has such interesting quirks and eccentricities.” Those differences become annoying after a while. Soon those differences create division. And don't count on changing your partner's odd ways. You can't change others.

And you want to confirm these issues before you get married. You girls don't want to marry a guy who seems like Prince Charming, and then find out to your shock and dismay after you get married that he's really more like a frog. And no matter how many times you kiss him, he doesn't turn into Prince Charming. You don't want to be stuck for life living with a frog.

Trans: God created a woman who was suitable for the man (Gen 2:18). Marriage works best when the couple is suitable to one another. Marriage works best when there is a partnership of equals. Don't be unequally yoked together.

II. Marriage is a partnership that recognizes gender distinctions (roles).

Gen 1:27 *So God created man in his [own] image, in the image of God created he him; **male and female** created he them.*

A. Spiritual equality before God does not remove gender roles. One of the major errors of our culture today is the idea that gender roles are somehow oppressive, unfair, or unequal. The culture wants to get rid of gender roles. They want to impose an unnatural sense of sameness on both spouses. They tell us that there is no difference between men and women; any woman should be able to do anything that a man can do.

Illus.: Classic movie Annie Get Your Gun—song “Anything You Can Do I Can Do Better”

B. All of us probably recognize that men are better suited for some tasks and women are better suited for others. Annie Oakley was so unique because she could shoot a gun better than most men. She was the exception to the rule.

C. The Bible clearly maintains and expects differences between the sexes. Gender distinctions are willed by God and grounded in nature.¹ The Bible maintains one set of responsibilities for men and a different set for women. There is some crossover where both men and women have the same roles, but there are significant distinctions as well.

D. The Bible teaches us to maintain these gender distinctions in two main areas: the home and the church. In the home and in the church, Christians are to recognize differences in what men do and what women do. These differences are not based on inherent value or superiority, but simply upon the roles God has given to men and women.

E. In the home and in the church, the role of the man is to provide leadership. We’re not talking about male headship in the church this morning, so we’ll just refer to it only in the home.

1. The man is to be the head of the home.

a) Paul calls the man “the head of the woman” (1 Cor 11:3).

b) The Bible teaches that the wife is supposed to submit to her husband and obey him (Eph 5:22).

¹ Herman Bavinck, *The Christian Family*, ed. Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian’s Library Press, 2012), 5.

- c) The Bible gives spiritual authority over the house to the husband/father (Eph 6) – as long as he is saved.
 2. The man is to provide for the home. If he's not willing to work, then he should not expect to eat (2 Thes 3:10). He's ultimately responsible to provide for the basic needs of his family. If he fails to do that, he is "worse than an infidel" (1 Tim 5:8).
 3. The man is to protect the family. He should be providing security and safety for his family. If his family is threatened, he should be willing to sacrifice himself to protect his family.
 4. Male headship does not give the man the right to be a tyrant or a dictator. Like Jesus, the man is the head but he's also a servant; he's a servant-leader. He must be the head of the house without being abusive and rigidly severe. He's a loving leader, not a bully.
- F. In the home, the woman has a distinct role.
1. She is to submit to the leadership of her husband. The Bible commands the wife to obey and respect her husband.
 2. She is to care for the children. If the couple have children, care for them usually falls mostly on the mother.
 3. She is to manage the house. The woman typically arranges for the family's food and the clothing needs. Some women manage the financial matters for the household; they do the banking and pay the bills.
 4. The woman's submission does not mean that she has no rights or that she should suffer abuse in silence. The wife's submission does not give the husband the right to be a bully or a tyrant.
- G. These are biblical roles, and life works best when we recognize them and follow them. Our culture has largely rejected these roles, but that should not hinder us from following them.
- H. In a good partnership, there is lots of flexibility in these roles. These are not air-tight, sealed compartments where the job falls on one or the other but not both. In a good partnership, both partners cooperate to get the job done.

E.g., men should not think of themselves as exempt from cooking, cleaning, and care for the children. Women should not think of themselves as exempt from putting gas in the car or raking leaves. There is plenty of overlap in these responsibilities. Families work out these responsibilities individually; we are not advocating a “cookie cutter,” uniform approach. Flexibility in these roles is a good thing. But we still affirm the distinctions in the roles of the husband and wife.

Trans: Christian marriage recognizes gender distinctions. The culture may be trying to remove all differences between men and women, but the Christian family should not give in to such pressure.

III. Marriage is a partnership of compromise.

Eph 5:21 *Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*

A. By “compromise,” I’m not implying anything sinful. We sometimes use the word “compromise” to describe involvement with sin or spiritual failure. But in the sense that I’m using it, I’m talking about the kind of mutual submission that loving partners make for the benefit of one another. I’m talking about adjusting to one another and deferring to one another. In any partnership, the partners usually have to adjust to one another.

B. In a dysfunctional partnership, one partner always gets his/her way while the other partner always has to give in. One receives the benefits, while the other pays the costs and does all the work.

Unfortunately, women often get into situations where they are the ones paying the costs and the man is the one reaping the benefits. Some men will take advantage of women who are willing to pay all the costs and do all the work. That is not the kind of partnership you want to be in. Avoid that kind of partnership.

C. You want to be in the kind of partnership where both partners benefit from the relationship most of the time, and where each partner is willing to compromise occasionally for the benefit of the other.

What kind of adjustments do you need to make to benefit your partner? Maybe you are making a big deal over something small. Maybe a slight compromise on your part would make your partner’s life a lot easier.

D. The motivation behind this kind of compromise is love. Love does what is best for the other person.

Eph 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

1. The Bible commands husbands to display Christ-like love for their wives. And the way that we show that love is to do what Jesus did—he gave himself for the church. Christ-like love calls for self-sacrifice. The husband at times has to give up his own desires so he can serve his wife. He leads by serving.
2. So in a loving partnership, each partner is willing to do what the other partner wants to do. Neither partner insists on getting his/her way all the time. But it's a two-way street. Neither partner demands that the other person always submits. Both partners submit to one another. Both partners want what is best for the other. That's called Christ-like love; it's 1 Cor 13 love.

Trans: Christian marriage calls for adjustment and compromise. Partners must defer to one another. If you can't do that, you are not ready to be married. If you are already married, you need to learn how to compromise/defer.

IV. Marriage is a partnership of mutual benefit (symbiosis).

Many studies have found that marriage is beneficial for the health and wellbeing of humans. People do better in many ways when they are married.

- ✓ Married people survive cancer better than single people.
- ✓ Married people have a lower death rate and live longer than single people.
- ✓ Married people have lower levels of depression, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, and cancer.

Quote: Marriage confers not just health and longevity, but wealth, life satisfaction, community engagement, and other social goods.²

- A. God Himself declared that it was not good for the man to be alone. So God made a "help meet" for Adam (Gen 2:18, 20). I.e., a helper corresponding/suitable for him. That term "help/helper" is not in any way degrading the woman. God is sometimes described as a helper using the same term, so it's not a demeaning term.
- B. Eve supplied what Adam lacked, and we assume that Adam supplied what Eve lacked.

² Mona Charen, "What Government Can't Do." 12 May 2016. <https://www.nationalreview.com>

- C. God made the human procreative/reproductive system to require both the male and the female. The complete human experience requires both male and female. You can't "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" with just one person or with one sex; you need a male and a female to fulfill that command.
- D. So the normal/natural process that God expects in most cases is that men and women get married. Young men and women ought to be seeking marriage. Once you are of marriageable age and status, it's not good to be alone. Don't put it off for too long.

App: I think that young people today are waiting too long to get married. It's probably a good idea to finish your education before getting married, but you don't have to wait until you are financially secure before pursuing marriage.

- E. The marriage relationship can be and should be symbiotic—i.e., the result is greater than just the two added together. The benefits for the two are greater than what each brings to the relationship individually. The results of the relationship are mutually beneficial.

The Bible says, "Two are better than one." A good marriage relationship provides benefits to both partners that goes beyond what each partner can provide individually.

Marriage is a partnership, and when the partnership is mutually beneficial, it's a wonderful experience. My advice for those who are of marriageable age and status is to find a partner with whom you can experience the joys of marriage.

Maybe you are a person something like Marty—not the most handsome, not the most exciting, not really the life of the party. Maybe you are something like Clara—not exactly a beauty queen, maybe rather shy, fairly plain. Marty and Clara can find each other and be happy. The two can form a partnership and enjoy life together. I highly recommend it.

For those who are already married, the enjoyment of marriage increases as each partner fulfills his/her obligations—the man does what he is supposed to do, and the woman does what she is supposed to do. The husband loves his wife, and the wife respects her husband. Both are willing to compromise for the benefit of the other. And both work for the benefit of the other. That's what makes Christian marriage a beneficial partnership.