



Does God Give Marriage Instructions?

“As the Scriptures say, ‘A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.’” (Ephesians 5:31, NLT)

Imagine the excitement of a wedding! With flowers in abundance and beautiful music in the background, the wedding party, family and friends all gather for the ceremony. The minister or priest leads the couple as they make a lifetime commitment to each other. Everyone celebrates with food and drink, and well-wishers give toasts to the couple and tell them to “Be happy!” That sounds wonderful, but have you ever thought of how difficult it is to take two, somewhat selfish people with differing expectations, different backgrounds, family history, beliefs, ideas, habits and temperaments and expect them to become one and live happily ever after? Is it possible? Only with God’s help! This is true whether there is a big wedding or a simple wedding with a few witnesses.

If marriage were a new game, you would first read the instructions. Yes, God gives detailed instructions. He wants a God-centered home for the couple and their children. However, many people jump into marriage without reading his instructions. In the Bible, God states the goal of marriage, the number of players, the length of the “game”, and describes exactly what each player should do. He warns of trouble – enemy attacks, penalties and challenges to the player’s commitment. What an adventure this “game” is! Warning: To win you must keep in constant touch with the “Game Creator” and follow his instructions!

The goal of marriage

What is the goal of marriage? God clearly states it in Genesis 2:24b (NIV): *“And they will become one flesh.”* What does that mean? Is he just speaking of a sexual union? In the Bible, the word *flesh* means the whole person. In a certain sense, the union makes one person of those who were two before. How can that happen? As God is a Trinity, so is man. He has a body, soul (mind, will and emotions) and spirit. To have a happy marriage, there must be oneness in all three.¹

Firstly, there must be oneness of body with body through sexual union. The Apostle Paul warns couples not to neglect this sexual expression of love. (Read 1 Corinthians 7:3-5) Did you know that the Christian church does not recognize a marriage as valid until sexual union takes place? In spite of lies you have heard from the enemy, sex is a sacred union between a man and woman, only created for marriage. God created sex with boundaries!

Secondly, there is oneness of soul with soul. This refers to the intellectual and emotional side of a person's nature. This does not mean you become exactly alike, losing your unique personality. However, it does mean that you show interest in the things your partner finds interesting, such as friends, sports, books and careers. You also share, help and encourage each other. Although there will be struggles, this can be a wonderful, challenging and growing time as you learn to unconditionally love and accept each other "as is", warts and all. Don't try to change your partner; it never works! Instead, pray and ask God to change both of you, beginning with you. God uses the hard times in marriage to change you to be more like his Son. (Romans 8:29) This is a life-long process. As you grow soul with soul, you will establish a wonderful relationship where you feel safe, accepted and loved. Do you know any marriages like that? Without this oneness of the soul, marriage can become a battleground!

Thirdly, there is oneness of spirit with spirit. This is the only way a marriage can begin to become what God intended. What does this mean? Primarily, it means that both of you are Christians. An unbeliever has a spirit dead to God, inherited from Adam. By faith in Jesus Christ, a believer has a live spirit and is a new person with the Holy Spirit living in his/her heart. Without this oneness of spirit with spirit, you can never share the things most precious to you. With it, your intimacy and oneness become a living picture and witness of the intimate relationship between Jesus Christ and his Church. (Ephesians 5:22-33) Think about it. How should this affect whom you date?

The roles in marriage

What instructions does God give so that the couple can operate and function as a team? You might say God makes the husband the pilot and the wife the copilot! "*For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of his body, the church; he gave his life to be her Savior.*" (Ephesians 5:23, NLT) The husband must love his wife with the same love Christ showed the church. Christ gave his life! He provides, protects, supports and cares for her. He must encourage her to become all that Christ Jesus wants her to become and treat her with understanding and respect as an equal partner in God's family. If he does not, God will not hear his prayers! (1 Peter 3:7-8)

Then God tells the wife, "*As the church submits to Christ, so you wives must submit to your husband in everything.*" (Ephesians 5:24, NLT) She submits to him, as she loves Christ and submits to Christ. This is not a demeaning, doormat position or blind obedience, nor does it mean the husband can control or abuse his wife. The word "submit" refers to a supporting role, a helpmate – like a foundation supporting a house. The wife loves and honors her husband in a way that will encourage, support and build him up. She must always respect him. (Ephesians 5:33b) A helpmate position does not inhibit or restrain good communication or advice. The wife is free to give her opinions, and the husband should seek and value her input and feelings. The trustworthier a godly husband is, the easier it is for the wife to submit to his leadership.

However, submission is not one-sided; immediately before these verses God says, “*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*” (Ephesians 5:21, NLT) There will be times when the husband should submit to his wife’s wishes. Think about this. If partners have trouble submitting to each other, don’t you think they would also have trouble submitting to Jesus?

Prayer for your marriage

Imagine your wedding day. Will you be prepared to follow God’s instructions for oneness in marriage and to function as a team? On your wedding day, will the toasts to “be happy” become a reality? Will your marriage illustrate the loving relationship between Jesus and his church? Will difficulties help you to become more and more like Christ? What choices will you make today that will prepare you to be the husband/wife God wants you to be? Begin praying now for your partner and marriage!

Attitude Check:

- In what way have you changed your attitude toward marriage?

Explore:

- Read “Husbands and Wives Have Distinct Roles in Marriage.” (Ephesians 5:21-33)
- Write in your journal the qualities that you want to have as a good marriage partner.

Talking with God:

- Father, give me the desire to make the choices that will please you. Prepare me to be the husband/wife you want me to be.

¹ *How to Live the Christian Life* by James Montgomery Boice, Moody Bible Institute, 1982, pp. 59-62