



# Marriage Matters

Examining the Biblical roots of civilization's most significant institution

## FOUR WEDDINGS, PART ONE

### Eden and Sinai

#### I. Introduction

- A. When the Supreme Court declared in June 2015 that same-sex marriage is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution, our nation suddenly woke to the reality that, after centuries on unanimity<sup>15</sup>, we are no longer able to define the most **foundational** of all human institutions. “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Ps. 11:3).
- B. How did this happen? Numerous cultural changes have been working together to undermine the traditional understanding of marriage:
1. The **sexual revolution** (1960s and 70s) separated sex from marriage.
  2. Widespread use of **contraception** separated sex from pregnancy.
  3. The legalization of **abortion** (1973) made pregnancy a private matter between a woman and fetus.
  4. The proliferation of **divorce**.
  5. **Cohabitation**: couples choosing to live together without marriage.
  6. The growing acceptance of **homosexuality**.<sup>16</sup>
  7. The growing confusion over **gender** identity: Bruce Jenner, bathroom laws, etc. How many letters are needed to say LGBTQQIAA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Allies)?
  8. The mixed signals given by the **church**.
- C. But does it really matter? Even among evangelicals, many wonder what all the hullabaloo is about. Why get so worked up? Why not just agree to disagree and move on? And yet this issue is different. It goes to the roots of how we understand **ourselves**, our **children**, our **communities**, our **nation**, and our **God!** Speaking of marriage, G. K. Chesterton famously warned that one should never tear down a fence until he learns why it was put there in the first place!<sup>17</sup>
- D. This study has a simple but ambitious purpose: to understand what **the Bible** says about marriage. We begin by examining four marriages highlighted in the Bible, noting especially how these weddings **define** the entire narrative of the history of salvation.

#### II. Eden: The Garden Variety of Marriage (Genesis 1:26–28; 2:18–25)

Just as it is hard to assemble a jigsaw puzzle without the picture on the box top, so it is hard to make sense of marriage with the original **prototype!** Genesis 1–2 tells us the

<sup>15</sup> My *American Heritage Dictionary* (1971) says simply that marriage is “the state of being husband and wife.”

<sup>16</sup> This is remarkable because until 1973 even the American Psychiatric Association continued to list homosexual practice in its official *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.

<sup>17</sup> “People do not know what they are doing; because they do not know what they are undoing.” From “The Drift from Domesticity,” *In Defense of Sanity: The Best Essays of G. K. Chesterton* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 173–82.

divine intention for the home. Note it well: according to the Bible, human history both **begins** and **ends** with a wedding!

A. Plato and Marriage

To better understand what a radical statement Genesis 1–2 is about human marriage, it is helpful to look at what is perhaps the most influential text in western culture on love: *The Symposium* by Plato<sup>18</sup>. Socrates and his friends gather for a dinner party where each guest is invited to give a speech in praise of love (*eros*). As the speakers begin to get drunk, their oratory eventually culminates in praising **homosexual** love as the highest form of love. The love between a man and a woman, when mentioned at all, “is spoken of as altogether inferior, a purely physical impulse whose sole object is the procreation of children” (from “Introduction,” 12).

The speech by Aristophanes describes the **origin** of humans and explains why they are the way they are. Originally, humans were of three kinds: male, female, and hermaphrodite. They were round in shape, with 4 legs, 4 arms, 2 faces, and 2 sets of sexual organs. When these creatures offended the gods, Zeus cut them in half for punishment. So today, we are all seeking our other, **lost half**. We want to be whole again. Those who are halves of an original hermaphrodite tend to be persons who are promiscuous (adulterers, prostitutes, etc.). Those who are from an original female seek other women (lesbians), and those from an original male seek other men (homosexuals). “When they grow to be men, they become lovers of boys...” (63).

*Love (eros) is simply the name for the desire and pursuit of the whole... The way to happiness for our race lies in fulfilling the behests of love (eros), and in each finding for himself the mate who properly belongs to him.... (64–65)*

Note: Though most today have little knowledge of Plato’s description of love, it is obvious that his teaching continues to have a huge influence on our culture:

1. Treating traditional marriage **lightly**—pragmatically (to produce children).
  2. Sexual **options** and gender **confusion**.
  3. Defining love as the satisfaction of **need**.
- B. Read Genesis 1:26–28; 2:18–25.
1. Man (mankind) is distinct from the **animals**: image of God, breath of life, dominion over nature, speech, free moral agent, stands erect, wears clothing (after Gen. 3), etc. Thus marriage is more than animal mating.
  2. The original marriage is **one man** and **one woman**; gender distinction is fundamental to understanding marriage. The model seems to rule out polygamy, homosexuality, bestiality, etc.
  3. The first commandment (“Be fruitful and multiply...”) is a command to be sexually intimate and **procreate**. Intimacy means fertility. Two become one; then, one becomes three.
  4. Why is it “not good” for the man to be alone (2:18)? Because alone, Adam cannot:
    - Obey the first commandment to **reproduce**.
    - Reflect the image of the **triune God** who made him.

---

<sup>18</sup> Plato, *The Symposium*, Translated by Walter Hamilton (London: Penguin Classics, 1951).

5. “Leave and cleave...” Leaving **parents** is necessary to make marriage work. Thus marriage trumps every other human relationship.
  6. Sin (Gen. 3) certainly **damaged** marriage, but it did not destroy the model.
- C. Marriage in Eden helps us to understand the basics about marriage.
1. Marriage is the only human institution in Eden. There is no **government** and not even a **church**. Thus, marriage is the most important of all human institutions!
  2. Marriage is defined as the **union** of one woman and one man. Two become one. It is a union of differences, just as is the Trinity.
  3. Marriage has a three-fold purpose:
    - a. Intimate **companionship**.
    - b. **Fertility**—children.
    - c. To reflect the **image of God**.

### III. Sinai: A Covenant of Love (Exodus 19–24)

Though Mount Sinai has negative associations for many (legalistic obligations, threatening deity, etc.), a closer look reveals what most people have missed entirely: **a wedding!** This was the moment when God and Israel entered into a **covenant** relationship of love. The prophets understood this reality and preached it often (Isa. 62:4–5; Jer. 2:2; 31:31–32; Hosea 1:2; etc.). To worship an idol was to be guilty of spiritual adultery.

- A. Read Exodus 19:1–8, 16–20; 20:1ff.; 24:3–11; 25:1–9; 32:1–6; 34:5–7; 40:34.

The Covenant Is Established (Exodus 19–24)			The Tabernacle Is Constructed (Exodus 25–40)		
Preparation (19)	Stipulations: The Law (20–23)	Ratification: Vows & Ceremonies (24)	The Plan Is Given (25–31)	The Golden Calf (32–34)	The Plan Is Carried Out (35–40)

1. Notice that Sinai is not in **Egypt**. The covenant comes *after* redemption. Keeping the law is the *result* of salvation, never the cause! We obey God’s law not in order to be saved but because we already are!
2. Just as creation began with a wedding, so does **redemption**. From among all the nations on the earth, God **chose** Israel, rescued her from bondage, and brought her “on eagles’ wings” to himself so that she could be his “treasured possession” (Ex. 19:4–6; John 15:16). This is a love story!
3. The heart of the covenant is expressed in solemn promises: God makes **vows** to Israel (Ex. 23:20–33; etc.) and Israel makes vows to God (19:8; 24:3, 7).
4. Other elements of the covenant-making ceremony at Sinai are carried over into traditional wedding ceremonies today: **trumpet** music (19:16, 19), a reception (24:9–11), **symbols** and signs (31:12–17), and fear and trembling (20:18–21).
5. The **law** defines what covenant love looks like (Ex. 20–23). The Bible does not hesitate to join together law and **love** (John 14:15; Rom. 13:10; etc.).
6. The Tabernacle is constructed (Ex. 25–31 and 35–40). Worship is **intimacy** with God; living with the Holy One (25:8; 40:34).
7. Adultery is grounds for **divorce** (Ex. 32–34).

- B. What the covenant at Sinai teaches us about marriage.
1. **Initiating** love. God pursued Israel when she was a slave in Egypt. From among all the nations of the earth, he chose his bride. Thus we see the origin of the knight in shining armor on a white horse pursuing his beloved. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. **Leadership** for men has been a challenge ever since the Fall.
  2. **Responding** love. Though Israel was chosen, she had a choice. She could refuse the advances of her lover. In worshiping the golden calf (Ex. 32), she did! Wives are to **submit** to their husbands as to the Lord. The Fall made this very challenging!
  3. **Romantic** love. The covenant at Sinai is not a contract between business partners, a treaty between nations, or even a social arrangement between families. It is a love story! Israel is God's "**treasured possession**." Song of Songs is a vivid illustration.
  4. The importance of **vows**. A covenant is composed of solemn promises (Eccl. 5:4–7) that are **exclusive** ("forsaking all others"), **comprehensive** ("for better, for worse") and **irrevocable** ("till death do us part"). If the vows are broken, then divorce becomes a real possibility (Ex. 32:7–10, 19, 30; Jer. 3:6–10).
  5. The **obligations** of love (law). Weddings have always included legal demands. So at Sinai, the covenant was the occasion for the giving of the law. These laws simply state what is expected in the relationship. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).
  6. A **ceremony** fitting the occasion. Making a covenant is a Big Deal! This is not a casual affair but one that demands all the solemn dignity we can give it. It is also a time of great joy. Thus it should include food, music, symbols, ceremony, awe, etc.

Note: It is remarkable that nearly all of these elements of covenant making are expressed in our understanding of traditional marriage in the West (the age of chivalry, Victorian love, the wedding ceremony in *The Book of Common Prayer*, etc.).

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do you account for the fact that our American culture no longer knows how to define marriage?
2. What struck you most about Plato's description of love and marriage?
3. How is marriage different from animal mating?
4. What does marriage have to do with the Trinity?
5. Before this lesson, had you ever understood the events at Mt. Sinai as a wedding?
6. Think of how weddings are practiced today. How are they similar to the covenant at Sinai? How are they different?
7. How do law and love go together?
8. Why did God wait until *after* the covenant was established to "move in" with Israel? Does this have anything to say today to couples who want to live together before they say their vows?

Next week, we will look at two other weddings in the Bible:

- *Cana: Glimpse of Glory* (John 2:1–11)
- *The Wedding of the Lamb: Happily, Ever After* (Revelation 19–22)

## **Projected Outline for Our Study** *(This may change)*

- |     |   |          |
|-----|---|----------|
| 1.  | <i>Four Weddings, Part One: Eden and Sinai</i>                        | Sept. 20 |
| 2.  | <i>Four Weddings, Part Two: Cana and the Wedding of the Lamb</i>      | Sept. 27 |
| 3.  | <i>When the Sizzle Fizzles: What Sin Does to Marriage</i> (Genesis 3) | Oct. 11  |
| 4.  | <i>The Classic Text</i> (Ephesians 5:22–33)                           | Oct. 18  |
| 5.  | <i>Is She the One?</i> (Genesis 24)                                   | Oct. 25  |
| 6.  | <i>When the Vow Breaks: Divorce</i>                                   | Nov. 1   |
| 7.  | <i>Exhibit A: Priscilla and Aquila</i>                                | Nov. 8   |
| 8.  | <i>The Naked Truth about Sex</i> (Leviticus 18)                       | Nov. 15  |
| 9.  | <i>Sodom: Things Fall Apart: Homosexuality</i>                        | Nov. 22  |
| 10. | <i>Agape and Eros</i>   | Nov. 29  |
| 11. | <i>Marriage and the Trinity</i>                                       | Dec. 6   |