

Thinking Cap #10 - The Question: Just When is a Couple Married?

I got a note from a friend on the net a couple of weeks back expressing concern that a couple had come forward to join his church and they were not married. He faced a dilemma. He did not want to turn them away from the very nurture and teaching they needed. Yet, if he allowed them to join, he would then have to proceed with "church discipline" against the couple. Leaving that problem aside, it did bring up another interesting question. Just when is a couple married? Is the fundamental purpose of marriage procreation? Is it merely the physical act that consummates marriage, or does the Bible indicate that there is more to it? Your thoughts, should you wish to jump in are due to me by midnight on Wednesday, April 5.

I heard from George Levesque (I guess with November looming, he'd better get a grasp on this concept), Martin Olson, Robert Sanders, Steve/Mary Sweatt, Ron Tottingham and Michael Piccirillo

•I would begin with the law of first mention. The first marriage was identified in Ge. 2:18-25. What does it tell us?

•It was blessed of God •God (the father of the bride) gave her away - is was consensual of the parent. •God instituted the "ordinance" of marriage. It was one of two that were instituted in the "age of innocence" - the other being the sabbath. The first was for the preservation of the world of mankind, the the later for the preservation of the church. •This suggests that God's ideal is for a man to be the husband of one wife and for the marriage to be permanent.

•Jesus affirmed the institution of marriage. (John 2:1-11, Mt. 19:4-5). He taught that marriage was the joining together of two people so they become "one flesh" and cleaving. Not only did God acknowledge the marriage; He also joined the couple.

•Marriage was to be between two people who were "Christians" (Ex. 34:10-17; Deut. 7:3-4; 2 Cor. 6:14)

•Was was not for "love" but for completeness and being "fruitfull." (Ge 1:28; Gen.24:67 - note how "love" followed marriage for Isaac and Rebekah). This carried with it the concept of commitment and consumation for the purpose of procreation. By Jewish custom the marriage was "consumated" through sexual union as the guests waited outside. Once that fact was announced, the wedding festivities continued, with guests dropping by for the wedding feast.

•The Old Testament indicated that witnesses were necessary for a marriage (Ruth 4:1- 11, Isa 8:1-3)

•In John 4:7-18, Jesus comes across a women who has been married 5 times but is living with a man now who is not her husband in the eyes of Jesus. Thus, the sexual act alone is not sufficient to constitute a marriage. ("The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly.")

•God had a "wife" in the Old Testament (the nation of Israel) and Jesus has a "bride" in the New Testament (the church). This relationship requires a covenant relationship and an "I do." (Ezek 16:8 "Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becomest mine.") It involves a lifetime commitment on the part of the two parties as seen from the word "cleave" [*kollao* - to glue, to stick, to fasten firmly together, to cement, to join oneself to]

•There are three institutions ordained of God to provide structure and order for mankind. In order or establishment, they are: the family, the government and the church. We are to be subject to each of these authority structures in our life. Children are to submit to parents. Wives submit to husbands. Husbands

submit to Christ. All submit to governmental authorities. All submit to spiritual authorities. (Ro. 13:1-4, Titus 3:1, Eph. 5:21-6:1, Heb. 13:7, 17).

•Put it all together and I would say that a marriage has three aspects to it for it to be complete:

- Covenant - the husband and wife make a lifetime commitment to each other,
- Certification - obedient to the laws of the land (do whatever your local government requires for the marriage to be legal),
- Consummation - acting within the realm of God's plan for mankind (Ge.1:28). Check out the definition of this word in a good dictionary to grasp its significance.