

# BIBLE STUDY: What is Marriage?

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## Introduction

What a good question! A quick Google search on marriage, a short session of channel-flipping or a poll of one's social circle will easily show you that it is a question with various answers, many of them contradictory to each other. As Christians, this is one of the most important questions we can ask, and it is imperative that we know how God answers this question as revealed in Scripture. With prayer and open hearts, let's take a look at God's definition of marriage and what that means for our lives.

## Dictionary Definition

First, let's take a quick look at how the dictionary answers the question of what is marriage. Webster's Dictionary defines marriage as:

- The state of being united to a person of the opposite sex as husband or wife in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law; the state of being united to a person of the same sex in a relationship like that of a traditional marriage.
- The mutual relation of married persons: wedlock.
- The institution whereby individuals are joined in a marriage.
- An act of marrying or the rite by which the married status is effected; especially: the wedding ceremony and attendant festivities or formalities.
- An intimate or close union.

## Biblical Definition

Now, let's take a look at what God says in Scripture regarding marriage. These passages are not the only ones that speak about marriage within Scripture, but they do show us the consistent definition that God reveals throughout His Word. (The Lutheran Study Bible has some excellent footnotes and further explanations of these passages regarding marriage and would be a good tool to use during this study.)

### Genesis 2:15-25

In this account of the creation of Eve, we see that God declared that it was not good for man to be alone. From the beginning, God designed for man and woman to become one. Together they were meant to be in a complementary, lifelong union that would be mutually beneficial for each person.

### Matthew 19:3-9

Here we see Christ uphold the standard of marriage that God set forth. Sin wreaks havoc in our relationships, but Christ does not desire the destruction of marriage, though He does allow for the dissolution of a marriage in the case of adultery. It is clear from this passage that Christ desires for marriage to be a lifelong union between a woman and a man as God designed.

### 1 Corinthians 7:1-5

In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul encourages marriage. He explains that it helps Christians resist sexual immorality as it fulfills a person's desires. It is also in this passage that God shows us again that in marriage husband and wife are no longer only separate individuals. Husband and wife belong to each other and have a responsibility and privilege to serve the other in love.

### Ephesians 5:22-33

This is a passage often misunderstood and misused. In this letter from Paul to the Ephesians, God shows us His desired order for marriage. God addresses both husbands and wives, telling them how to best love their partner. He instructs wives to be subordinate to their husbands in all things in the same way as the Church is subordinate to Christ. He also instructs husbands to love their wives in the same sacrificial way as Christ loved the Church and gave up His life for her. In this way, husbands and wives fulfill their vocations to each other.

### Hebrews 13:4

In this passage, the writer shows how important the sanctity of marriage should be and warns that God judges the "sexually immoral and adulterous." We see that Christians should set an example for society by upholding and honoring marriage and by keeping the marriage bed pure. This means chaste celibacy for single people and marital fidelity for those who are married. Activities such as homosexual sex, casual sex ("friends with benefits"), "shacking up," etc. all bring dishonor to marriage and defile the marriage bed.

### 1 Peter 3:1-7

Another passage that is often misunderstood is 1 Peter 3:1-7. Here God again shows us how a marriage should function. He emphasizes that wives should follow and trust their husband's judgment and leadership. He emphasizes that husbands should honor women, protecting and not abusing them; husbands should lead their wives according to God's will. God wants marriage to be a complementary partnership where both parties are fulfilled and benefitted.

### Application - Your Definition

As Christians, we reflect God's image through our words and actions. In our daily living, we strive to follow His will and bring glory to Him. The application of His Word to our lives is imperative for our faith.

- Considering the dictionary's definition and how we have seen society change the definition of marriage, what is different about God's definition of marriage?
- What does God's definition of marriage reveal about His will for our lives?
- What do you struggle with most when it comes to meeting God's design for marriage?
- Whether or not you are married, how can you uphold God's definition of marriage in your life?

### Conclusion

We have seen what God's definition of and desire for marriage is. It is truly a great gift and blessing for husband and wife to be one flesh! We also recognize that we are sinful and fall short of the God's standards for sexual purity and marriage. Scripture is also very clear that Christ became our sin so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). Baptized into Christ, we are dead to sin and alive to God. We are new creatures. We have a new orientation away from self to God and to each other, so that we can receive God's gift of marriage or singleness to His glory and to the blessing of others.