

Origins

Marriage: A Gift from Heaven

Lesson #9 for March 2, 2013

Scriptures: Genesis 2:18-25; Mark 10:7-9; Ephesians 5:21-25; Matthew 5:27-30.

1. This lesson will focus on relationships. We will specifically focus on the relationship we call marriage. When God wants to create one million angels, He creates one million angels. But, when He decided to have this world filled with human beings, He made just two. Why the difference? Human beings were “a new and distinct order of beings.” (*RH* Feb. 11, 1902; *1BC* 1081.3; *SD* 7.2) God intended for us to have children out of a loving marriage relationship. The process of giving birth to those children and caring for them and training them to be responsible adults is a very important lesson for us in our understanding of God’s challenges in dealing with us as His children.
2. A happy marriage and a loving home are an incredible blessing. Statistics show that less than 10% of the population in the United States have reached such a high ideal. Divorces have gone past the 50% level. Thus, more often, marriages lead to pain and anger rather than joy and peace. That was certainly not God’s original intention.

God celebrated the first marriage. Thus the institution has for its originator the Creator of the universe. ‘Marriage is honorable’ (Hebrews 13:4); it was one of the first gifts of God to man, and it is one of the two institutions that, after the Fall, Adam brought with him beyond the gates of Paradise. When the divine principles are recognized and obeyed in this relation, marriage is a blessing; it guards the purity and happiness of the race, it provides for man’s social needs, it elevates the physical, the intellectual, and the moral nature.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46.

3. When God created our world step-by-step, He pronounced each step good. At the end, He said it was all, “Very good.” But, after creating Adam, there was something that was “not good.” (Genesis 2:18) A careful look at Genesis 2:7, 18 makes it clear that every creature was made from the soil except Eve. Why that difference? When Adam recognized his great need because he was alone, God put him into a deep sleep, (Genesis 2:21) took a rib from his side, and formed Eve out of that rib.
4. We need to learn several important things from Genesis 2:18-25. The Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—work in perfect unity and harmony, and They have done so throughout eternity. God is love, and love can only be expressed in relationships. Did God ask Adam to name the animals so that he would recognize the need for a companion more deeply than he had before? When he woke up and saw Eve, Adam’s response indicates how excited he was about having a companion. Before she was created, he could speak to God and the angels, but he had no one like himself with whom to communicate.
5. It is interesting to note that while Adam apparently named all the animals—which presumably included the great apes—he did not find any creature that was “like himself.” This is in stark contrast to the notion among evolutionists that we are just a more sophisticated great ape. No great ape was suitable as a companion for Adam. And a great ape certainly would not be a suitable companion for one of us.
6. Why do you think God chose to create Eve from a rib of Adam? Did Adam need that rib? Certainly, God could have just spoken Eve into existence. He could have formed Eve out of the soil just as He did every other creature including Adam. But instead, He removed a

rib from Adam and made Eve out of it. (PP 46.2) What is the significance of that? Adam was expected to recognize Eve as a part of himself. They were not two individuals created separately that were somehow supposed to come together; they were indeed one. Were the angels jealous? Satan was! The fact that Eve was made from a rib taken out of Adam was significant when Adam later considered whether or not to join Eve in sin. God had provided for Adam in every possible way. Somehow, God could have provided for Adam if he had chosen to remain faithful. Instead, looking at Eve as part of himself, Adam could not bear the thought of being separated from her. Thus, our two first parents fell into sin together. Read Genesis 2:23-25. Since Adam was asleep when Eve was created, how did he know that she had been taken from him? Was there a scar left on his side? I am sure God is better than any plastic surgeon. God must have told Adam exactly how Eve was created. Adam did not think he needed any introduction. He immediately recognized that Eve was to be his mate and his equal. They were both naked, but they felt completely comfortable with each other. And the entire universe was watching.

7. But, this ideal marriage did not last. When sin entered our world, everything that God intended for us was spoiled in one way or another. Careful students of the Bible will recognize that the two institutions which we still have as blessings from God extending from the Garden of Eden are the seventh-day Sabbath and marriage. What a wonderful thing it would be if all—or at least all Christians—could have marriages as God originally intended. Wouldn't the world flock to our doors to find our secret?
8. By contrast, author William Faulkner once called marriage a "failure" and wrote that, "The only way to get any peace out of it is...to keep the first one [wife] and stay as far away from her as much as you can, with the hope of someday outliving her." What does this say to you about the current state of marriage?
9. In Jesus' day, He repeated the instructions given by God in Genesis through Moses. (Mark 10:5-12; compare Genesis 2:22-25) Divorce was not acceptable in Moses' day. Why do you think it specifically mentions that the husband should leave his father and mother, but it says nothing about the wife leaving hers? Is it because in the cultural norms of Jesus' day it was expected that the wife would leave her home and become a part of the husband's family? A marriage needs to be between one man and one woman, and they need to learn how to manage their affairs together. They do not need the helpful or harmful influence of in-laws or parents. Leaving one's parents would certainly suggest that the new couple should be financially independent and be expected to make their own mutual marriage decisions.
10. *Cleaving* suggests that husband and wife should talk together, develop a very close communication, and thus, establish a growing love relationship. The new couple needs to develop a unity. They need to work on cooperating together to build a relationship like the relationships in heaven. And, finally, they need to wait to enter into the marriage relationship until they are prepared to make a lifetime commitment.
11. Finally, in the original words of Genesis, young men are told to become one flesh with their wives in the marriage relationship. Becoming one flesh suggests that the culmination of this relationship should be a sexual union which is pure. In the polytheistic pagan societies surrounding Palestine even in Jesus' day, sexual promiscuity was rampant. Do you think that had anything to do with Jesus' repetition of the instructions from Genesis?
12. Paul was the apostle who talked the most about marriage. Ephesians 5:21-25 and Colossians 3:18, 19 are perhaps the clearest verses in which a good marriage is described.

Why is it that so often we start reading from verse 22 instead of reading verse 21? What does it really mean to submit yourselves to one another? However, it is interesting to notice that the instructions given to husbands are somewhat different from the instructions given to wives. Why do you think that is? What would it mean for husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church? Would that be true self-sacrificing love? And what does it mean for wives to submit themselves completely to their husbands? Unfortunately, if we are to look at the way the church submits itself to Christ in our day, it is not such a good example! Would you say the standard for men is higher? Or, is the standard for women higher?

13. Why is it so hard for human beings to develop the kind of ideal marriage that God represents in Scripture? Is it because of our native selfishness?
14. Read Matthew 5:27-30. These verses should scare everyone. In our society so-called sex appeal is used to sell almost everything. Whether it is a laundry soap or a new car, sexually attractive women or men are used to catch our attention. What do you think Jesus would say about that advertising trend? In this context, why did He speak so strongly about cutting out our eyes and cutting off our hands? Does that seem extreme? Of course, we know that it is not the eye that is at fault, and it is not the hand that is at fault.

If all who profess to obey the law of God were free from iniquity, my soul would be delivered; but they are not. Even some who profess to keep all the commandments of God are guilty of the sin of adultery. What can I say to arouse their benumbed sensibilities? Moral principle, strictly carried out, becomes the only safeguard of the soul.—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, pp. 621,622.

15. As sinful human beings, we must struggle between that very high moral standard on the one hand and the way Jesus dealt with the woman caught in adultery on the other. (John 8:1-11; compare Luke 8:1-3) How can we fit these two extremes together? Is it possible for us—like God—to hate the sin but love the sinner? How do we accomplish that?
16. Throughout the Bible, marriage is used to describe the relationship between God and His covenant people. Unfortunately, that relationship was usually in a bad condition. Is God trying to get us to learn to live with someone who thinks differently than we do? We will certainly have to do that in heaven! Read Exodus 34:15,16 and Ezekiel 16; 23.
17. In Moses' day, sexual intimacy and the reproductive capacity were worshiped almost as if they were magic. The fertility cult religions grew out of those ideas. God recognized what an incredibly evil influence those religions were going to have on His people when they got mixed up in them. The truth of that prophecy in Exodus 34 was seen before the children of Israel got out of the desert! (See Numbers 25) And 24,000 people died.
18. Read Ephesians 5:28-32 and Revelation 19:5-9. Surely, these texts suggest to us something of the ideal marriage. How does Christ treat His true people? Shouldn't the husband treat a faithful wife that way?
19. What do we as Seventh-day Adventist Christians need to do to avoid the immoral mess which is engulfing our world? How can we make choices and live lives that demonstrate to the world the power of a true Christian life?
20. Once again, we should note the stark contrast between the ideals suggested by the creation story and the very different morality implied by evolution. There is nothing in the evolutionary process to suggest that we should avoid sexual immorality. In fact, animals and birds have a wide variety of "mating systems." Some types of fish even change sex when necessary. Many animals, birds, and fish are polygamists. Others are very

promiscuous. Is it any wonder that people who believe we have descended from these creatures feel comfortable in moving around between partners! Evolution gives us no basis for sexual morality. Can you find any basis in Darwinian evolution for practicing moral sexuality?

In both the Old and the New Testament, the marriage relation is employed to represent the tender and sacred union that exists between Christ and His people. To the mind of Jesus the gladness of the wedding festivities pointed forward to the rejoicing of that day when He shall bring home His bride to the Father's house, and the redeemed with the Redeemer shall sit down to the marriage supper of the Lamb.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 151.

21. Can you think of any good examples from the Bible of true, loving marriage relationships? We have talked a lot about Adam and Eve, but what about Abraham and Sarah and Boaz and Ruth?
22. As local Adventist congregations, should we seek out ways to strengthen marriage ties and raise the standard of morality among our members as an example to the world around us?
23. Have we developed a clear understanding of God's original design for marriage? If human marriage is supposed to be carried out in a pattern following the example of Christ's love and care for the church, what can we learn from Philippians 2:5-9?
24. Before sin entered our world, Adam and Eve were perfectly happy to live together as equals. After sin entered, a slightly different standard was set up. As you now understand them, what is implied by those new standards? No doubt, each marriage develops a little differently from every other marriage. None of us is exactly like any other person. But, there are certain principles in Scripture as to how the marriage relationship is supposed to grow.
25. God created us in His image, male and female. (Genesis 1:27,28) This means that the male partner—usually exemplifying more strength, decisiveness, and assertiveness—is to learn from his wife—who exemplifies more of the caring, softness, concern, and love that are more characteristic of the female side—and she is to learn from him. Each partner is to learn from the other until together they grow to be more like God.
26. Read Genesis 3:16. What did God mean when He told Eve, "You will still have desire for your husband, yet you will be subject to him."

Had the principles enjoined in the law of God been cherished by the fallen race, this sentence, though growing out of the results of sin, would have proved a blessing to them; but man's abuse of the supremacy thus given him has too often rendered the lot of woman very bitter, and made her life a burden.—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 115.

27. Husbands, do you love your wife with self-emptying, self-sacrificial love? Have you learned to love her as Christ loved the church? Wives, have you learned how to relate to your husband in a submissive but loving way to soften and nurture his love for you?
28. Are both husbands and wives following this incredibly important divine direction so that we can enjoy the kind of marriages God designed we should experience?

© 2013, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution is encouraged. It is our goal to see them spread as widely and freely as possible. If you would like to use them for your class or even make copies of portions of them, feel free to do so. We always enjoy hearing about how you might be using the materials, and we might even want to share good ideas with others. So, let us know. Info@theox.org

Last Modified: January 8, 2013

Z:\My Documents\WP\SSTG-Hart\Origins\SS-9-Origins-2013_03_02-Fin+.wpd