

**Note:** Verse 9 would seem to indicate that Scripture permits a new marriage after a divorce on biblically permitted grounds. But verse 8 equally clearly shows that divorce is never *required* - only *permitted* under God's law.

3. Consider what Jesus has to say about divorce (verses 4-9) and singleness (verses 10-12) in the light of what you read in 1 Corinthians 7. Write down a summary of your findings on marriage, singleness and divorce.
4. Divorce is always a tragedy - even though it may seem to offer the best solution in a broken relationship. Think about how Jesus' teaching might help people today to avoid the traumas of divorce. Consider how the gospel of forgiveness and healing, of reconciliation and peace might bring comfort to those who are suffering the effects of marriage break-up.

Think about Jesus' attitude to the children in verses 13-15. He is still the same today. As you pray, specifically ask the Lord's blessing on any children in your family - or children you know.

### Weekend

1. Follow up your interest in marriage and the family by looking up the relevant articles in the **New** or **Illustrated Bible Dictionary** (IVP). These will set your thinking in the wider context of Bible times.
2. Alternatively, you may like to begin reading one of the following books that may help you understand marriage and family better, from a biblical perspective.

*Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home & Work* by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones  
(Banner of Truth)

*Parents in Pain* by John White (IVP)

### Notes



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### Meeting With God Bible Reading Notes

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### Week 22: Marriage & the family (An issue study)

To walk by faith is seldom easy. Some things in the Bible are hard to understand. Some of Scripture's teaching may appear to cut across accepted thinking in our society. But for most Christians, the crisis of faith does not arise through these problems, but through knowing what Scripture clearly says and not wanting to do it! Where the Bible says something we do not like, we are not at liberty to disregard it or explain it away. It stands as God's own Word.

According to the Bible, marriage and family life are part of God's original purpose for mankind. The subjects come up in the earliest chapters of Genesis, and out of these chapters spring much of the Bible's teaching about marriage and the family. The Lord Jesus as well as the New Testament writers refer to them to give teaching to Christians on marriage and the family. So let's start there at the very beginning ... (By the way, Genesis means 'beginnings'.)

### Day 1. In the beginning

#### **Genesis 1:26 - 2:25**

Genesis 2 elaborates on the summary account of man's creation given in the opening chapter. Together, these chapters show that God's plan for marriage and family life is integral to the way he made man.

1. What does Genesis 1:27-28 tell you concerning God's intentions in making man male and female?
2. From Genesis 2:18-25 list as many things as you can see that make marriage either unique or good as a relationship.
3. Genesis 2:24 talks about **leaving** father and mother, **uniting** to a married partner, and becoming **one flesh** (symbolized in sexual union but meaning that two formerly distinct people should now be regarded as a single unit).

How important is each of these elements in forming a successful marriage? Why might failure in any one of them cause marriage difficulties?

4. Genesis 1:28 gives God's command to 'be fruitful and increase in number' (NIV). Families, as well as marriage, are part of God's idea. How is this brought out in Ephesians 3:14-15 (GNB) and Psalm 68:5-6?

Thank God for what you know of family life. Pray for your own parents and for any other families where you have shared the joy of God-centred family life. Pray about your own relationships and needs for companionship.

## Day 2. As Christ loved the church

### **Ephesians 5:21-23**

1. What does this passage tell you about: (a) the love of Christ for the church; (b) the church's relationship to Christ?
2. Look at verses 21-28. In what ways should Christ's relationship with the church help you to understand: (a) a husband's 'love' for his wife; (b) a wife's 'submission' to her husband?
3. Christ's relationship with the church is pictured not only as 'husband and wife' but as 'head and body' (verse 23). How is this picture worked out in verses 28-30?

Verse 31 refers back to Genesis and reminds us that in marriage there is 'one flesh' - the two become one. This is indeed a mystery - but nevertheless a truth that we would not have known unless God had revealed it. A husband may not neglect his wife any more than he may neglect his own body.

4. Are you subject to Christ in everything? Are you willing for Christ's sake to be subject to other Christians? (See verse 21.)

Spend time thanking the Lord for his love to you as his bride and as his body. Ask him to assure you of his love and provision for you today. Pray that his love for you will be reflected in your relationships, which do not come right automatically, and especially with your partner if or when you are married.

## Day 3. Parent and Child

### **Ephesians 6:1-4**

1. What reasons does the apostle Paul give for a child to obey his parents?
2. Is the command to obey parents an absolute command, or is it qualified in any way? (Look up Colossians 3:10-21 before you write your answer. Acts 4:19 also may give you a valuable sidelight on the thought of obeying 'in the Lord', pleasing him.)

**Consider:** Look back to Ephesians 5:31. The right relationship of obedience of child to parent necessarily changes when the child marries. A person then has an allegiance firstly to the new marriage partner. Although obedience may not then be required, the commandment to 'honour your mother and father' (Exodus 20:12 quoted in Ephesians 6:2 and 3) is not rescinded - but it has often been shirked. (See Jesus' reaction in Mark 7:9-13.)

3. According to Ephesians 5, a wife should be safeguarded from exploitation by her husband when she submits to him because of the husband's duty to love his wife. From what you have read today, how should a child be protected from parental exploitation?

What might honouring your father and mother mean in practice? (You may like to write down your conclusions in your notebook.) Pray in the light of what this means for you.

## Day 4. 'I do - or do I?'

### **1 Corinthians 7**

In New Testament times, Corinth was a byword for sexual immorality - conjuring up similar ideas to London's Soho. Some of this immorality had found its way into the church (see chapter 5). In reaction to sexual abuse, the church was in danger of being affected by teaching that all sexual activity was unspiritual, and that it would certainly defile a Christian to remain related to an unsaved partner. The positive teaching of 1 Corinthians 7 clearly contradicts these errors.

1. How is the principle that husband and wife are one flesh reflected in verses 1-7?
2. Marriage is clearly the God-appointed outlet for sexual passion. Is it ever right to have sexual intercourse without marriage? Is it ever right to have marriage without sexual intercourse? Can you demonstrate your conclusions from this chapter?

**Notes:** Verse 10 shows that it is God's intention for marriage to be permanent. This principle of permanence continues to apply when one of the partners becomes a Christian.

Verse 14. 'Sanctified' does not mean 'saved'. It does mean that rather than being unclean in God's eyes and so defiling to a Christian, he or she is in a special sense consecrated through his or her relationship with one of God's children.

3. What limit does verse 39 place on a Christian's freedom to marry?
4. Although marriage and family life are obviously God's provision, can you see any good reasons from 1 Corinthians 7 why singleness should be considered as a serious option for a Christian? Write down what you find. Alongside your findings, write what the chapter says in favour of marriage.

Ask God to help you to serve him to your full potential, whether married or single. Commit yourself to allowing no change in your marital status unless that change will result in God's glory through your increased liberty to serve him, in line with what you have read today.

## Day 5. Divorce

### **Matthew 19:1-15**

In Jesus' day, as today, there was much debate among religious people about circumstances in which divorce may be right. Jesus' teaching is truly radical. Not only is it revolutionary in contrast to much current thought, it takes us back to the roots of the issues.

1. How does Jesus use the teaching of Genesis 2:24 to answer the question about divorce?
2. If the one-flesh relationship which God creates in marriage is essentially permanent, are there any circumstances in which divorce might be an option for a disciple of Jesus?