

Marriage in Scripture

I interpret what the Scriptures say about marriage and many other things with great care to understand context. Most of what the Bible says about marriage is not about love or respect or any of the other beautiful ideals we have of marriage today. Adam and Eve were not married. While I am sure that many of the men and women we read of in the Bible - Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Leah and Rachel, Moses and Zipporah, Mary and Joseph, Peter and his wife and many more - deeply loved and had great affection for each other, the principles underlying marriage in the Bible are mostly about property, with the exception of the poetry of the Song of Solomon.

The Bible was written in a time when marriage was a way to transfer property (a daughter) from one family to another in order to bring two families together. Many other sexual relationships exist in the First Testament that are not condemned by YHWH, including polygamy and the use of concubines.

Aside from reluctantly performing his first miracle at the Wedding of Cana, Jesus speaks of marriage only when talking about divorce, which says to me that Jesus saw marriage not as an end in itself, but a way, imperfect as it is, for two people to share a life together.

Paul, whose words to the Ephesians in chapter 5 drive most married couples crazy, might have come closest in all the Scriptures to the ideal to which we hold marriage today. What I appreciate about the portrayal of marriage in the Gospels and the Epistles is its rootedness in the flaws of humanity - recognizing that two sinful people are coming together to try to bring out the best in one another.

Two halves make a whole?

I grew up being told that marriage is a way to make one whole, that as I grew, another person was being prepared for me, that we would meet at the time and place God ordained, fall in love, get married, and then I would be complete. Of course, I was also told that would be a man.

Imagine my surprise when, in a university Christian fellowship, I asked the speaker of the evening who was speaking about marriage where the Bible says someone is being prepared for me, that this was a promise of God. He couldn't find it. Neither could the rest of us. That's when I started a prayerful journey asking God the question, "Can I be whole without being married?" I enjoyed 7 years of being single, not dating anyone, until I met a man, now my husband, at a wedding. I love married life, and I also loved being single, thanks to the time I spent in prayer and study seeing myself as God does, a whole person who is sufficient on her own.

I share this because gender difference in marriage has centered mainly on the "physical fitting" of male and female bodies, and that each is incomplete until we find our "fit". This is a terrible understanding of marriage and God's hopes of dreams for each of us, reducing us all to our body parts. When I read Scripture, I hear from a God who loves all of humanity, and each person has been created with a purpose. I see no complete reading of Scripture that says gender difference is an essential part of the commitment God has called us to make in marriage.

Marriage and sacrament

At the heart of what makes a marriage holy and good is the love that exists between two people, committed to one another. I was taught and believed for a time that two men or two women could not possibly love one another the way a man and woman can, that what same sex couples experienced was "merely lust" and not holy.

That didn't last very long once some very compassionate and open minded gay men women invited me to be their friend. I could no longer reduce what I saw in these couples as merely lust. In fact, I learned more about marriage through them than through my straight friends who were all getting married. Here were people who loved one another, committing to one another, not because the world told them this was the normal way, but because they truly loved one another so much that they gave their lives to each other.

I am not the first to say this, but my understanding of sacrament is not based on status, but on substance. Whatever status we give to lesbian, gay or transgendered people, the substance of the relationships I have witnessed displays everything the Scriptures tell me love looks like. The sacrament of marriage recognizes the substance of the love between two people. We can no longer deny that the love that exists in same gender relationships is as capable of symbolizing God's love for the church as is gender relationships.

Thank you for your work and consideration. May you know the companionship of the Holy Spirit as you move through this discernment.

Dawn Leger

Diocese of Toronto

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