



"Marriage isn't an amusement park that you exit as soon as the fun comes to a stop. It's a relationship you believe in enough to stick around until the run returns."

—Martha Bolton

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Marriage—A God-Plane Relationship (Part Six)

[Moses](#) writes in [Genesis 2:24](#), "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." As mentioned in the previous essay, this is the "leave and cleave" verse regarding godly marriage. Notice that Moses begins the verse with "therefore," which signals a concluding statement. In other words, a man leaves his parents and cleaves to his new wife "because she was taken out of Man" (verse 23). The marriage union, then, works to restore the unity—the oneness—of humanity; the man is incomplete without the woman, and the woman, without the man. Together, they are whole.

"Cleave" is a word that we do not use very often. It is a strange word, as it has come down to us through the centuries with two diametrically opposite meanings! These meanings descended from two similarly sounding Old English (Anglo Saxon) words, *cleofan* and *cleofian*, the former meaning "to cut asunder, split," and the latter meaning "to stick fast, adhere." Obviously, the meaning that is correct in this passage is "to stick fast, adhere," as the Hebrew word under it, *dabaq*, means "cling, adhere to." Modern translations render this Hebrew word as "be joined to," "cling to," "hold fast to," "unite

with," "bond with," even "stick with." In every case, it suggests that the couple are "stuck like glue" to each other.

In our house, there is a table in our living room where our children do their homeschool work, and around it are some Windsor chairs. A few years ago, my son, Jarod, had a bad habit of rocking back on one of these chairs, and he rocked on it so much that the back of the chair broke completely off, creating a stool. Not wanting to throw the chair away, I decided to repair it. While inspecting the break, I was interested to see that the chair broke above the glued joint. The glued joint remained solidly connected to the seat of the chair. It stuck, adhered, or clung to the seat of the chair, while the rest of the back broke off.

This simple illustration helps us to see what [God](#) means in [Genesis 2:24](#). When a man and his wife are joined together—when they cleave to one another—the joint should be stronger than anything else. The joint between a married couple is to be so strong that, if trouble visits the marriage, the union will survive. If a break comes, one of the spouses should "break" but not the joint, that is, one or the other should submit rather than break the bond. That is God's overall intention for the marriage union.

This is the first indication in the Bible that God intends marriage to be one man and one woman for life. Notice the apostle Paul's elucidation of this point in [Romans 7:1-3](#):

Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.

The law that Paul refers to here is not explicitly stated in the [Old Testament](#); no verse in the Old Testament says a man and wife shall be married "until death do they part." In fact, those words are nowhere in the Bible. Neither is the phrase "as long as you both shall live," used in many wedding

ceremonies, although it is implied here in Romans 7. Nevertheless, the principle is unquestionably in both testaments, showing the continuity throughout God's Word.

Paul makes God's instruction regarding the marriage union very clear. Marriage is for life, except for a limited number of circumstances that are explained by both Christ in Matthew 19 (and related places in the other gospels) and Paul in I Corinthians 7. God says that He hates divorce in [Malachi 2:16](#), and He therefore provides only a bare minimum of "outs" from the marriage covenant.

The "marriage is for life" principle is definitely in the Bible. In [I Corinthians 7:10](#), Paul restates the church's teaching unequivocally: "Now to the married I command, *yet* not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband." With all the authority of an apostle of [Jesus Christ](#), Paul affirms God's desire for a lifelong union, this time positing it in the negative. It should be added that, despite his commanding the wife not to depart from her husband, "what is good for the goose is good for the gander," as the saying goes.

[I Corinthians 7:39](#) again repeats the apostle's doctrinal statement from Romans 7, adding an interesting caveat: "A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." The caveat concerns a person's conversion status. If a woman's husband dies while she is a member of the church, she is free to remarry, but "only in the Lord." In other words, she can marry only another converted member of the church, and without doubt, that is the best thing for her to do if she wishes to remarry.

Jesus comments on [Genesis 1:27](#) and 2:24 in [Mark 10:6-9](#):

But from the beginning of the creation, God "made them male and female." "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.

Clearly, the Bible consistently emphasizes lifelong marriage—from the Book's opening salvoes in Genesis to Malachi, throughout the Gospels, in

the epistles of the apostles, and even in the final chapters of Revelation. On the other hand, human beings tend to try to find loopholes for splitting up. However, the Bible is not a book that provides many legal loopholes. In fact, it contains so few regulations concerning divorce that it takes a fair bit of scholarship to figure out exactly what Jesus and Paul, especially, mean when they give the few reasons for divorce. It is not simple but a matter that must be deeply considered.

Our God is a very positive God. Throughout His Book, He emphasizes His desire—His intent—for a man and a woman to remain married for life. As we see from Jesus' statement regarding marriage, the first two chapters of Genesis provide the core principles regarding marriage. Other biblical scriptures about marriage are based on what we read about the first human couple in Genesis 1-3. In the end, it comes down to one concept: that a man and his wife are to be one flesh joined together by God. Jesus sums it up by saying that, since "they are no longer two, but one flesh," they should not be separated.

Next time, we will look more closely into the concept of "one flesh."

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

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by David F. Maas

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