

Do not look on any of these comments as the final story. Marriage and love are both rather fluid. Therefore at different times the characteristics may change somewhat even though the basic definitions and foundation would remain the same. Keep in mind these are 'tentative' thoughts.

Some Tentative Thoughts on the Mystery of Marriage and Love

- Because God created us in His image and likeness we must begin with Him.

God is a Person

He has all the characteristics of person-hood: He is self-conscious and self-determinative. He thinks, feels, chooses, has plans, expresses love, has character, and enters into social relationships, etc.

God is an Infinite Person

By 'infinite' it means that God is without any limitation in any area of His person-hood and work. For instance, regarding time - He is eternal, regarding power - he is omnipotent, etc. Therefore it is important to remember that regarding love, wisdom, etc., there is no limitation.

God is an Infinite Person Who is basically (in essence) Spirit

By describing God as 'Spirit' I'm not referring to the third person of the Trinity, but the essence of each member of the Trinity God, is not matter but pure - fully - Spirit. And as such He is the fullness of all goodness, holiness, etc. and what we would call 'value.' He is not, in essence, primarily intellect, emotions, volition, or a social Person (One Who sustains personal relationships).

God has established certain Divine Institutions.

These institutions are: the Church, the Nation, and Marriage. Because he designs marriage - it is designed to work - to succeed. However, there are also a few general principles or truths that must be followed. This does not mean the truths are set in concrete. They are 'general' rules of the game and somewhat flexible. Only a few are rather strict - as we would find in the Ten Commandments. However, these truths about our personal relationships in marriage cannot be violated to the degree they are totally neglected. When He tells us marriage will succeed if we love and care for one another - it doesn't mean we can hate one another, work against one another and still have a happy marriage.

Because He designed marriage He is deeply concerned about those who enter into such a relationship (as He is for all of us). Therefore He wants to be involved within the inner workings of those who marry, to help them experience His love and to love one another, to give them wisdom so they can understand one another and do what is right.

God created us as persons.

To be a person means more than possessing the ability to be self-conscious and self-determinative. As a person we also have many rights. We have the right, given to us by God, to be heard when we speak, to have emotions, to express and enjoy our emotions, to think, to learn, to have needs, to express our needs, to have our needs met, to have our own opinions. We have the right to love, to be loved and enjoy love. We have the right to be treated with respect, to develop our potential, to work, to assume responsibility, to enjoy life, to have covenantal relationships with God as well as social and covenantal relationships with people, to marry, to have and raise our children.

God created us as spirit persons.

“Spirit” is the kind of person we are. It is our essence. We are not basically body, mind, emotions, will or a social creature. As spirit (or spiritual) our greatest abilities relate to what it means to be in the image of God. He created us to be able to hear Him and communicate with Him. He created us to receive His love and love Him in return. He created us to enter into covenantal relationships with Him. He created us to fellowship with Him and serve Him. He created us with Himself at the center of our person and with all of our life to revolve around Him. He created us to glorify Him, develop the potential of the universe, and enjoy Him forever. He created us for Himself.

We are now fallen - spirit persons.

While we still possess the image of God, we have lost many of the abilities God originally gave us. However, this does not mean we are at zero spiritually. We are still spirit in essence, even though instead of loving God we may deny He exists, dislike Him, and even hate Him.

Because of the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus - when we believed upon Him as Lord and Savior - many of our original abilities and rights were restored to us. However, at the present time our restoration is not complete in practice. We still possess a fallen sinful nature that expresses itself in sin - particularly in self-centeredness.

Because we possess this nature God has graciously given us certain instructions in His Word to protect us from ourselves, from the fallen world system, from sin and from the enemy (Satan). These instructions are also given to us to enable us make a success of our relationship with Him and with others (particularly speaking now of marriage).

Probably the most important instruction He has given to us is that we are to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. In regard to marriage we are told to love one another. These two are closely related. We cannot succeed in this divine institution without Him and we cannot love one another, as we should - without His practical involvement on a daily basis.

Our relationship with God and one another in true marriage is called spirit-bonding.

The restoration God in His love and grace gave us, through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ is - a bonding of our finite spirit with Him and His infinite spirit. This does not mean we'll eventually become God. The infinite-finite relationship will always be true. We will never become deity.

When a man and a woman genuinely fall in love - they are bonded together in that love relationship - particularly in spirit - because that is the basic characteristic of our essence. They become, as we are told, "*one flesh*." The word "flesh" referring to the totality of the person as in John 1:14. The bonding is the result of the work of God in the lives of these two people and that is why divorce is a serious matter.

Love has some discernable characteristics.

To love a person is first of all, to recognize them as a spirit-person. By 'recognize' I mean to give them the rights that belong to them as created in the image of God. (Review the second paragraph on page two) No one wants to be treated as less than a person - a 'thing' - to be 'used.' When we fail to treat our spouse in that way we are introducing an element of destruction into our marriage and forfeiting the help God has for us.

To love a person is secondly, to give that person rightful place in our life. A man, if married, has only one person in the world who is his wife. And a woman has only one man in the world who is her husband. The marriage relationship must therefore be carefully guarded. It takes honesty involving hard choices. And most of all it takes daily dependence on God for wisdom, heart-searching and the willingness to see marriage as it was designed by God.

To love a person is thirdly, to seek the good of that person, sacrificially. To have such a relationship with one's spouse takes planning, and discussions together about the future. It also involves a daily goal captured in the words: "How can I help my spouse enjoy this day?" As in all of these characteristics our own selfish interest must be laid aside. It means 'being there' for your spouse and may take the form of listening, doing the dishes, taking care of the kids, investigating further schooling, reading the Bible and praying together, and finding out what their needs are in a regular pattern etc.

To love a person is fourthly, to distinguish between the person and their actions. We must love the person even though we may not appreciate or even approve of what they do. That is how God loves each of us. It is the person that counts.

The *Golden Rule* pattern of life.

These four suggestions, as you can see, are developed out of *The Golden Rule*. It is always helpful to ask ourselves, "How do I want my spouse to treat me?" In talking that over with the spouse, as well as the children, there is an opportunity for problems to be brought out into the open and to find how things are going inside the people involved. If a person reveals they wanted to be treated in a 'sinful,' or 'self-centered' way - then there is opportunity for instruction, prayer, and perhaps suggestions for change.

Many times, in a genuine marriage, there is need for 'healing prayer.' In this way the hurts, problems, areas of bondage, and sources of irritation and confusion can be addressed by bringing that person into the presence of God. We have been commanded. *Therefore, confess your sins one to another and pray for one another that you might be healed* (James 5:16)

By doing healing prayer most of the problems can be faced when small and solved. If problems are not brought out into the open - explosions happen.

- **Summary: God designed marriage and He made us for Himself.**

The missing ingredient in many marriages and in most of us - is God Himself. He is always 'the key,' because He is '*the way, the truth, and the life,*' and '*without him we can do nothing*' of genuine value.

When we learn to surrender every area of life to Him and invite Him into every area on a regular basis - then He can make our life and even our marriage work successfully. However, we'll never be perfect until we get to heaven.

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