

HOW DO I LOVE THEE?

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One of the most adoring statements expressive of human love was spoken by Ruth the Moabitess to her mother-in-law, Naomi. With her heart fearing from its depths the possibility of separation from her loved one, she said these immortal words, “Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me” (Ruth 1:16-17). The sentiment of this language has often found application in the union of two people in marriage. Perhaps this is one of the most often read passages of scripture in wedding ceremonies. Marriage is one of three institutions the Bible attributes to God. And, of the three, the home, the government, and the church, the home was given first. The God of love in his power originated marriage, in his mercy ordained marriage, in his wisdom ordered marriage, and in his authority oversees marriage (II Cor. 13:11).

Marriage Originated from God

At the creation of Adam, the first man, God saw that the condition of his life was less than desirable because he was alone. Genesis 2:18 reads, “And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” At last, Eve was made from Adam’s rib, and the two continued through life as one. God utilized his great power to relieve a condition within the human family of insufferable loneliness.

Marriage is Ordained of God

God ordained one man and one woman become one flesh (Gen. 2:24). Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, wrote, “Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband” (I Cor. 7:2). Marriage is the unique institution where intimacy between a man and a woman is approved of God. John, the apostle of love, wrote, “For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie,” in reference to heaven, and the same concerning “whoremongers” is true of those engaging in intimate relationships outside of marriage today (Rev. 22:15).

Marriage is Ordered by God

In his infinite wisdom, God has not left the married couple without guidance in their lifelong relationship of love. With the precision of a textbook, the Bible serves as an infallible guide ordering the activities of the man and woman who have become one. Ephesians 5:21-33 serves to illustrate that which is available to assist in making a marriage all that God intends. The apostle wrote: “Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.”

Marriage is Overseen by God

The overall observation of God’s insight into the lives of every individual emerges from what is called his omniscience, meaning “all knowing.” This part of God’s nature is stated by Jesus, “And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works” (Rev. 2:23). The reins (literally “kidneys” and refers metaphorically to “the inmost part of man” or “the seat of feelings or passions”) places emphasis on not only the thinking part of man which is the heart but additionally the emotional part of man. God has the knowledge and power to “judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ” according to the gospel (Rom. 2:16).

In the gospel of Matthew God has made a specific statement of his knowledge of the commitment and day to day bond which exists between a man and a woman in marriage. Jesus said, “And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matt. 19:4-6).

Therefore, how deeply circumspect every person should be toward his and her spouse. “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment” (Eccles. 11:9). Marital bliss found and kept yields incomparable temporal and eternal joys.

How do I love Thee? . . . Let me count the ways.