

A BIBLICAL PATTERN FOR MARRIAGE¹

There is a very simple statement about marriage in the Bible. It is simple and clear and yet very deep... It is the only statement about marriage which is repeated four times in the Bible. The Bible does not speak very often about marriage. Therefore, it is all the more striking that this statement appears four times in very decisive places:

1. **Genesis 2:24**
2. **Matthew 19:5**
3. **Mark 10:7**
4. **Ephesians 5:31**

“For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife: And they shall become one flesh.” – Genesis 2:24 (NASV)

This verse has three parts. It mentions three things which are essential to marriage: to leave, to cleave, and to become one flesh.” (p. 19)

1. **LEAVING**. **There can be no marriage without leaving.** The word “leaving” indicated that a public and legal act has to take place in order to make a marriage a marriage.

Sometimes in Africa the whole wedding party (marches), often for many miles, from the village of the bride to the village of the bridegroom. ***There is nothing secret about it. This public act of leaving makes marriage legal at the same time.*** From that day on everyone knows, these two are husband and wife, they are under “wedlock” ... The outward form is not of primary importance, but what is important is the fact that a public and legal action has taken place.

“Leaves his father and his mother,” (Gen. 2:24a) When I pronounce these words, you will feel a pain in your heart. This is certainly not something joyful... You would expect that the teaching about marriage begins with something more joyful and beautiful. But the bible is very down to earth and sober. It says, “A man leaves his father and his mother.” Leaving is the price of happiness. There must be a clean and clear-cut (break). Just as a newborn baby cannot grow up and develop unless the umbilical cord is cut, so marriage cannot grow up and develop as long as no real leaving, no clear separation from one’s family, takes place. (pp. 19-20)

You can’t get married without leaving... **If no real leaving takes place, the marriage will be in trouble.** If the young couple have no chance to start their own home, completely separate from their families, the danger is great that the in-laws will interfere continuously.

In Africa the custom of “*bride price*” is sometimes used as such a means of interference. Some parents who do not want to let their daughter go, raise the bride price so high that the young couple remain in debt for a long time. These debts are then used to prevent a real leaving. (p. 21)

WHAT ABOUT THE EXTENDED FAMILY?

Some of you may say... We are taught to love our parents, not to leave them. We feel an obligation not only to the small family—or as it is sometimes called, the intimate family—which is made up of father, mother and children. We also feel an obligation to the greater family, the extended family, which takes in all our relatives.

¹ Virtually all of this material is taken verbatim from the book “*I Married You*” by Walter Trobisch (InterVarsity Press: Leicester, England, 1971, 1985). The material is taken from a series of marriage seminars that he gave in a country in Africa several decades ago. As you read, try to picture yourself in Africa, to receive the full import of his words. References to certain traditions, such as “bride price” & polygamy while common in some African countries as well as in Papua New Guinea where we lived for 19 years, may seem like a foreign concept. But his points are hard hitting & relevant to western countries such as the United States as well. Page references are from the 1985 edition. Originally compiled 05 October, 1990 by Rev. Mike Edwards, while serving as Baptist Chaplain at the University of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby, PNG. Retyped & reformatted into a Word document September, 2015, Madison, Ohio, rev. 1/21.

This is a very valuable tradition, which by no means should be destroyed. Yet my answer is that “leaving” does not mean to leave in the lurch. Leaving *does not mean to abandon one’s parents*... In my experience, the extended family can function only so long as the nuclear family is intact and healthily independent.

Is this a Western concept of marriage? It is not... Everyone has trouble with “leaving.” If you ask a Western marriage counsellor which problem he has most frequently to deal with, he will probably answer, “With the mother-in-law problem.” (p. 22)

In Europe and America it is usually the mother of the husband who interferes... In Africa I have heard it is more often the mother of the wife who causes trouble. If there is a marriage quarrel, the young wife tries to run home to her mother.

WHY DO AFRICAN WOMEN RUN HOME SO FREQUENTLY?

The answer is, because the woman has left her family, while her husband has not. In your (i.e. African) country the man stays in his home or close to his home, and his wife has to join him there.

Read the book of Genesis and you will find the same kind of society. There it was a matter of course that the woman had to leave and become a member of her husband’s clan. ***The unheard of and revolutionary message was that the man also had to leave his family.*** This must have hurt the ears of the male listeners at that time as much as it may hurt your ears today.” (p. 22)

(This leaving) protects the woman’s rights. It aims toward partnership between husband and wife. The message is, in other words: *Both have to leave, not only the wife, but also the husband.* (p. 22)

2. CLEAVING.

Leaving and cleaving belong together. One describes more the public and legal aspect of marriage, the other more the personal aspect. They are intertwined. You cannot really cleave unless you have left. You cannot really leave unless you have decided to cleave.

The literal sense of the Hebrew word for “*to cleave*” is *to stick to, or to be glued to a person*. The husband and wife are glued together like two pieces of paper. If you try to separate two pieces of paper which are glued together, you tear them both. (p. 23)

Another consequence of this being glued together is that husband and wife are closest to each other, closer than to anything else and to anyone else in the world. It is more important than the husband’s work... more important than the wife’s house-cleaning and cooking... more important than the husband’s friends or the wife’s friends... more important than the children.

Very often adultery occurs in a young marriage after the first baby is born. Why? The young wife makes the mistake of becoming closer to her baby than to her husband. The baby becomes the centre of her life, which makes the husband feel like an outsider. (pp. 23-24)

POLYGAMY?

To cleave in this deep sense... being glued together, is, of course, only possible between *TWO persons*. **Our Bible verse is an uncompromising attack on all polygamy.** It states, “*Therefore a man... cleaves to his wife (singular).*”

This verse also strikes out against divorce, which makes a successive polygamy possible, where one man does not have several wives at the same time, but one after the other. (p. 24)

Perhaps we would use another word today... “To love” ...But it is interesting that the Bible does not use this word here. **Cleaving means love, but love of a special kind. IT IS LOVE that has made a DECISION i.e. a**

COMMITMENT and which is no longer a groping and seeking love. Love which cleaves is mature love... which has decided to remain faithful—faithful to one person—and to share with this one person one’s whole life. (p. 24)

3. **BECOMING ONE FLESH.**

This physical aspect is as essential for marriage as the legal (leaving) and personal (cleaving) aspect... We can talk about it. We must talk about it, even in church... You say, “It is against our African tradition to talk about the things of the body’ ...But it is very strange. If I talk to parents in Africa and advise them to teach their children these functions of the body, they say, “European and American parents may be able to do that, because these things are more natural to them. For Africans this is impossible.” However, when I talk to European and American parents, they say to me, “Mr. Trobisch, you lived too long in Africa. The people in Africa are closer to nature. They may be able to do this, but for us it is impossible.” It is my experience that the embarrassment is worldwide... The reason is that it has either been considered as something so holy that it cannot even be pronounced—or so unholy that one is ashamed to mention it. *The Bible refutes both positions.*

Of course “*to become one flesh*” means much more than just the physical union. It means that two persons share everything they have, not only their bodies, not only their material possessions, but also their thinking and their feeling, their joy and their suffering, their hopes and their fears, their successes and their failures. (p. 25)

THE BIBLICAL “TRIANGLE”

We’ve studied the three parts: *To leave, to cleave, and to become one flesh*. The message is that these three parts are inseparable from each other. **If one of the parts is lacking, the marriage is not complete.** Only those who have left, regardless of the consequences, and only those “cleave” exclusively to each other, can become “one flesh.”

LEAVING = THE PUBLIC & LEGAL ACT i.e. the Wedding or “Wedlock.”

CLEAVING = LOVE or FAITHFULNESS, i.e. COMMITMENT. (Thus the importance of a legal marriage, as opposed to guys who often tell a girl, “*Oh, who needs a piece of paper anyway. We love each other, that’s all that matters!*” Please girls, do **not** fall for that line. -mwe)

ONE FLESH = THE PHYSICAL UNION... If it is understood that much more is meant by this word than just the sexual fellowship of the couple. (p. 27)

IF YOU WANT A REAL MARRIAGE, THESE THREE THINGS HAVE TO BE IN THE PICTURE.

For young people who are not yet married, this is the goal they have to reach.

WHAT ABOUT CHILDREN or THE LACK OF CHILDREN? DOES THAT MEAN THE MARRIAGE IS INCOMPLETE?

Now I have to call your attention to another very important fact about or Bible verse. How does it end? What is the last thing in this verse of Genesis 2:24? Answer: ***A period!*** i.e. a “*full stop.*”

In this key verse about marriage quoted four times in the Bible, there is not one word about children.

Don’t misunderstand me. Children are a blessing of God. The Bible emphasizes this over and over again... **Children are a blessing to marriage, but they are an ADDITIONAL blessing to marriage.** When God created Adam and Eve, He blessed them and **THEN** He said to them: “***Be fruitful and multiply***” (**Gen. 1:28**). From the Hebrew text it is clear that this commandment was an additional action to the action of blessing. (pp. 27-28)

Therefore when the Bible describes the indispensable elements of marriage... Leaving, Cleaving and becoming One Flesh are sufficient. Period! **The full stop means that barrenness is no reason for divorce.** No man can

say, “This woman hasn’t given me a child. Therefore I’m not really married to her: and then send her away! (pp. 28-29)

WHAT THEN IS THE PLACE OF *THE CHILD* IN THE TRIANGLE?

The place of the child is in the centre of the triangle. It begins in the physical union of the father and mother. It is surrounded by the love and faithfulness of both parents, and it is protected and sheltered by the legality of the marriage contract... There alone, is the atmosphere in which (the child) can mature and be prepared for its own marriage later on. (p. 32)

THE “GARDEN” OR THE “TRIANGLE”?

There is another concept of marriage. It contradicts the biblical concept of marriage which I have just described, in every point. This concept is widespread.

The “Garden” concept of marriage, as I like to call it, is based on a book called “*Marriage East and West*” by David and Vera Mace, American marriage counsellors, who conducted a marriage seminar with twenty Asians in 1958 at Chengmai, Thailand. (p. 29)

This “garden” concept of marriage... is based on an *Inaccurate Biology*. It conceives of the man as the sower of the seed and of the woman as the soil, as the garden. Man plants his seed in the woman. The woman’s body nurtures the seed, just as the soil nurtures the grain of rice. Just as the plant grows out of the grain, so the child grows out of the man’s seed. The child is the man’s child, his ongoing spirit, his continuing life. (p. 29) This is inaccurate and bad biology...

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE “GARDEN” WAY OF THINKING ARE TREMENDOUS:

- 1) ***Men are more important than women.*** The woman can never be as important as the man, any more than the soil can be as important as the seed. By her very nature, *she is secondary, auxiliary*. This explains, as nothing else can do, the discrimination between man and woman, not only in Asia, but also in Europe and America (and Africa), even today.
- 2) ***Sons are more important than daughters.*** It is through sons that the family line is continued. A family who has no sons and whose line dies out is like a tree cut off from its roots. Its ancestors wither and have no peace. (p. 30)
- 3) ***The relationship between husband and wife is the same as one between possessor and his possession,*** just as the sower of the seed owns the soil into which he sows. The main duty of the woman is to obey. It is also the man’s privilege to choose. He chooses the garden he is going to buy. The garden has nothing to say. The standard of choice is the potential fertility of the garden. (p. 30)
- 4) ***Within the garden concept of thinking, a childless marriage is as useless and senseless as a barren field.*** If a woman fails to bear children, she fails in her destiny.
- 5) ***The “garden” concept explains the practices of DIVORCE & POLYGAMY.*** If a man’s garden does not bear fruit, either he gives the garden back to its former possessor and asks the father of the girl to return the price he has paid for her i.e. he asks for a “refund”, or he keeps the garden and acquires one or two other gardens which may bear fruit. **Polygamy is understandable only within the “garden” concept.**

Further, a man can have several “gardens,” but a garden can have only one owner. ***The woman is always at a disadvantage within the garden concept.*** (pp. 30-31)

- 6) ***The custom of “Bride Price.”*** This custom is closely related to the garden concept. Actually, it is not (primarily) the price for the garden, but for the fruits which the garden is going to produce. The name is misleading. It is not the price for the bride (primarily), but for the fruits which the garden is going to

produce. The name is misleading. It is not the price for the bride (so much as) for the children she is supposed to bear.

That is why sometimes it is not paid in full until she gives birth to the first child, and then only if the child is a son. (PNG customs vary from this, depending on location, etc.)

A *WIDOW* loses her children if she marries outside of her late husband's clan which paid for those children (in some African countries). They do not really belong to the widowed mother. By the way, a Widow is the most pitiful creature within the "garden" concept. She is a possession which has lost its owner.

- 7) ***The "garden" concept explains too, why a woman is more reproached for adultery than a man.*** Both are guilty. What happens if a man commits adultery? He sows his seed in a garden which does not belong to him. He does wrong to the owner of the other garden and may have to pay him a fine if he is caught. But he is not considered as doing wrong to his own wife or violating his own marriage. If a wife commits adultery, however, she does the worst thing she can do to her husband. She allows foreign seed in his garden. She endangers the integrity of his family line. She violates her own marriage. **It's a complete double standard!**
- 8) ***There is no place whatsoever within the "garden" concept for the unmarried person.*** An *UNMARRIED GIRL* is a garden which could bear fruit, but which is not given to a sower.

The most foolish thing one can think of is a *BACHELOR*. He is a sower of seed who does not purchase a garden in which to sow his seed. Unthinkable! (p. 31)

**THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT (i.e. THE "TRIANGLE")
CONTRADICTS THE "GARDEN" CONCEPT
IN EVERY SINGLE POINT!**

- 1) ***The Bible does away with the inaccurate concept of reproduction.*** It is *NOT* out of a man's seed that the child grows, but according to the Bible and proven by modern science, husband and wife contribute equally (genetically) to the creation of a new life. The child is not only the man's child but belongs to **BOTH** husband and wife. (pp. 31-32)
- 2) ***The garden concept discriminates against women.*** The biblical concept conceives of the woman not as an inferior being, but as the *EQUAL* partner of her husband, not an *OBJECT*, but a *PERSON* in her own right.
- 3) ***The "garden" concept invites multiple marriages,*** for it thinks of the woman as a *PROPERTY* which can be augmented in numbers at will. The biblical "triangle" concept aims for *MONOGAMY*. (p. 32)

"The choice is between the "garden" & the "triangle."

Do you consider your wife a garden, or a partner for whom you leave your parents, to whom you cleave, and with whom you become one flesh?"

(Trobisch, p. 32)