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SEVEN BIBLICAL EXCLUSIONS FOR MARRIED LIFE

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Marriage is one of the most intricate experiences to be encountered in a person's lifetime. A man and a woman meet, develop friendship, and if they are serious they take each other by faith, not by empirical research, and hope to find each other to be suitable marriage partners.

After marriage begins, it does not take long before they realise that they are each very different from the other. An average man or woman will soon begin to think that the other person is undergoing a serious change for the worse. Very few people appreciate the experience, and the majority hardly know what is happening.

This perceived "change" is nothing else than a beginning of a better acquaintance and intimacy between the two, rather than a change in personality, appearance or attitude of one or the other. In fact, if one does not notice any "change" in one's partner, there must be some degree of abnormality or of ignorance about the intricacies of personality. For in every normal relationship there must be learning, discussion and appreciation. This last factor – appreciation – is often missed in the midst of the struggle to find out why so-and-so is "changing". Since such discovery is inevitable due to proximity and interaction, the mistaken learner (husband or wife) begins to withdraw from the "changing" partner. One begins to look for other company, where one will not encounter such "change", and the road to separation or divorce has begun.

We ought to understand that the longer two people live together, the more each begins to understand their partner truly and realistically, resulting in an increase in love and appreciation. It would be unhealthy to live for years with someone whom in fact you do not understand. How can one keep on loving and appreciating a person whose strengths and weaknesses have not been recognised? The discovery of one's partner as that partner really is, is in fact the key to a better relationship. During the time I have been involved in premarital counselling, I have discovered from Scripture seven necessary exclusions for a successful marriage, seven factors for which there can be *no room* in a godly marriage.

**1. No Room for Careless Presumption towards One's Partner –
Genesis 2:18-25.**

Marriage was instituted by God the Father before the Fall, and was meant to last for life. It represents God's mind and act, and therefore transcends human initiative. The only part that human beings play is to accept the other person by faith, since faith is the only adequate basis of perception for God's children. This conclusion was confirmed by the first father, Adam, when he said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man." After Adam's response, the final statement is made: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."

No man or woman should take marriage for granted as if it were a product of human effort. Instead, both should live to thank, praise and serve God together in a way that will always express gratitude to Him for the provision of partnership. For if man's satisfaction were to be in fauna or flora, God would not have said, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Man was placed by God in a wonderful climatic condition, where agriculturally speaking he had everything he needed. He had every kind of animal, bird, reptile and marine life under his control, and freedom to eat from every tree in the garden but one. Yet with all this comfort, Adam was alone, and God said this was not good. By the creation of Eve, Adam was presented with what was designated as good for him. And so it is today. Our partner in marriage is a gift from God, and we must not treat such a gift with careless presumption, but with loving honour.

**2. No Room for Comparing One's Partner with Others –
Song of Solomon 2:2,3.**

In the love poetry of the Song of Solomon, the wife is said to be a lily to her husband and the husband is an apple tree to his wife. The rest of the women are thorns, while other men are the unnamed second class trees which cannot be compared with an apple tree. This means that the marriage partner is taken to be of a superlative degree, above which there is no human comparison.

One of the concerns of the time in which we live is comparison of everything: who is taller, who is shorter, who is wiser, who is more handsome or beautiful, who is more active, and so forth. It happens that very cunningly this attitude has crept into the popular outlook on marriage, to the extent that a man or woman invites ridicule if they seem satisfied with the status quo of their spouse's appearance and abilities.

Comparing alternatives to what God has granted is sinful, and therefore condemned. Instead of such comparisons, one should always take time to thank God and to rejoice in the distinctiveness of the marriage which God has provided. This must be acknowledged by the couple and lived out in their daily

life. There can never be two lilies nor can there be two apple trees at the same time – only one of each while they live. Therefore, whatever disturbs our sight, whether we go by sensory system or not, there is no room for comparisons.

3. No Room for Breaking Faith with One's Partner – Malachi 2:10-16.

Malachi analyses a situation in which a man and his bride do not live up to the expected behaviour. Whenever marriage partners break faith with each other, the prophet says they are profaning the marriage covenant. Faith can be broken through hypocrisy by one or the other partner, through lack of trust, or through mistreatment. When such attitudes or behaviour are allowed to permeate married life, the relationship begins to break down, and the consequence may be divorce, which God hates (2:16). When God says that He hates something, He is not suggesting dislike but rather an extreme enmity or abhorrence. This may lead to cutting off the guilty party from the fellowship, irrespective of one's responsibilities in the church (2:12). Therefore, let us be warned, and let couples remain carefully faithful to each other in all aspects of their life together. The Lord is a witness between a man and his covenant wife.

4. No Room for Divorcing One's Partner – Matthew 19:3-12.

The Pharisees came to Jesus to inquire about the possibility of dismissing their wives any time they feel like doing so. "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" Actually these people did not ask anything at all, since the phrase "for any and every reason" leaves no need for legal rulings. Jesus responded in plain language that their first problem was ignorance of God's word. Had they not read that when God created male and female at the beginning, He meant that the two should be united together as one flesh. "They are no longer two but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (19:4-6).

The second problem of the Pharisees was unbelief. This is spelled out in our Lord's response to their next question: "Why then did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus replied: "Because your hearts were hard." But, as it was intended in the beginning, even now no one can divorce his wife (19:8,9). I realise that Jesus said, "except for marital unfaithfulness." But since immorality is not part of Christian behaviour, we may conclude that there is no room for divorce among believing Christians.

At this point the disciples spoke up. They too held to the Pharisees' opinion that the wife should be disposable. Having heard the Lord's response to the Pharisees, they said, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." It is sad that many Christians of today have picked up this attitude. Marriage is undesirable if it does not include an option of

disposal. God the Father did not intend that those He joined should separate, and God the Son did not allow it. Therefore in Christian marriage there is to be no room for divorce.

5. No Room for an Egocentric Attitude in the Marriage Partnership – Ephesians 5:21-33.

The basis for relationship between a husband and wife is established by Ephesians 5:21: “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” The only way a husband and wife can live together in this way is by means of the Spirit-filled life of those who have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Other than that, there is no way for a man and women to cleave together for life in this evil and confused age.

The wife’s submission to her husband and the husband’s love of his wife are both to be based on the relationship between Christ and His Church. Note that this qualifying reason is given for every command in this passage, stated in phrases like: “as”, “so also”, “in the same way”. If we miss this basis for our behaviour, we will not make it in our married life, since the husband will keep on demanding submission from his wife, while the wife keeps on demanding love from the husband. But marriage is not a matter of placing our demands before our partner, but a matter of fulfilling our own responsibilities before Christ. The husband should love his wife in the manner that Christ loves the Church, cares for it, and protects it from danger. The wife likewise should respond to such love in the same manner as the Church is expected to respond to Christ’s acts of love. We cannot live on mere human traditions, by which in some parts of the world the woman is treated as an “animal of burden” or as “property”. To be able to live as expected, one must be Spirit-filled and not wine-filled (5:18).

6. No Room for Camouflage in the Marriage Partnership – 1 Peter 3:1-7.

Peter warns both husband and wife against camouflage. The wife is commanded to show submission to her husband as a means of gospel testimony, “so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.” This is an unusual type of evangelism, given only to the wives in this case. Unfortunately, wives can miss this opportunity through the pursuit of equality. The issue of equality should not arise among the true children of God, because the Bible is very clear that both husband and wife are equal before God spiritually speaking (Gal 3:28). The wives should take courage in marriage lest they miss the opportunity to portray Christ in their demeanour.

The warning to the wife is that she should not assume that she will win her husband’s heart by external physical appearance. She may adorn herself by braiding hair, or by wearing gold jewellery and fine clothes. All these have their

proper place and the Bible is not against them. But if they are used as a substitute for fellowship with God in the inner person, they are a misleading camouflage and wrong. For even the prostitutes use such things, and may appear even more beautiful than the faithful. But this is mere disguise, for within they are corrupt. What counts is the development of the inner person after the manner of Sarah, who lived an exemplary life with her husband Abraham, calling him "master". Such a pattern of life is not camouflage, but the manifestation of true beauty.

The husband likewise is commanded to be considerate in living with his covenant wife, because the wife is a weaker partner (this refers to physical weakness, not spiritual). The husband is to be considerate as well because his wife is an heir of life jointly with him. Sometimes we men behave as if we are the only recognised kingdom-heirs. Such thinking is faulty in view of God's word. Furthermore, Peter says that if considerateness does not mark the couple's relationship, then their prayers will be hindered. If prayers are hindered, spiritual suffocation will result. So there can be no place for camouflage in their lives. Both of them must reflect in daily outward bearing the true grace of a Spirit-filled person, rather than maintain an outward appearance that does not match up with the inner reality.

7. No Room for Gloom in the Marriage Partnership – Revelation 19:1-10.

Marriage was instituted by God the Father in Eden before the Fall. This means that marriage is a creation act rather than a product of merely human device. And God instituted marriage for mankind's fulfillment and joy. Any attempt to change its intended joyful pattern and purpose is sinful. Marriage should portray not only the joy of eternity past, but also of eternity to come. For in the passage before us, marriage is likened to the second coming of the Lord to take His bride the Church home for eternity. Married couples should reflect in their life together the characteristics appropriate to that final celebration, of which they are meant to be a picture. Hence their lives should be filled with praise (19:1-3), worship (19:4,6,10), and rejoicing in righteousness (19:7,8).

Husband and wife should show to the world the joy of marriage so that no one may despise the wedding supper of the Lamb. For if we live a life of married gloom, we paint a picture that life in heaven is not going to be any better. Note that righteousness is singled out as the only acceptable attire for the wedding supper of the Lamb, and blessed are those who are invited to it because they have the right dress: well-fashioned, glittering and clean. Marriage should be characterised by joyful righteousness, as it plays its role between eternity past and eternity to come, announcing to the world the Great Marriage of the Final Day, which will unite the Lord Jesus with His own forever.

Conclusion

Marriage is a relationship between two grown-ups, and they need to behave as such before the Lord. While the husband is said to be the head of the family, God does not suggest that he is superior to his wife, nor does He suggest that the wife is inferior to her husband simply because she is commanded to be submissive. The nature of this relationship must have its basis in the unity in the Godhead. Among the Persons of the Trinity there is both full fellowship and cooperation, and also differing functions, yet without any question of superiority or inferiority. Therefore, we should cease from a utilitarian attitude, often times expressed by the husbands, and take marriage with biblical seriousness. For whether we like it or not, Scripture reminds us that there is no room in marriage for: presumption, comparison, breaking of faith, divorce, egocentrism, camouflage, or gloom.