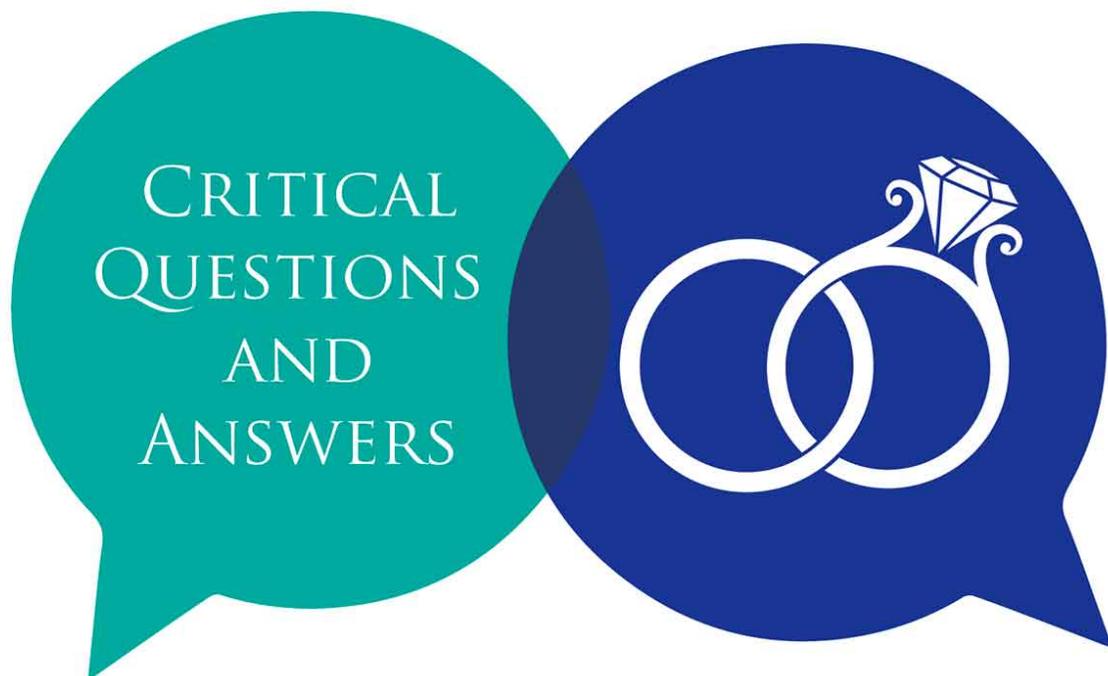


# MARRIAGE DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE



**JIM NEWHEISER**

FOREWORD BY EDWARD T. WELCH

“Jim Newheiser continues to be a wealth of biblical wisdom. Whatever he writes I buy because I know it will be wise, insightful, biblical, and fleshed out in the trenches of real ministry with real people. As a pastor and counselor myself for over thirty years, I’m always looking for biblical resources like this. *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* will serve the church well because the questions that leaders face today have become increasingly complicated. Jim cuts through the fog with the light of God’s Word and the heart of a real shepherd that has been forged side by side with people who are hurting and looking for answers. This little book can be the guide that takes you by the hand and leads you through the forest of winding, twisting turns, plowing through the underbrush of today’s questions about sex, marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Get a copy to read and reread, as well as one to give to any church leader or counselor who is working with people today.”

—**Brad Bigney**, Pastor, Grace Fellowship, Florence, Kentucky;  
author, *Gospel Treason*

“Jim Newheiser offers wise biblical counsel and tackles very difficult (but sadly common) issues in a way that pastors, elders, and those preparing to serve in the church will benefit from and greatly appreciate. I wish I had had a copy of *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage: Critical Questions and Answers* before I started out in ministry in the local church. I would have been better equipped to help and better prepared for the kinds of issues I would encounter. Above all, Dr. Newheiser seeks to be faithful to Scripture and summons us to a caring fidelity, even when it means that we have to deny self and take up our cross (Luke 9:23). We find here a call and plan to support God’s grand design for marriage through the counseling ministry of the church.”

—**Ligon Duncan**, Chancellor/CEO, Reformed Theological Seminary; John E. Richards Professor of Systematic Theology, RTS Jackson

“Not many people have spent as many hours opening the Bible to help couples experiencing difficulties as my friend Dr. Jim Newheiser.

The answers he offers in this very helpful guide flow out of years of experience and a deep love for Christ and his church. I heartily recommend it!”

—**Elyse Fitzpatrick**, Author, *Counsel from the Cross*

“Jim Newheiser has had decades of counseling experience, much of it in the field of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. He is now my valued colleague at Reformed Theological Seminary. His book is the most thorough and cogent treatment I know on these subjects. I cannot think of any question in this area that he has not discussed with biblical wisdom, applied to real-life situations. I hope that many couples will use this book in their premarital counseling and that churches will use it in dealing with marriage problems in their congregations.”

—**John M. Frame**, Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology and Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, Florida.

“Jim Newheiser combines careful biblical thinking, decades of marriage counseling experience, and practical pastoral sensitivity to bring thorough wisdom to a surprisingly wide number of questions and sub-questions, including thorny and painful ones. While not every reader will agree with every aspect of every answer, the reader hungry to think carefully and practically about these matters will be richly rewarded with this concise yet comprehensive resource.”

—**Robert D. Jones**, Biblical Counseling Professor, Southern Seminary; author, *Uprooting Anger* and *Pursuing Peace*

“As I read the table of contents for *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, I couldn’t wait to read Jim’s answers. Then when I actually started reading Jim’s rich engagement with each of these forty vital questions, I had to wait—to slow down, ponder, reflect, and learn from the wisdom of a seasoned pastor and biblical counselor. *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* is an excellent book for pastors and counselors—not simply for its thorough and relevant answers, but perhaps even more

for its example of how to relate God's Word to the tough issues of daily life."

—**Bob Kellemen**, Chair, Biblical Counseling Department,  
Crossroads Bible College; author, *Gospel-Centered Counseling*

"Sooner or later, marriage touches all our lives. It is therefore one of the most important and most debated realities in the universe. That fact makes Jim Newheiser's book one of the most crucial for Christians to read. I am aware of no resource on marriage that is as comprehensive and yet as accessible as this book. Every issue addressed here is debated by someone, but Newheiser's careful and passionate arguments require thoughtful engagement from everyone. I am happy to commend it to any scholar, pastor, or layperson seeking to understand the biblical teaching on marriage."

—**Heath Lambert**, Assistant Professor of Biblical Counseling,  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Executive  
Director, Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC)

"This book about marriage is different from most other books about marriage. It is different in that it provides biblically based answers to a great variety of current questions that are not answered in any other marriage book that I have ever read. In that sense it is unique, and I recommend it wholeheartedly. And it is also unique in that Dr. Newheiser's answers are not just his opinion or the opinion of certain so-called experts, but drawn from an exegesis of Scripture. Jim seeks to ground all his answers in what God says in his Word, the Bible. As a pastor and marriage counselor, I am glad to have such a book to which I can refer people for solid information on critical questions that are being asked in this twenty-first century."

—**Wayne Mack**, Director, Professor, Counselor, Strengthening Ministries Training Institute; Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC), Member of the Academy; Director, ACBC Africa

"Jim Newheiser has written an exceptional resource on marriage. It is carefully organized, thoroughly researched, and very well written. This

book is going to be the gold standard for pastors, biblical counselors, and other Christians who want to glorify God on the issue of marriage. I highly recommend it.”

—**Martha Peace**, Biblical counselor, conference speaker, best-selling author of *The Excellent Wife*

“Basic questions are comfortable questions. Jim Newheiser leads us beyond the comfortable basics of marriage to where real ministry often forces us—the unstable edges of this vital topic. Is abuse grounds for divorce? When is remarriage a bad idea? Does forgiveness always mean reconciliation? Newheiser answers risky questions such as these with delicacy and conviction, providing biblical footing for the edges.”

—**Jeremy Pierre**, Associate Professor of Biblical Counseling, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*

“There may not be a more difficult set of questions for Christians than those raised regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Complex issues in these incredibly important areas abound, yet in Jim Newheiser’s new book, these many questions receive fair, helpful, and, most importantly, biblical answers. My hat is off to the author for tackling so many questions and providing much-needed clarity in the midst of a fog of confusion surrounding these critical matters. The graciousness and skill with which he does so is a lesson for us all in handling what appear to be vexing uncertainties about, for instance, whom to marry, how to stay married, and what the bases are if you don’t. As a pastor, I for one am always looking for helpful treatments on critical concerns for members of my congregation, and we surely have it here in this most valuable and eminently readable volume. May it receive wide acclaim as a trusted source for the church’s singles and couples alike.”

—**Lance Quinn**, Senior Pastor, Bethany Church, Thousand Oaks, California

“With his astute biblical wisdom and his years of experience, Jim Newheiser provides for us an exceptional question-and-answer tool for

growing in our knowledge of marriage and in the topics related to marriage. Since we hold the marriage relationship in honor (Heb. 13:4), we make every effort to grow in our knowledge of biblical marriage, to practice biblical marriage, and to help others do the same, leading to the cultivation of marriages that proclaim the excellencies of God. We do this well by knowing what questions to ask and how to answer them biblically. This book will help us do just that.”

—**Andrew Rogers**, Soul Care Pastor, College Park Church,  
Indianapolis, Indiana

“Over the past forty years, I have counseled hundreds of couples who were struggling with questions that this book answers with clarity. But unlike most books that cover a similar subject, this volume by Jim Newheiser handles these questions with biblical precision and grace. When there has been passionate love in marriage, there is also the potential for passionate hate. When this is true, it is difficult for those involved to think objectively, much less biblically. This book will provide a clear direction as it unfolds God’s wonderful Word concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Someone has wisely remarked, ‘A good Christian wedding always involves two funerals.’ A husband and wife must first learn to die to self; then they are ready to do things God’s way. Anyone who has questions about marriage, divorce, or remarriage from a thoroughly biblical perspective must carefully study this book with the Bible alongside!”

—**John D. Street**, Professor, The Master’s University and  
Seminary; President, Association of Certified Biblical  
Counselors (ACBC)

“*Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* by Jim Newheiser brings needed clarity to contemporary confusion over this foundation of society. Newheiser evaluates fairly those with whom he disagrees, making this book a real treasure. He answers the knotty questions from God’s Word, making this volume valuable for a pastor bringing counsel, or a spouse caught up in a difficult marriage. Newheiser’s pastoral insight, lucid analysis, and biblical focus make this book a must-read for people

with questions about marriage and a valuable resource for a pastor's bookshelf."

—**Tedd Tripp**, Author, conference speaker

"In *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, Jim Newheiser humbly tackles some of the tough issues often connected to marriage. He acknowledges that good people may differ and then encourages the reader to search the Scriptures, not rely on man's opinion. Jim doesn't stop there, however. He blesses the reader with the result of his own scriptural conclusions and provides wise guidance for those who want to please the Lord in their approach to this topic."

—**Steve Viars**, Senior Pastor, Faith Church, Lafayette, Indiana

# MARRIAGE DIVORCE AND REMARriage

Critical Questions and Answers

**JIM NEWHEISER**



P U B L I S H I N G  
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

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With thanks to God, who gave me Caroline as my wife.  
It must be because he knew how weak I would be that he gave  
me such a gracious and patient companion. Her love helps me to  
comprehend the gracious love of Christ for me. She has been a  
helper who has done me good all the days of my life and  
with whom I have shared surpassing joy.

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# FOREWORD

When you understand something, you know what questions to ask. For example, if you understand the book of Obadiah, you can ask lots of questions. If you do not understand it, you are reduced to, “Is that a book in the Bible?” When you can ask forty important questions, it means that you understand the issues well.

Then comes the equally challenging part. Once you ask the questions, you hope to give clear, cogent, scriptural answers in which you make your case but recognize that there are other perspectives, and you are respectful toward them.

Dr. Newheiser does both. He asks the important questions about marriage, divorce, and remarriage, and he gives biblically reasoned and very practical answers. You would think that he must be a 110-year-old to accrue that kind of wisdom. But somehow, he has accrued it in much less time. He has accrued it through loving God, pastoring a church, loving his family, being quick to receive advice and critique, living under Scripture and feeding on it, listening before he speaks, and loving others.

As I read the book, my first thought was that this is the perfect book for pastors, elders, and church leaders. Jim succinctly covers the matters that they will encounter in everyday ministry. It is perfect for them, but there is more.

Even though the book is in a question-and-answer format, after I read a dozen or so entries, I discovered that the book was teaching me how to use Scripture to think about our modern questions. In other

## Foreword

words, Jim prepares you to ask forty more questions and consider forty wise answers. That's what a good book should do.

And one more benefit: When I read the book, I simply engaged in more conversations about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. That, too, is what a good book should do.

Edward T. Welch  
Counselor and Faculty Member  
Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation

# PREFACE

It has been my privilege to teach about marriage and to engage in marriage counseling for more than thirty years. It has been my greater privilege to be in a very blessed marriage for over thirty-seven years. Both experiences have taught me much.

As I have faced some very difficult and challenging marriage counseling questions, I have been most thankful for the inerrancy and the sufficiency of God's Word (2 Tim. 3:16–17), which contains timeless truth that applies in all ages and cultures. The Bible offers powerful, authoritative, and helpful answers for every issue and question we may face in our own lives or when offering counsel to others. My hope in writing this book is to shed light on these answers for those who are eager to know God's wisdom.

I envision this book as being used in a few different ways. Some may read it straight through to obtain an overview of how Scripture addresses various matters concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage. The question-and-answer format will make this helpful to others who may use it as a reference, which will help them to answer challenging issues as they arise. I also anticipate that counselors may assign particular chapters to their counselees as they face particular situations (e.g., how single people can know whether it is God's will for them to marry, or how a married couple can resolve conflicts and improve their communication).

The first half of the book deals with questions that tend to be more pastoral and less controversial (at least in Bible-believing evangelical

## Preface

circles)—the nature of marriage, entering into marriage, having a successful marriage, and facing challenges in marriage. The second half of the book deals with what the Bible teaches about divorce and remarriage—issues that many Christians in our day sharply disagree on. While those who differ with me may not be satisfied with all my answers, my hope is that they will be able to acknowledge that I have sought to understand their position and have treated it with respect and fairness. It additionally has been my intention not to duck the difficult questions and, on those issues that I am not sure about, to present different perspectives while admitting my uncertainty.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very thankful to Benjamin Merkle, who encouraged me to write about these issues. Ben is a godly husband and father, an excellent scholar, and a dear friend. I also thank God for John Hughes and Ian Thompson, of P&R Publishing, for their help and encouragement as we brought this project to completion. I am particularly indebted to Pat Kuhl, Ann Maree Goudzwaard, and Christina Henson, whose help in proofreading and editing made this a much better (and more readable) book. In addition, I am grateful to God for Don and Darlene Downs, who gave me a place of beauty and respite from which to write. I pray that our work will be a blessing to the church, the bride of Christ, to his glory.



# INTRODUCTION

Marriage is important. The Bible begins with a marriage—of Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:18–25)—and it ends with a marriage—of the Lamb and his bride, the church (Rev. 19:7–9). Marriage is designed by God as a picture of his loving covenant relationship with us. Marriage is the most intimate of all human relationships, in which a man and a woman have opportunity to love each other as God has loved them. Through marriage, we learn more about God’s love for us. As we strive to grasp the dimensions of God’s love for us, we learn how to love one another in marriage.

Because God is the Creator of humankind and of marriage, his Word is the authoritative source for what we are to believe and how we are to live. As Ray Ortlund writes, “Marriage did not arise from historical forces. It came down by heavenly grace as a permanent good for mankind. It was his to define. And he did define it in Genesis 2:24 as one mortal life fully shared between one man and one woman.”<sup>1</sup>

Our culture has made a mess of marriage. Marriage vows are violated through adultery and divorce. The sanctity of marriage is rejected as the sexual privileges of marriage are taken without the commitment that the physical union is meant to represent. In more recent days, society has sought to redefine God’s institution through mandating same-sex marriage.

1. Ray Ortlund, *Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 31.

Human corruption of God's gift is not something unique to our age. Biblical history portrays sexual sins of every kind and even the attempted redefinition through polygamy of God's design of marriage as one man and one woman.

This book will examine God's design for marriage and the difficulties that have arisen because of human sin. Most of what this book addresses would be unnecessary apart from the fall—polygamy, homosexuality, adultery, conflict, divorce, and remarriage.

God offers hope for fallen men and women and for the institution of marriage. Our great Bridegroom, Jesus, has come to redeem and to cleanse his bride, the church. As he transforms us inwardly by his love, we are able to reflect such love in our marriages. Thus, not only are we redeemed as individuals, but our marriages are redeemed, so that they can begin to attain the beauty and joy of God's original design. According to Ray Ortlund, "Nothing is more natural in our fallen world today than trying to build a marriage on a foundation of God-avoidance. But it cannot work. Without peace with God we inevitably shatter the peace we desire with one another."<sup>2</sup> He continues, "Only the gospel of Jesus can free us from this endless power struggle and restore the romance, the beauty, the joy, the harmony God intended."<sup>3</sup>

2. *Ibid.*, 42.

3. *Ibid.*, 49.

**PART 1**

**MARRIAGE**



## A. THE FOUNDATIONS OF MARRIAGE



# 1

## WHAT IS MARRIAGE?

We must begin our discussion with that which is the most crucial of all the questions. Without a correct definition of marriage, our trajectory will be flawed and all subsequent answers skewed. A proper understanding of the nature of marriage is especially crucial today as Western culture presses for the radical redefinition of marriage. This societal shift springs from the premise that marriage is a contract established by humankind, which evolves to meet the needs of a changing society. Sociologists claim that marriage originated for pragmatic and economic reasons (e.g., in an agrarian society, a man would want assurance that he is the father of the children for whom he is providing). Because marriage is perceived as nothing more than a societal invention, people are free to redefine the marriage contract to meet their evolving needs (e.g., with the availability of birth control, the ability of many women to provide for themselves, and the societal acceptance of homosexuality). Tim Keller points out that another significant shift began over a century ago as people began to think of marriage from the standpoint of personal fulfillment, with little concern for duty or the benefits of a stable marriage to the community.<sup>1</sup> This approach to marriage has led to no-fault divorce laws and skyrocketing divorce rates.

Once divine authority has been removed from human relationships,

1. Timothy Keller and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 28.

anything is permissible (Judg. 21:25). Biblical gender roles within marriage have been rejected as archaic and patriarchal. Some advocate eliminating the institution of marriage altogether. Many heterosexual couples cohabit with no intention of ever marrying. Same-sex “marriage,” unthinkable only a generation ago, is today enshrined in law and widely celebrated. But Jesus reminds us that “from the beginning it has not been this way” (Matt. 19:8).

## GOD DEFINES MARRIAGE AT CREATION

Marriage is a creation ordinance established and explained the sixth day when “the LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him’” (Gen. 2:18). Then “the LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man’” (2:22–23). Upon bringing the man and woman together, the basic elements of marriage are set forth. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh” (2:24). Everything else the Bible teaches about marriage flows from these foundational passages. God, as the Creator and Lord, is sovereign over humanity, including our relationships. He has revealed in his infallible, timeless, and all-sufficient Word the nature of marriage, the obligations of marriage, who may be married, and when divorce and remarriage are permissible. No one has the right to modify what God has established.

## A BRIEF DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is a lifelong covenant of companionship between a man and a woman that has been established under God and before the community.<sup>2</sup>

2. Köstenberger defines marriage as “a sacred bond between a man and a woman

## Marriage Is Covenantal

Marriage is a covenantal relationship, which is implied in Genesis 2 and is explicitly stated elsewhere in Scripture. Proverbs 2:17 warns that the strange woman (the adulteress) “forgets the covenant of her God.” Malachi 2:14 rebukes the man who abandons his wife: “The LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.”

The implications of the covenantal nature of marriage are manifold. A biblical covenant involves mutual obligations, promises of blessing upon fulfillment, and consequences for breaking the covenant. The obligations for marriage, including lifelong faithfulness and the divinely established gender roles, are revealed in Scripture and will be further explained throughout this book. The blessings that God offers in the marriage covenant are significant, including loving companionship, sexual union,<sup>3</sup> and children. The consequences of violating a covenant promise are severe. Covenants were typically established along with animal sacrifice, as in Genesis 15:9–21 when God made his covenant with Abraham. Those making the covenant promises in essence say, “May what happened to these sacrificial animals happen to me if I don’t fulfill my obligations under this covenant.” If one properly understands the seriousness of the marriage vows, he or she will not enter into them lightly.

## Marriage Is under God

Another crucial aspect to a proper understanding of marriage is to recognize that a marriage union is not merely a contract between two people; a third party is involved—God himself. Many people see only

---

instituted by and publicly entered into before God (whether or not this is acknowledged by the married couple), normally consummated by sexual intercourse.” Andreas J. Köstenberger with David Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 270.

3. The mere fact that a man and a woman have had sex does not make them married. Marriage is a covenant that is ordinarily expressed in sexual union. Sexual union before the making of the covenant is a sinful distortion of God’s design.

the horizontal dimension of marriage, while failing to see the vertical one. God joins every married couple; consequently, both spouses have covenant obligations to God (Prov. 2:17; Mal. 2:14), even if they don't acknowledge his place in their relationship. A properly conducted marriage ceremony emphasizes the reality that the man and woman are making their vows before God, to whom they will give account. Jesus also warns that anyone who participates in or promotes the breakup of a marriage will answer to God, who is the defender of the marriage covenant. "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate," he declares (Matt. 19:6).

### **Marriage Is for Companionship**

God designed marriage to provide the good gift of companionship. When Scripture initially declares the need for marriage, the focus is not on sexual gratification or the need to produce children. Rather, we are told that the man needs a companion with whom he can share life, so that he will not be lonely: "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). In context, the statement "It is not good" is especially striking, given that this was before the fall and up until then, everything God had created had been declared good (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 25). But the man alone was incomplete. Just as most of us would regard popcorn without salt as deficient, the man lacked an essential element to his humanity.

Moreover, it is significant that before creating the woman, the Lord God paraded all the other creatures before the man, but a suitable helper could not be found among them (Gen. 2:19–20).<sup>4</sup> Only a woman, who was his equal, could complete him. Then the Lord brings him Eve, and he senses that this is good. "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh," he cries out. "She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (2:23). This

4. Ray Ortlund puts it this way: "God bends down, touches the man and says, 'Son, you can wake up now. I have one more creature for you to name. I'm very interested to see your response to this one.'" *Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 26–27.

unique and intimate marriage relationship is encapsulated in the summary declaration in Genesis 2:24, in which a man leaves his parents to be united to his wife as his primary life companion. God's design is for the husband and wife to walk together as lifelong best friends.

### **Marriage Authorizes Sexual Intimacy**

In addition to companionship, the Lord has given marriage for sexual intimacy. From creation, Scripture makes it clear that God intends sexual intimacy to take place exclusively between a man and a woman who have entered into the marriage covenant together. The two “shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24c). In our culture, the wedding ring is the outward sign of the marriage covenant. According to Scripture, however, the sexual union between husband and wife is the sacred sign and symbol of their covenant commitment. This one-flesh union involves far more than sex. Coming together physically is meant to be a picture of the oneness of life and relational intimacy enjoyed by a man and a woman who have committed themselves to one another for life. Every other sexual expression is against God's will and is a perversion of his wonderful design.

### **Marriage Is for Life**

God hates divorce because it is a betrayal of the marriage covenant (Mal. 2:14–16; Matt. 19:3–9). It is he who joins man and woman in this covenantal one-flesh union, and he designed it to last until death parts the husband and wife. Jesus teaches this explicitly, warning that “they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (Mark 10:8b–9). Scripture also teaches that “the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband” (Rom. 7:2; see also 1 Cor. 7:39). We see from this passage that marriage ends with the death of one of the spouses. Jesus also teaches that there will be no marriage in heaven: “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Matt. 22:30).

## ORDINARILY THE MARRIAGE COVENANT IS MADE PUBLICLY

Marriage is not merely a private arrangement into which a man and a woman enter secretly. Marriage involves the community. Biblical marriage covenants were made in full view of the community and family. For example, Boaz went to the city gate to transact the business that was necessary to acquire Ruth as his wife (Ruth 4:1–10): “The people who were in the court, and the elders, said, ‘We are witnesses’” (4:11). Other biblical weddings are celebrated with a public feast (Gen. 29:22; Matt. 22:2; John 2:1; Rev. 19:7). Weddings are public events in our culture as well. Those in the congregation are not solely spectators. Family and friends serve as witnesses to the covenant promises made by the man and the woman. If, at some time in the future, one or both parties to the covenant are tempted to abandon the marriage or to fail to keep their covenant obligations, the witnesses will hold them accountable.

Marriages are public affairs because healthy marriages are necessary for the well-being of the extended family and for the welfare of society as a whole. When marriages are strong, a culture thrives, but when marriage as an institution is weakened, the overall community is in trouble.

## THE TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE VOWS SUM UP THE COVENANTAL OBLIGATIONS OF MARRIAGE

As some couples approach marriage, they don’t seem to care enough about their vows. Instead, they are more concerned about the catering, the flowers, and the bridesmaids’ dresses. But the vows are what will remain long after the cake has been eaten, the flowers have wilted, and the dresses are in mothballs. Many couples unthinkingly repeat the traditional vows much as they would blindly click acceptance of the terms and conditions for using a piece of software. A couple should carefully choose and study their marriage vows, which are among the most important words they will ever speak. They should also recognize that they will be in continual need of grace both from God and from each other when they fall short of God’s perfect

## What Is Marriage?

standard. We can begin to fulfill God's design for marriage only through our union with Christ, who sends us his Spirit to help us (John 15:5; Phil. 4:13).

I, *N*, take you, *N*,  
to be my wife/husband,  
to have and to hold  
from this day forward;  
for better, for worse,  
for richer, for poorer,  
in sickness and in health,  
to love and to cherish,  
till death us do part;  
according to God's holy law.  
In the presence of God I make this vow.<sup>5</sup>

### SUMMARY

Marriage is not a human invention or convenience that can evolve or be discarded as society changes. At creation, God established marriage as a lifelong covenant of companionship between a man and a woman. A proper view of marriage is essential for the good of each spouse, for the proper structure of the family, for the training of children, and for the benefit of society as a whole.

### — QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION —

1. How might one's views of creation versus evolution affect one's view of marriage?
2. What are the implications of the viewpoint that the institution of marriage is evolving and can be redefined as culture changes?

5. <http://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/pastoral/marriage/marriage.aspx>.

## Marriage

3. What are the basic elements of the marriage covenant that God established from creation?
4. How could the proper understanding of the nature of marriage help a couple to enjoy a more successful marriage?
5. What is the primary purpose of marriage?

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**JIM NEWHEISER** is director of the Christian Counseling program and associate professor of practical theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte.

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