

That Paper is Not What Makes Marriage a Marriage

Song of Solomon 3:11 “Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and gaze on King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding and on the day of his gladness in heart.”

Weddings are fun, joyous and full of memories. Mothers cry. Photos are taken. Friends who haven't seen each other in years, come and spend time together. Weddings are hugs and kisses. Weddings are uniting a young man and a young woman to a promise and a pledge made before God. Weddings are God joining together. It is important to remind ourselves of the value of marriage. Marriage is God's idea, not man's. Marriage is something that God is involved in. Marriage is about promises, hope and the future that includes God.

This passage from the Song of Solomon talks about the king's wedding day. Solomon was getting married. This was to be a festive day. I expect much was spent since it was a king getting married. Why all the trouble? Why all the bother? Why all the expense? Why have a wedding? Some wonder. Some don't see the need. Our society is moving quickly to being a secular land. Some question marriage. Others want to redefine marriage. Some think the only criteria is love. As long as there is love, it doesn't matter who gets married. Some look at marriage as nothing more than a piece of paper. “It doesn't take a piece of paper to get married,” some decry. Others proudly boast, “I'm just as married without a marriage license as the couple who has the marriage license.” All of that talk is a bunch of hooley. It comes from those who are guilty of living in sin and they want to be legitimate, recognized and have the same things as those who are legally married. Living together unmarried is not the same as living together married. There is more to it than a piece of paper, and that piece of paper is what makes it right. It's right, because God makes it right.

God defines marriage, not man. God is in the position to do that, we are not. Does it make a difference when you are sitting inside an airplane, if the pilot has a license or not? Suppose he proudly says, “I can fly this thing just like any licensed pilot. It's only a piece of paper. I don't need a piece of paper to fly this.” I'm off the plane if I hear that. Suppose you're lying on a bed in an operating room, awaiting your surgery and you hear the surgeon boast that he is not licensed. “It's only a piece of paper. I can operate on someone without that.” Don't know about you, but I'm off that table and running down the hall if I hear that. That piece of paper does matter.

But it's more than the piece of paper, it's what God's word says. Marriage is holy. Marriage is right. There is a line, on one side, things are right. On the other side, things are wrong. From a distance, the two may look the same. But they are not. A couple living together may be neighbors to a couple who are married. Both couples live in a house, take care of their place, go to work, and share life. The couple living together are in sin and the married couple is not. It's that simple.

MARRIAGE THROUGH THE AGES

Marriage is much more than a piece of paper. It is a promise, to each other and to God. It is more than a ceremony, rings and cake. It is being joined by God and having a commitment forever with each other. The couple living together has no promises that they are bound to. They have no vows that they must keep. When they tire of each other, one will move out. When someone more exciting is found, one will be dumped for the new person. There is nothing beyond themselves that is holding the relationship together. In a marriage, especially, a marriage between believers in God, there is something beyond themselves. There is something bigger than the two of them that keeps them together. They made a promise and a pledge of their hearts to stay committed to each other. Their word, the most sacred thing they have to offer, will keep them together when they tire of each other. Their promise will keep them loyal when someone better comes along. They made a promise. For better or worse...in sickness and in health...in riches or poverty...until death we part. Those aren't multiple choices. It's not, "I'll take the health and riches...but leave the sickness and poverty." It is a promise that no matter what happens and no matter where life takes us, you can count on me. I will be there. I will always be there. I promise. It is a vow. It is a spoken trust.

Few words are more precious than vows. Few words are more important than our vows. Few words are more binding than our vows. They belong to us. They are what makes a marriage, marriage. It's hard to think of any other promise that is that serious and that lasting. We don't make that promise when we take a new job. We don't promise to stay with that company no matter what, until we die. No, we don't. We don't make that promise to an organization. The mafia or the Masons might, but those are things we don't want to mess with. Marriage is about promises kept. It is about loyalty to God. It is about the other person.

Marriage is more than a piece of paper, it is the uniting of the hearts. It is the promise that we made and a promise that we keep. Marriage is keeping your word. Keeping your word after the ceremony. Keeping your word when the other person is cranky, stressed and irritable. Keeping your word when you are tired of keeping your word. Keeping your word. For the Christian couple, it's much more than just keeping your word, it's improving upon your word. It's making the relationship stronger, richer, and better through the years. It's not letting the fires of love die out. It's more than just staying together because we have to, it's staying together because we want to. It's saying "If I could do it all over, I'd do it all again!"

There are sweet moments in marriage. There are special times in marriage. There are many everyday common days in marriage. There's a lot of "what do you want for dinner tonight," kind of days. There are exciting times. There are stressful times. The bills. The babies. The pressures. Those things stretch a marriage. There are trips to the emergency rooms. There are long walks home from the cemetery. That's life. It has ups and downs and a lot of uneventful common days. Marriage is sharing all of those. It's more than fireworks, and thrills. It's just being there and knowing that the person you are with has promised their heart to you forever. Marriage is only a piece of paper? Certainly not. That paper is necessary, but that paper is not what makes marriage, a marriage. - **Roger Shouse**