

MARRIAGE at SCCC

Principles and Practice of Holy Matrimony

Marriage is God's first "institution" in creation. He created Adam, and created Eve out of Adam to be a companion, helper, and partner. She was created "like" Adam; appropriately similar and appropriately different from him, and the two of them became "one flesh" according to Genesis 2:24. Their union was part of the creation that God called "good" in Genesis 1:31.

Throughout the Old Testament, God protected marriage. Even before the Law was given to Moses, people who knew God took the future marriage of their children very seriously. Abraham gave his servant specific instructions regarding where to find a wife for his son Isaac (Genesis 24:1-9); Rebekah and Isaac also did their best to make sure that Jacob would seek an appropriate wife (Genesis 27:46-28:4).

When the Law was given, it contained extensive regulations concerning sexuality and marriage, and marital conduct was explicitly linked to a man's eligibility to serve before the Lord as a priest. Many of the regulations governing sexuality refer to sexual acts as "uncovering the nakedness" of another person. Doing this inappropriately- "uncovering the nakedness" of anyone but one's spouse was (and continues to be) shameful and inappropriate both for the one who uncovers and for the one who is uncovered. It is also a violation and an insult against the spouse of the person who has been "uncovered," in that what belonged exclusively to the spouse has been given to another person.

Marriage was the only permitted context for sexual expression, and a violation of this law brought the most serious consequences, the least of which (between a man and a woman who was not already married or "betrothed") was an obligation to marry. The sentence for adultery was death (by stoning) of both parties. While divorce was permitted under certain circumstances, Malachi 2:16 says "*For I hate divorce,' says the Lord, the God of Israel...*" Jesus, speaking in Matthew 19:3-9, says that the provision in the Law for divorce was "*Because of your hardness of heart...*"

Under the New Covenant, God's intention for marriage began to be more fully revealed. First, several passages, most related to qualifications for leadership in the Church, indicate that God's intention is that marriage be between one man and one woman. Where polygamy (a man married to more than one wife) appears to have been implicitly permitted in the Old Testament, the New Testament eliminates this option. Second, marriage is spoken of as representative of the permanent covenant relationship between Christ and the Church, both in the husband's sacrificial love for his wife and the wife's respectful submission to her husband. Every Christian couple, when they enter into marriage, has the opportunity to represent this relationship to the world. What a privilege... what a responsibility!

Why marry in the church?

We believe that the church is a covenant community in which God's people live out His "one-another" commands: love, bear with, encourage, exhort, consider, etc. As a primary source of spiritual fellowship and nourishment as well as spiritual authority, the church is significantly responsible for the growth and maturity of its members. Part of this responsibility

is to ensure that when individuals enter into the covenant of marriage, they do so with the spiritual blessing of the church and all the practical resources of counsel and support that such a community offers. For this reason, we can refer to a marriage undertaken with the sanction of the Church as “Holy Matrimony.” In contrast, a couple entering marriage exclusively as a “legal” and “civil” matter does not enjoy these advantages, and will likely struggle to honor God in a marriage that has been stripped of its proper spiritual context.

Though civil government has the legal authority to “marry” people, this authority does not extend into the spiritual realm and thus it cannot represent God in the creation of a spiritual covenant. The Church is given the power from civil governments to join people in marriage, but also represents God’s authority to join people spiritually, and to hold them accountable to their covenant vows. While it is possible to honor God in a marriage initiated outside of the church, we feel strongly that Christians should take their marriage vows within a spiritual community and under the auspices of spiritual authority and leadership.

What is “unequal yoking” and why does the Bible prohibit it?

This way of expressing the suitability of a marriage partner is drawn from 2 Corinthians 6:14-16, in which the apostle Paul is speaking to the Corinthians regarding their reconciliation to God and holy living. The passage says *“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?”* In the context of marriage, we understand this to mean that a Christian should not marry an unbeliever, for the very reasons that the passage above makes clear. Since a Christian is a “child of light” (Ephesians 5:8) the believer cannot become truly one with a person who, as an unbeliever, is still “in the dark” spiritually. In the terms of Genesis 2:18, God’s expressed intention for marriage was that the partners be “suitable” (NIV, NASB) or “comparable” (NKJV) to each other. A non-Christian is simply not “suitable” or “comparable” as a marriage partner for a Christian; in fact there are even Christians who are not well suited to be married to each other. For this reason it is essential for every couple considering marriage to spend time sharing expectations, concerns, plans, roles, strengths, weaknesses; in individual prayer regarding their future together; and in submission to the counsel of mature, Spirit-directed church leaders. While it may be painful, the decision not to marry leaves both individuals free to pursue the Lord’s best for them.

While a Christian is not permitted to enter into marriage with a non-Christian, and the Church cannot biblically endorse such a marriage, Paul the apostle recognizes the possibility that one individual of a married couple, having been married when both were unbelievers, may become a Christian. In 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 he writes:

... If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband... But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

In other words, the marriage is viable and biblically valid if the unbelieving spouse is willing to continue it and faithfully honor their marriage covenant. However, if the unbelieving spouse is unfaithful or initiates a divorce, the believer is permitted to carry out the divorce.

What are the biblical principles covering divorce and remarriage?

Scripture makes it quite clear that marriage is permanent, in that God says in Malachi 2:16 “*For I hate divorce,” says the Lord, the God of Israel...*” Also, Matthew 5:32, Matthew 19:5-9, and Mark 10:4-12 all quote Jesus clearly affirming the permanence of marriage while specifying the circumstances under which divorce is permissible. In light of these passages, “remarriage” is implicitly an abnormal circumstance. However, the Bible does address the issue of remarriage. In the case of the death of their spouse, a Christian is free to marry again (Romans 7:2-3, 1 Corinthians 7:39), provided the marriage is “in the Lord,” i.e., to another Christian. Also, as the section above mentions, if one partner in a marriage becomes a Christian and the unbelieving spouse is unfaithful or initiates a divorce, the believer may carry through with a divorce and is then free to remarry (1 Corinthians 7:12-16). The Bible also allows for divorce if one spouse (Christian or non-Christian) is unfaithful, and in this case the innocent spouse is free to remarry (Matthew 19:9). These are the only acceptable grounds for remarriage, in other cases 1 Corinthians 7:11 says that a woman who “departs” from her husband is either to remain unmarried or be reconciled to him; we hold this principle to apply identically to a man.

Some examples of marriage from the Bible:

These examples of marriage in the Bible, some good and some bad, show the profound influence that husbands and wives have on each other, as well as the tremendous potential to bring either glory or dishonor to the Kingdom of God.

Made for Each Other: Adam and Eve – Genesis 2:21-25, Genesis 3:1-19. “*God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good...*” yet even in view of a perfect creation He said “It is not good that man should be alone...” He formed Eve out of Adam’s “rib” or “side” to be a suitable, comparable helper and partner for him. The bible notes that the man and woman were naked together, and were not ashamed. This is a model both for sexual expression and emotional and spiritual transparency within a marriage. When Eve was deceived by the serpent, Adam participated in this sin as well, and together they brought sin upon all mankind. Though both Adam and Eve received a curse from God, He prepared a sacrifice for them and covered their “public” nakedness with clothing. God preserved their union as “one flesh” and blessed them with offspring.

Beauty and the Beast: Abigail and Nabal - 1 Samuel 25:2-42. Abigail is described as “*a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance*” married to a man who is “*harsh and evil in his doings.*” Despite this, she saved her husband from being destroyed by David (later the King of Israel, author of many Psalms, from whose ancestry Jesus was born) and his men, who meant to kill him because Nabal had treated them very rudely. Through her wisdom and quick thinking, she convinced David to turn back from his vengeance. When Nabal learned of his close brush with death, he became “*like a stone*” and died 10 days later. David so prized her beauty and the

wisdom that Abigail demonstrated in their brief meeting that he sent for her and she became his wife.

Partners in Evil: Ahab and Jezebel – *1 Kings 16:29-33, 1 Kings 18:4, 1 Kings 21:1-26* Ahab and Jezebel were probably the most wicked couple in the Bible. Ahab, as king of Israel, led the nation into the worship of demonic idols, urged on by his wife Jezebel. She was a schemer and an evil woman, who on one occasion slaughtered all the prophets of the Lord she could find, though Obadiah hid 100 of them in a cave and thus saved their lives. When Ahab desired a vineyard and its highly respected owner refused to sell it to him, Jezebel conspired to have “scoundrels” falsely accuse the man of blasphemy, and he was stoned to death. When Ahab went to take possession of the vineyard, the prophet Elijah met him there and proclaimed the Lord’s judgement on both of them- Ahab’s blood was licked up by dogs in a place where prostitutes washed themselves, and Jezebel’s body was eaten by dogs. 1 Kings 21:25 sums up their lives: *“But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up”*

Lying Together: Ananias and Sapphira – *Acts 5:1-11* During the early days of the church, when the first believers were selling their possessions to live more closely in community and provide for each other’s needs, this couple sold a piece of land that they owned. They brought some of the proceeds from the land and presented it to the apostles, apparently hoping that they would be perceived as generous, when in fact they had reserved part of the money for themselves. The Holy Spirit made Peter aware of their plan, and when Peter told Ananias he had lied to God, Ananias fell down dead. Sapphira came in three hours later, unaware of what had happened, and repeated the lie; she too fell down and died. God used this couple’s deception to teach the early church a powerful lesson about integrity and about the real-life power of the Holy Spirit.

Minstering Togther: Priscilla and Aquila - *Acts 18, Romans 16:3, 1 Corinthians 16:19*. In Acts 18 these godly Roman exiles hosted the apostle Paul, who worked with them in their tentmaking business during the week and spoke in the Corinthian synagogue each Sabbath. They were hospitable to Paul, and then traveled with him to Ephesus where they ministered together to Apollos, who was a powerful and zealous preacher though he had not yet learned about Jesus. Romans 16:3 indicates that they ministered to the Roman church for some time. Their ministry affected not only the church in Rome, but gave Paul cause to express thanks to them from “all the churches of the Gentiles.” In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church he mentions them as the hosts of an Ephesian house church. What a powerful example of service and ministry!

Getting married at Steele Creek Church of Charlotte

It should be clear at this point that marriage is something we take seriously at SCCC. We count it a privilege to become a part of what God does in bringing two people to the point of joining their lives and hearts in holy matrimony. We are happy to assist in this process, under the following circumstances:

- 1) Both of the couple are Christians, having placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation and publicly testified to their new life in Him by being water-baptized.
- 2) At least one of the couple is a covenant member of Steele Creek Church of Charlotte, and is committed to the vision and purpose of the church.
- 3) The couple commits to active membership in a local church, either at SCCC or another church which believes and teaches according to Biblical truth and authority.
- 4) If either of the couple has been married previously, the dissolution of that marriage was according to biblical standards, and all genuine attempts at reconciliation and restoration have failed. Even when these attempts have failed, there must be forgiveness and repentance (where appropriate) on the part of the person requesting marriage at SCCC.
- 5) The couple completes a course of counseling in biblical principles for marriage (for example, "Biblical Portrait of Marriage") with an SCCC pastor. (Please note: Pastor Kelvin is unavailable to conduct counseling or ceremonies; he may be available to preside over a brief exchange of vows after a Sunday morning service.)
- 6) The couple agrees to be bound by biblical authority and principles in the conduct of their marriage and in the raising of any children they may have.
- 7) The couple agrees to fulfill all the practical requirements for the ceremony, according to SCCC policy, including wedding direction, music, use of PA and other equipment, cleanup and necessary maintenance.