

## Introduction

Throughout the history of the human race marriage has generally been the basic building block of society. Marriage between a man and a woman forms the beginning of a family. As children are born they are brought up in the love and security that comes from two people committed to each other and to each new arrival. When the children grow up, they too can form families of their own. The whole human race has developed in this way.

This book has been written because of the need for Christians to develop a biblical understanding of marriage. Even Christian couples have too often been married with little idea of what marriage entails or what the Bible teaches. Sometimes there has been very little understanding of the sexual aspect of marriage and this has caused distress and tension in the relationship. Nowadays, with the widespread influence of films and the internet, as well as books, the problem is often the opposite. From a young age many people are bombarded with all sorts of inappropriate

images and sexual practices. This makes it even more necessary for Christians to be guided and instructed from the Bible.

In different parts of the world differences about marriage have led to a diversity of customs. Some of these customs conflict with a Christian view; others are simply variations which can fit within it. Human sinful disobedience to God has always affected marriage. It is under particular pressures in the present day. This is mainly because of the spread of secularism—that is, a view of life that leaves God and his Word completely out of the picture. Such a view is widely expressed in books, films, newspapers and the internet.

This book, however, is based on the authority of the Bible as the inspired Word of God. In doing so it follows the example of our Saviour and Lord himself, Jesus Christ, who clearly endorsed the Old Testament as the Word of God (see John 10:35; Matthew 26:29–32; Luke 24:25–27,44). And it, is written for those who themselves believe in Jesus Christ and accept the Bible as God's Word. It does not attempt to interact with those who might want to take a different view.

For us to understand what marriage is meant to be, therefore, we have to look carefully at what the Bible tells us. This is where we find guidance for all matters of Christian belief and practice. The Bible, however, is a big book. Its history covers the whole period from creation to the time of the early Christian church. It also shows to us behaviour and practices that have arisen because of human sin. It is only when we have considered everything that the Bible has to say that we can set out in full what it teaches. For this reason we shall start with a brief introduction to marriage. This will then be discussed more fully and made clearer as the book proceeds.

A very brief definition of marriage would be this: marriage

is the union of a man and a woman. It is a union that has a purpose; that purpose is for those who are married to serve God by doing his will together. They are to live for his glory. They are to serve as stewards, cultivating, preserving and using wisely the resources of the good earth God has created. In doing this, they are to develop and use the abilities that God has given them. For this to continue into the future, children have to be born, nurtured and taught. Then, after their parents' death, they carry on the task of fulfilling God's will.

So the procreation of children and the ongoing life of the family is an essential part of the meaning of marriage. It was never intended by God simply to be an opportunity for two people to become absorbed in each other. Rather, a married couple first serves their own generation and then the generations to come through the family. All this will need to be considered in greater detail later. Some married couples, for example, are not able to have children. Mankind's fall into sin in the beginning (see Genesis 3) has affected every part of life. There are many factors arising from the fall that affect marriage.

The book is set out in this way. First we look at what the Bible says about marriage, considering a number of important passages from both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Brief comments are made on each passage. These comments give some help in understanding what is being said. They show how the passages build up our knowledge of the whole subject. Do not just agree with what is written in this book without giving proper thought to what the Bible actually says, as well as the explanation. Give time to thinking through what is being said. There are also many other places in the Bible that you can refer to.

Secondly, we consider a number of practical questions relating to marriage. This includes matters like singleness, polygamy and

divorce. There are problems that can arise where cultures are influenced by pagan or secular ideas. Modern life and the global influence of the mass media also mean that the same sort of problems and difficulties are arising across the world. We have to seek to live in a God-honouring way in the world as it is. Many differences of opinion among Christians about marriage go back to the pressures that they feel in their own situations. So do give careful thought to what is written here.

Finally, we consider marriage itself more closely; its blessings and its difficulties, its opportunities and its dangers, its challenges and what Christian responses should be. In many ways, this book only gives basic instruction. It is a primer, it points the way. Readers are encouraged to study the Bible carefully for themselves. Pastors and Christian leaders, in particular, need to gain a thorough understanding of all the aspects of this subject. They need to develop a thoughtful, caring, sympathetic approach as they minister to God's people.