

The DeGradation of Marriage

Goal of G6

To recover God's design for marriage that we might achieve God's purpose in our marriage.

Hard Questions

- Q. What are the purposes and goals that we believe about marriage?
- Q. Do we know what God's goals and God's purposes of marriage are?
- Q. Could it be possible that we are reaching for a goal that God does not have for us?
- Q. Are Christian marriages being helped by the abundance of marriage resources we have?
- Q. Could it be possible that in the history of the church today we have completely missed the point?
- Q. Is it the responsibility of the church to teach Christians God's design for marriage? If so, what would it tell us if the church missed the boat?

Are our Christian resources and efforts building for our marriages wings to fly, or are they giving us a shovel to dig ourselves into the ground? And if so, how is it possible that the very means we are using to strengthen our marriages are in reality promoting their destruction?

Are Christian Marriages Fairing Any Better Than the World?

"Facts are stubborn things." John Adams.

The Stubborn Facts of Marriage

George Barna conducted a survey of Christian marriage in 1999.

Variation in divorce rates by religion:

Religion	% have been divorced
Jews	30%
Born-again Christians	27%
Other Christians	24%
Atheists, Agnostics	21%

Barna report: Variation in divorce rates among Christian faith groups:

Denomination (in order of decreasing divorce rate)	% who have been divorced
Non-denominational (evangelical with no affiliation)	34%
Baptists	29%
Mainline Protestants	25%
Mormons	24%
Catholics	21%
Lutherans	21%

Suggested Causes for High Divorce Rates Among Protestant Christians

- 1. Low income and low education.**
- 2. Entering marriage younger**
- 3. Lack of Premarital Counselling.**
- 4. A lack of stigma placed on divorce.**

"I applaud the Catholics. I don't think we as Protestant evangelists have done nearly as well preparing people for marriage. And in the name of being loving and accepting, we have not placed the stigma on divorce that we should have."

-- Anthony Jordan, executive director of the Southern Baptist Convention in Oklahoma

- 5. An antiquated patriarchal system of marriage that suppresses women.**
- 6. Some mysterious factor in Protestant conservatism contributes to divorce.**
- 7. Poor Relationship Skills.**

"In the churches, people have a superstitious view that Christianity will keep them from divorce, but they are subject to the same problems as everyone else, and they include a lack of relationship skills. ...Just being born again is not a rabbit's foot."

--Donald Hughes, author of 'The Divorce Reality'.ⁱ

- 8. Misplaced and lofty expectations of marriage.**

"What brings people to divorce has so many more important factors than theology....I believe we expect more out of marriage than we use to."ⁱⁱ

-- Bart Grooms, pastoral counsellor for the Samaritan Counselling Center of Baptist Health System

- 9. Anti-Christian Culture.**
- 10. Poor Communication Skills.**

The Most Commonly Suggested Solutions

1. Producing more books, more seminars, more organizations.
2. Requiring premarital counselling
3. Teaching classes on values and relationships in public schools
4. Meditation for those considering divorce.
5. Available & affordable marriage counselling.

Barna rightly concludes --

"...the research also raises questions regarding the effectiveness of how churches minister to families. The ultimate responsibility for a marriage belongs to the husband and wife, but the high incidence of divorce within the Christian community challenges the idea that churches provide truly practical and life-changing support for marriages."

– George Barnaⁱⁱⁱ

Our Problem in a Nutshell

We have abandoned God's Word and God's design at the very foundation of marriage.

We desperately need a solid theology of marriage.

"—the only way out of our present cultural confusion is a return to a biblical vision of marriage and family."

--Al Mohler (A Christian Vision of Marriage and Family).

"The Judeo-Christian view of marriage...has to a significant extent been replaced with a set of values that prizes human rights, self-fulfillment, and pragmatic utility on an individual or societal level."

--Andreas Kostenberger, The Biblical Framework for Marriage.

The Bible is the greatest instruction manual on marriage.

"—most Christians are woefully unaware of the deep biblical, theological, and spiritual foundations for marriage and the family that are central to the Christian tradition."

--Al Mohler (A Christian Vision of Marriage and Family).

A Glorious Vision for Christian Marriage

Two Kingdom Marriage

A short walk through the marriage and family section of the local Christian bookstore easily demonstrates that modern Christians have a tremendous interest in the subject of marriage and the family. But this booming marriage business; books, conferences, seminars, marriage counselling, is really a sign of disease and not health. In a very real sense our interest is morbid – almost pathological. We are like a cancer patient, fervently searching alternative treatments, hoping against hope that something can be done. Desperate for happiness in our relationships and discontent with what God has given to us, we are desperate for the experts to show us the way out. And what are we finding, my dear friends, from the experts of our day? What we're finding is a fascination with techniques, formulas, methodologies, various paint by number approaches to living in a family, that on the one hand ignore the Bible altogether, or more commonly, and far more disturbing to me, use the Bible to arrive at conclusions that have little, if any, real relationship to the Spirit-intended meaning of the sacred text.

-- Arturo Azurdia

Christian Pyramid

Genesis Foundation: We cannot know anything about marriage, anything about Christian life; in fact, we cannot know anything about mankind without Genesis 1-3. Remove them and everything about mankind falls apart.

Gospel Restoration: Our greatest problems as mankind, and as marriages, are directly related to sin and to the curse. So, the Gospel is a requirement for marriage. You cannot have any meaningful discussion about marriage without a sound basis on the Gospel.

Grace Grown Godliness: The **inward** testimony of your marriage should be growth in Christ-likeness, now that sin is in the picture. Our greatest need is Christ-like growth. God has purposed that marriage to take on an active role in mutual discipleship. The marriage relationship is so unique that it's the place where you can experience accelerated spiritual growth.

Grace Abounding Marriage: The **outward** testimony of your marriage. As God works in you to produce Christian character, your marriage doesn't stop there and become a cul-de-sac. Your marriage is designed to be a freeway of grace that God can use in the lives of others. God designed your marriage to overflow with grace for others.

God Glorified: God is the goal of your marriage. We are made in the image of God. And in salvation we are restored to him through our marriage to Jesus Christ. The fact that our marriages are pictures of the final consummate eternal marriage gives our temporary marriages their meaning. Our marriage pictures the marriage of Christ and the Church, which brings all things in this world back under One Head – Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:7-10

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him..."

The greatest picture of that **uniting** is your marriage to your sinful spouse.

i Donald Hughes, "The Divorce Reality." 109 pages. This is an eBook written from a positive, conservative Christian. It can be purchased and then downloaded from Theatron Media at: www.Bookstore.TheatronMedia.com

ii <http://www.divorcereform.org/mel/rbaptisthigh.html>

iii "Christians are more likely to experience divorce than are non-Christians," Barna Research Group, 1999-DEC-21, at: <http://www.adherents.com/> Barna no longer has this report online. However, a review of the report is at: <http://www.adherents.com/>