

There are Different Types of Marriages in America, Understanding the Difference Could Save Yours

by Brad Miller

Some writers might start this article by saying, “Christian marriage is under attack,” or “We need to continue fighting for marriage.” I am convinced that both of those ideas, while well-intended, do little to help marriages to be any better. I also believe that understanding what marriage is, specifically *what marriage is to you*, is the critical piece that has been missing for far too long. Every marriage should have a purpose, but few spouses take the time to think about what the purpose of their marriage is.

Let’s start with a short history lesson to frame this conversation properly. Let’s look at the different lenses that we can look through to view marriage and how those lenses define marriage for us. I promise it will be worth your time.

CULTURAL

Culturally speaking, marriage is defined by whatever our culture says it is. That means whatever is popular, current, and has the loudest voice is the way that our culture defines marriage. This is the most fluid and broad definition of marriage discussed here. Also, I am not making any judgments here, just stating the way things are. If our culture says that a marriage must be a legal contract between a man and a woman, then that’s what it is. If our culture says marriage is between any two consenting adults, then that’s what it is. If our culture says that marriage can be between an adult and a minor, then that’s what it will be. And, if our culture ever decides that marriage can be a contract between a person and their dog, lizard, or pizza, then that is what it will be. In other words, the cultural version of the definition of marriage will keep changing.

LEGAL

The legal system in America has no need to take any interest whatsoever in the quality of a marriage. The legal system’s interests lie in interpreting and enforcing the contracts associated with the institution of marriage. Oh, and taxes too. Therefore, our legal system is concerned with neither the quality of marriage nor its purpose. Lawmakers don’t need to be concerned with whether or not you and your spouse are getting along, going on regular date nights, have intimacy struggles, or need marriage counseling, because this version of marriage is merely a contract.

SPIRITUAL

This is where things get profoundly interesting for me. The historical account in the Bible says that God created marriage for a *purpose*. He created marriage so that man would not be alone, so there would be a way for mankind to multiply, and so man and woman together in a marriage can be

a reflection of who God is. Wow, are you seeing how the spiritual definition of marriage is the polar opposite of either the legal or cultural definition? At this point, I am not trying to convince anyone to buy into one definition or another, I am merely acknowledging the elephant in the room – that there are major differences in how marriage is defined.

DIFFERENT PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT PURPOSES FOR MARRIAGE

Now back to where I started when I said that some will claim, “Christian marriage is under attack.” If someone agrees with the cultural view of the purpose of marriage, it does not necessarily mean they are attacking the spiritual view of marriage, but it does mean there are different groups of people who will acknowledge different purposes for marriage. So, what about you? What is the purpose of your marriage? Have you ever thought about that? Is it because you need a legal contract for filing taxes and to make things fair and equitable in the case of a divorce? Is it because you want the highest form of union that our culture allows? Or is it to honor God’s design and purpose for marriage?

Since there are multiple definitions of marriage, I have decided to choose my battles wisely. I simply cannot force others to agree with, or adopt my view of marriage. In my view, that would be futile. But, if another couple believes in the same purpose for marriage that Tami and I do, then we are highly skilled at helping that couple press into their purpose. If, on the other hand, a couple believes that a legal contract is the most important aspect of marriage, Tami and I would not be the best fit to help them. We realize that our skillset is uniquely fine-tuned to a subset of married people.

Marriage the way God intended it, makes the most sense to us. That version of marriage is meant to last a lifetime, but the cultural and legal versions don’t place as high a value there. Marriage and family are still the best foundation for a healthy and flourishing society, but don’t take our word for it. In the 1970s a study was started in which 131 children of divorce were studied over the course of 25 years, well into adulthood. That study was called [The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce](#). And before you dismiss this study as “too long ago to be relevant,” this, dear friends, is precisely how good science works — science takes time to study things and learn their outcomes so that we can make choices in the future and know the expected outcomes.

[O]nly seven of the 131 children from the original sample experienced a post-divorce home in which they had a good relationship with a step-parent. At this 25-year mark, only 60 percent had contracted for marriage. Two-thirds of the sample decided not to have children. Only 30 percent of the sample received financial support for college, as contrasted with 90 percent of children whose parents were not divorced, an indication of the nature and quality of their troubled relationships with their parents.

These findings make sense to both Tami and me for another reason as well since we are both children of divorce and struggled in some of these same areas. None of this is intended to shift blame to our parents for divorce, but rather to acknowledge that which we know to be true — that divorce, the dissolution of a marriage, has unintended and negative consequences on children and society.

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

God said that He created man and woman in His image (Genesis 1:26, 5:1). God created both man and woman to reflect different parts of His image so that, together, a married couple might be the most complete representation of God’s image in physical form on this earth. This is why God intended for them to “become one” in marriage, an idea that Jesus ratified in Matthew 19:4-6 when He was asked about divorce. Haven’t you read,” He replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined

together, let no one separate.”

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