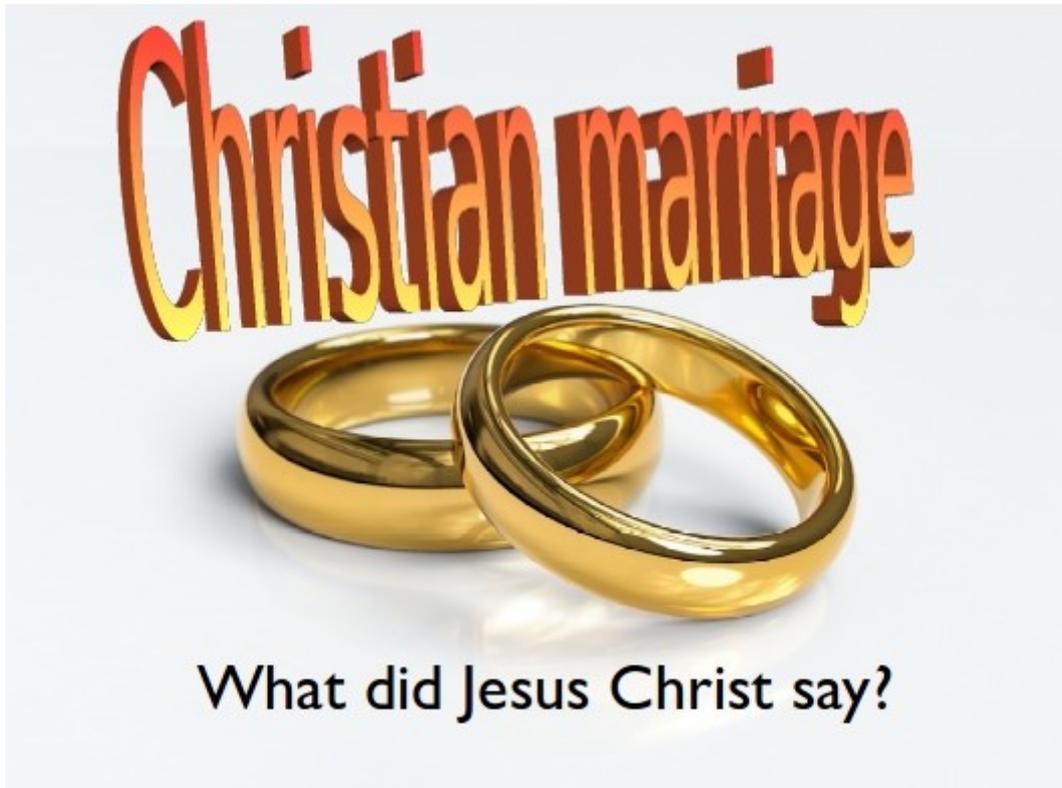


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To be a Christian means that we believe in Jesus Christ and so that is what the word “CHRISTian” means. So any Christian needs to see what Jesus Christ says.

The two Psalms commonly used at Church wedding services were either Psalm 67 or Psalm 128. Psalm 67 was used more often but it is worth us reminding ourselves of the words in Psalm 128.

Psalm 128

- ¹ Blessed are all who fear the Lord,
who walk in obedience to him.
- ² You will eat the fruit of your labor;
blessings and prosperity will be yours.
- ³ Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.
- ⁴ Yes, this will be the blessing
for the man who fears the Lord.
- ⁵ May the Lord bless you from Zion;
may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.
- ⁶ May you live to see your children’s children—
peace be on Israel.

In verse 3 it is “Your wife” that will be like a fruitful vine, and “Your children” that will be like olive shoots but an olive tree doesn't normally grow in a vineyard, and in verse 4 this will be the blessing for the “man who fears the Lord”. Therefore back in verse 3 this is about a man / husband and a woman / wife.

The reference to the wife being a fruitful vine and the reference to children being like olive shoots are in different paragraphs. When you visit a household you know whether it is a warm place instinctively and so the reference to fruitful vine is about the house and about the couple and is linked to the “man” fearing the Lord. This actually not only refers to the husband believing in God, but also to the woman, as the reference to “man” can be understood as human (and St Paul's letters deal with the question of what happens when a Christian marries a non-Christian). What is true is that whenever the fear of God is not present in a Christian household, however imperfectly, then it is noticeable and when a man or woman does not fear God then that incompleteness reflects onto the family around.

As Michael Wilcock wrote about this Psalm:

The fear of the Lord and his blessings are matters of daily life, to do with house and family, work and food just as they are also in Psalm 127.

In the Message translation of the Bible into modern language it is translated as “...*your household lush as a vineyard.*” which expresses the idea that the words are not about a building but about an environment.

So “fruitful” is about a warm, Christian atmosphere through that complementarity and togetherness, it is not necessarily about the blessing of children. So not all couples will have children but all couples can be fruitful. As soon as you see that it is about a fruitful household then you realise that such a couple is a real blessing to the whole community. This also reminds us that marriage is something that is worth constantly working on, as we each constantly change, because the ultimate reward is always there.

What is also clear in the Bible is that marriage is from God and not from the State.

Now Jesus did not come to change anything in the law and so there is a context for understanding the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. We read in Matthew chapter 19

³ *Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”*

⁴ *“Haven't you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’*

⁵ *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’?*

⁶ *So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”*

It is true that the Pharisees were trying to nit-pick about divorce. Jesus Christ stopped them in their tracks by reminding them and telling them what marriage actually is.

So Jesus Christ reminds the Pharisees that from the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and then says:

'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.

This reminds us that Jesus is referencing the Bible from the very beginning (i.e. the book of Genesis) showing that the intention is to be together always, and even if it doesn't quite always work it is, nonetheless, the intention.

So in verse 6 it is about what "God has joined together" (i.e. not the State but God). It is also Jesus Christ telling us that marriage is between a man and a woman and it is NOT about the true meaning of patriarchy at all. Patriarchy was about the man / the father being in charge of a full household of not only their own family but also the families of their children even though the children had grown up. That is actual patriarchy but Jesus Christ says that "... For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife...". Jesus Christ is explicitly saying that a man will leave his Father to become a new family of a man and a woman together and so Jesus does NOT include the true meaning of patriarchy in marriage at all. Jesus Christ is not supporting marriage as patriarchal. Jesus Christ instead supports marriage being God given and marriage making new Christian households.

The words you hear in the marriage service in Church is that "...what God has joined together let nobody separate". You can see these are the words we are told by Jesus Christ himself in Matthew chapter 9 at verse 6 and that is why the marriage service is often referred to as being as our Lord Jesus Christ commanded.

The phrase "God is love" does not appear in the Gospels. In the letter 1 John chapter 4 at verse 8 it says:

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

But love in this verse is NOT "Eros" (sexual love) but "Agape" (caring love). So whoever does not show caring love does not know God, because God is caring love.

Marriage is from God is what our Lord Jesus Christ tells us. Jesus does not mislead us by referring to the same idea as we find in 1 John 4 when that particular idea is not directly about marriage at all.

Christian marriage is God given. "Fruitful" is about a warm, Christian atmosphere in the house, it is not necessarily about the blessing of children. So not all couples will have children but all couples can be fruitful. This also reminds us that marriage is something that is worth constantly working on as we each constantly change because the ultimate reward is always there.

June 2019

Each week in the words of the Gloria we end by joining together with the words:

For You alone are the Holy One,
You alone are the Lord,
You alone are the Most High,

Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

This emphasises the importance of what Jesus Christ says to all Christians.