



**Universal Foundations for Human Rights:
A Dialogue in Genesis**

Marriage may not have the same urgency as other matters that make up the agenda of the Security Council, but its importance may supersede the current crises. The security of our world and the stability of our society—our neighborhoods, schools, nations and regions—can be deeply affected by the stability of our homes. Article 16 of the UDHR concluded 60 years ago that “the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.” Nevertheless, culture is not static and marriage is increasingly challenged and abused. It is therefore pertinent to discover its universal meaning and purpose.

First, it is imperative to state that marriage is God’s idea. It was instituted by God in the Garden; it was endorsed and adorned by Jesus when he attended the wedding at Cana and performed his first miracle; and it symbolizes the mystical union of Jesus and His church, the “bride of Christ.”

Marriage is referenced in the very first chapter of the Bible and defined in Genesis 2:24: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” To better understand marriage, it is important to consider the purpose of this divine institution:

1. *Reflect the image of God.* All are created in the image of God, but in marriage there is a unique opportunity to reflect the unseen love, grace and forgiveness of God through the visible relationship between two who are committed to God and to each other.
2. *Multiply a godly legacy through procreation and instruction.* Multiplication is both a physical and a spiritual responsibility. It involves bearing children and training them in the admonition of the Lord.
3. *Complete each other in oneness.* When a man and his wife become one, it is a union of more than their physical bodies. It is the oneness of two human beings, at the deepest levels of vulnerability and acceptance.

Article 16 of the UDHR affirms that “men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family.” By using the term “men and women” could this article be interpreted as endorsing polygamy or same sex marriage? One might argue that “gender” would have been included in the list along with “race, nationality or religion” if the authors were assuming anything other than the marriage of men with women, especially since this was not an issue on the world agenda 60 years ago. Polygamy, on the other hand, is not directly addressed.

In a world where marriage is being redefined, where it is considered unnecessary, or where it is so flippantly dissolved, Matthew Spalding of The Heritage Foundation says, “We should be talking about how to *strengthen* marriage. And the preservation in law of marriage as a man and a woman is a necessary condition for the renewal of the institution of marriage in our [American] culture. We should all be disturbed by the ease with which some are willing to throw away thousands of years of experience, the laws and customs of every society, the beliefs of every major religious tradition, all for the sake of a social experiment.” Hebrews 13:4 adds, “Marriage should be honored by all.”

When Mother Teresa received the Nobel peace prize in 1979, she was asked, “What can we do to promote world peace?” She did not suggest greater devotion to work, nor sacrificial efforts in service of the government. Her profoundly simple reply was: “Go home and love your family.”

1. **Research the primary sources related to marriage in the Bible.** Use the following source material to establish specific principles of a biblical view of marriage. Write down the implications of the concept or phrase that is given or any others which you may observe in the passage.

SOURCE	IMPLICATIONS of the CONCEPT or PHRASE
Genesis 1:27	Image of God Male and female
Genesis 2:18	Alone Helper suitable
Genesis 2:20b-22	God brought Eve to Adam
Genesis 2:24-25	Leave Be united Man and wife One flesh Naked No shame
Genesis 1:28	Blessed Be fruitful Subdue
Matthew 19:3-6	No longer two God has joined together Let man not separate

2. **Marriage defined.** Now combine the implications above to create a Biblical definition of marriage.
3. **Purpose of marriage.** We have already seen several of God’s intended purposes of marriage: to reflect His image, to multiply a godly legacy through procreation, to mutually complete each other in oneness. Read Ephesians 5:32-33 to get the main principle, then read the context: Ephesians 5:21-33. What further insights do you gain about the purpose of marriage?
4. **Complimentarity and differentiation in marriage.** What does Ephesians 5 contribute regarding the responsibilities of a husband and a wife *within* their marriage relationship? Are these universal or cultural?
5. **Current Issues.** In what ways does this definition of marriage inform the current dialogue on marriage and family?

*“This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife,
and the two are united into one.”*
(Genesis 2:25 NLT)