

was done to assure the child support, financial and inheritance status of any children born to such a couple, and afford some protection to the dependant spouse.)

Many times I have heard of couples that lived together for months or even years before deciding to “make it legal” and had a beautiful relationship that seemed like a truly good marriage ? until they made it legal and then they began to have trouble. Why? Was their decision to get married wrong? Not at all! Often the problem is that as long as they were not legally married, they realized that the other was free to leave at any time. In order to prevent that, each tried to please the other and keep him or her happy so that he or she would not want to leave. Once the marriage vows have been made and the certificate hung on the wall, the attitude often changes to one of, “Now you belong to me and I don’t have to make you happy any more. I can ‘do my own thing’ and you will still be there for me.” Or an even more blunt, “Now I own you, and I can control you.” Still others just feel the need to “be free to walk out whenever I want to,” and the lack of that freedom makes them feel under bondage.

Each of these is a form of selfishness on the part of one or both members of the couple. The answer is for each to continue to try to please the other. Don’t forget that “no-fault” divorces are relatively easy to get and fairly inexpensive in most states, so if the feeling of being “locked in now,” bothers you emotionally, just think of how easy it would be for your spouse to get a no-fault divorce and end it, and then try to keep that from happening.

Art and Mary were attracted to each other for different reasons. Mary was a lively beauty and all the fellows were after her. Nor was Mary oblivious to the following she had, and she had been playing one boy against another since childhood. By a petulant pout, she could get her own way with any of them. Virtue was only something to gain her own ends with , and the lucky fellow who was successful in gaining her favor kept his mouth shut in the hope of further opportunity which was often promised but seldom dispensed. She lived strictly for her own pleasure.

Art’s popularity came a little later in life, when he became the ace quarterback of the local high school team and all the girls began flocking to him. Mary was only one of the many vying for his favors. As a result, when Mary decided she really wanted him during their senior year, she felt she had to prove herself more

## CHAPTER TWO WHEN IS A COUPLE MARRIED?

**BY DEFINITION:** Marriage is the *legally sanctioned* joining together of one man and one woman into one single homogenous identity for the purpose of establishing a family unit.

When does this status take place? When the Clerk of Court issues the license? As they repeat their vows before the authorized minister or public official? At the moment the minister, judge, justice of the peace, notary public or other authorized public official says the words, “I now pronounce you man and wife.”? Does it take place at the moment they make a commitment to each other to share the rest of their lives together? Or when the couple have complied with the common law requirements of their state and thus achieve the status of being legally married? Just what is true marriage? How important is the Marriage Certificate to the “rightness” of the marriage?

From the wedding day, are the parties whose names appear on the marriage license truly man and wife? In the eyes of the law and of society, they are, but are the two yet one? When do they become one in their own eyes and the eyes of Almighty God? Are they yet, in fact, meeting the definition of marriage?

What is *your* definition of marriage? We’ve already dealt with the basics of marriage from the standpoint of idealism and romanticism, but now let’s get down to the “nitty-gritty” of it by breaking down the definition of what marriage is in the first paragraph of this chapter. Marriage – our subject; is – verb of being; the legally – it must be legally recognized, whether by license and certificate or by common law: if, for some reason the law will not recognize it, it is no marriage; sanctioned – approved, consented to, given the blessing of; joining together – when two objects, whether like or unlike are joined together, they lose their individual identities and become a part of the whole; of one man and one woman – not children, not two males or two females, but one mature male and one mature female regardless of age (Note that some teenagers mature both mentally and physically quite young, while some people in their twenties and thirties are still quite immature); into one – ceasing to be two separate persons each going separate ways; single – when viewed from the outside, they are but one being (*ie.* the Smiths, the Joneses, etc.); homogenous – a smooth mixture blended together, as milk and cream will separate unless homogenized; identity – sameness in all that constitutes the objective reality of a thing; for the purpose

of establishing a family unit.

When does all this joining take place? At what point do they become one? Is it that pronouncement of the words, “man and wife” by the minister or other official performing the ceremony that makes the magical transformation? Is it the first sexual relationship (whether before or after the ceremony)? Is it the conception of their first child? Or is it the point when they reach a near total mutual agreement? It is self-evident that the final question in this paragraph is the best answer. This is not to say that minor differences of opinion will never crop up, for no two have ever been that completely one, but their goals in life are the same, their first concern is no longer each for his or her own happiness, but for the happiness of the other. This point should by all means be reached before the marriage license is taken out, but should not include the sexual relationship before the marriage ceremony.

Joe and Sue were introduced by mutual friends, and at once felt attracted to each other. As they dated, they found out that they both preferred the same types of foods; preferred folk music over jazz, rock or classical music; were of compatible faith in God; liked the outdoor sports rather than dancing or the opera and both were faithful to attend church and didn’t care much for movies or nightclubs. Further, Joe found the slightly bucked teeth and one-sided grin that made Sue less than beautiful to most of his friends, were actually quite attractive to him. The embarrassing stutter and lisp which had heretofore proven to be a real handicap to Joe’s self-confidence and ability to ask for dates, exactly touched Sue’s inner self ? she loved it. An inner appeal gripped both of them, each for the other. They had fallen in love! The better they came to know each other, the more apparent it became that they were meant for a life together, so when Joe asked the all-important question, Sue was just waiting for the chance to say, “Yes”, and lost not a second in doing it.

Since both were in their final year at college, they wisely decided to wait until after graduation to take the big leap, but when Sue began wearing her engagement ring, some of her “less inhibited” companions in the girls dorm, knowing her church background, began urging her that it would now be “perfectly alright” for her to begin having sexual relations with Joe. Joe had never asked nor tried to take liberties, but Sue knew he had wanted her on several occasions. What should she do? On the one side was the fact that they were “almost married” and loved each other. Lots of others were doing it, so why not? On the other side was the fact that they

were not yet legally married, not in their own eyes, nor in God’s eyes.

About this time, two other cases helped to determine Sue’s decision. Her friend Betty had begun relations with Bill shortly after their engagement and, despite protective measures, found herself pregnant and unable to finish her last semester. The accompanying embarrassment and pressure from his parents caused Bill to declare he no longer loved Betty, and Betty, sensibly, didn’t force him to become an unwilling husband. But both of them had a price to pay, and not only that, but they were really a very well suited couple who, if they had only waited, might well have spent a lifetime of happiness together. Lost because of premarital sex. There was also the innocent baby now faced with life without one parent.

The other case had not a problem of pregnancy, but embarrassment. Ellen found that Jim was a talker and that details of their most intimate moments were being talked about among the fellows. She called off the engagement. After all, what right thinking girl wants every detail of her marriage made public by her husband?

Sue heeded the warnings of these two classmates and waited. Joe never knew of the temptation Sue had faced, and his own respect and love for her kept him in line. For these two, the day of their wedding was the all important time when they did become one.

Many other scenarios of possible tragedy could easily be given besides the two just mentioned, and yet, on the other hand, many young couples have “played with fire” and not gotten noticeably burnt. The point is that at best it is a risky gamble with only momentary pleasure stacked on the one side and a lifetime of heartache stacked on the other. For Sue and Joe, there was a very clear-cut, unforgettable moment when they became one. For others, there may be several separate steps.

What about living together before marriage? Many couples do get along for a long time, and even raise families without being legally married. This situation has now become fairly accepted in nearly all segments of the population except strict Bible churches. Many states have made it easy to become married by “common law” by saying that if you live together and refer to each other as husband and wife for a certain specified time, you are then legally married and must divorce if you separate even though you never went through the formality of getting married. (This supposedly

desirable to him than all the other girls. Afraid she was failing to achieve her objective, she played her ace and her father saw to it that Art married her.

Since both were selfish, childish and emotionally immature, they continued to play politics with each other. Blackmail and counter blackmail with never a dull moment. They had tired of the battle before their daughter was born, and Mary had gone home to mother. Were these two ever married? “Yes, of course,” some will quickly reply. Well, then, did they ever become one? “Of course,” these will snap back in huffy tones. “After all, they had a child.” But let me ask you, was there ever really any more one-ness or unity between Art and Mary than between either of them and the others either of them had had relations with? The answer is obvious.

The important thing to note here is that while both Art and Mary were hurt and bitter, the worst damage was done to their innocent daughter. And for all the “legality” of their marriage, the real fact is that it never really existed.

If a “husband” and “wife” begin tearing each other down from the very first, are they “one flesh”? If their purpose in getting married was merely to “get out on our own,” to get away from Mom and Dad’s control, have they become one by the vows they have taken? Legally and scripturally, are vows spoken with reservations really vows? If the lad have dealt unfairly with his lassie and his lassie’s Daddy enter the picture with shotgun in hand and fire in eye, are they twain one flesh either by virtue of their first relationship or by the superficial repeating of vows? Where and at what point does God enter the picture to join them together? Can we really say that God joins every couple that repeat wedding vows? Is God a party to mis-matches – would you say that he would yoke a donkey with a racehorse?

Marriage is not to be entered into lightly. If you are just now contemplating marriage, move with extreme care, for that step can either be the best or the worst moment of your life. Bear in mind that there is a vast difference between seeing a person a few hours a day in courtship and living with that person. Remember. For nearly everyone, there is a perfect match, but you’ll never make that match if you’re already mis-matched and out of circulation when that perfect match meets you! Be patient and the reward of the perfect match will pay off many times over.

Is “love” the only real reason for marriage? Do you think “society

marriages” arranged between families of “class” are wise? All these questions are asked to make you THINK. It is not my intention to preach my favorite theories, but to encourage you to make a reasonable study of marriage.

Bob and Ann got married over the protest of his parents and family that Ann was not of the “proper” background. Bob felt that Ann should not be judged by her family background, and that she would adjust under his “tender loving care.” Ann, keeping her own counsel, married Bob to get out of an unpleasant home situation.

Bob soon learned that Ann was clever in certain ways, but not really intelligent, and further, was such a poor cook that she almost had difficulty with boiling water! She was sloppy and slovenly in her personal habits, throwing her clothes about everywhere and not bothering to clean up. Bob, tending toward carelessness, but accustomed to living in a neat, tidy home, suddenly found a necessity to become the housekeeper if he wanted to have things like he was used to. Resentment and argument began before the end of their first week of marriage, and soon became outright fighting. They never could reach a point of agreement and gradually drifted apart to the point of unfaithfulness.

Did God join these two? Are they married in reality? They said their vows in church in front of fifty friends; does this make the ceremony more sure of God’s blessing than if it had been solemnized only before a Justice of the Peace?

A couple is married when they have become one in purpose, have vowed their legal vows, and have joined themselves in loving sexual union. All three steps are necessary in the order given. These steps can best be taken if both husband and wife love Jesus Christ most of all.