

## “Love and Marriage”

### Sermon – October 6, 2024 Stone Presbyterian Church

---

“Love and marriage, love and marriage

They go together like a horse and carriage

This I tell you, brother

You can't have one without the other.”

With apologies to Frank Sinatra—and to you for having to hear me sing—  
this isn't true. Well, at least until relatively recently.

Until the modern era with rise of a middle class and greater emphasis on individuality, marriage was more about security and survival. People needed a support system for food, clothing, and shelter. Thus, it was really families that were marrying as much as the individuals. And with no birth control casual sex had real consequences.

And from religious standpoint, the bible has little to say about marriage and nothing at all on marriage ceremonies. Until the fall of the Roman Empire, marriage was a civil affair for Christians. Then the church took over and few centuries later marriage was considered a sacrament as a symbol of the union between Christ and the Church.

But it wasn't until after the Reformation that the Catholic Church officially recognized marriage as a sacrament in 1563 at the Council of Trent.

And in all that it was the men calling the shots.

But let's talk briefly how it began.

As you heard, I told the story from Genesis 2 with some language different from you typically hear. That's because the Hebrew says God breathed into *adamah* to form *ha-adam*. To convey the semantics, you could say God breathed in a clump of “earth” to form the “earthling” or in the “humus” to form “the human.” Whereas later it says that *ishah*, woman or female, came from the side (not rib) of *ish*, man or male.

## **“Love and Marriage”**

### **Sermon – October 6, 2024 Stone Presbyterian Church**

---

And in the Hebrew she is a “fitting helper” for the human. “Fitting” in that she is a partner corresponding to him. She is not subservient or an assistant. The Hebrew word here for “helper” is that same one used for God when referring to him as a helper. And we certainly don’t think of God as an “assistant.”

Then we have the last verse, “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh”, which is interesting because the practice was actually the woman joining the man’s family. Thus, there is an implication that the man is to be devoted to his wife and that joining into one is actually a rejoining.

Now despite how this passage has been used and abused, you will note there is not one word on “marriage” (or “wedding” for that matter).

You should also note that the Israelites did not understand this text to require monogamy and there is no divine rebuke in subsequent texts that frame relationships between women and men in very different terms.

From the time of Abraham through Soloman men had multiple wives or concubines (basically lived-in mistresses or slaves the man had sex with).

Love had some part in relationships, such as Jacob loving Rachel enough to work another seven years marry her after being tricked into first marrying her sister Leah. But marriage was first the joining of families.

So divorce also had real consequences and was not trivial. The one place divorce is discussed in the Old Testament is in Deuteronomy 25:1-4.

## “Love and Marriage”

### Sermon – October 6, 2024 Stone Presbyterian Church

---

This is the passage that the Pharisees partially cite in today’s Gospel lesson from Mark 10 when they tell Jesus, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.”

In Jesus time the question is what were the criteria for divorce. The Rabbi Hillel school allowed a man to divorce his wife for almost anything that displeased him while the Rabbi Shammai school would only allow divorces in cases of adultery or mitigating circumstances that made it very difficult to maintain the marriage. The Pharisees didn’t really care which side Jesus chose because whichever he chose would offend the other segment of Jewish society and hurt his popularity and standing. Understand, a woman could not directly divorce her husband. She had to convince him to divorce her or get a male relative to petition for her. Imagine—a woman having all of the consequences of a legal action but none of the rights.

But lets read the whole four verses about divorce and not just the “proof text” the Pharisees cited. From Deuteronomy 25:1-4:

“Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her, so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house and goes off to become another man’s wife.

Then suppose the second man dislikes her, writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house (or the second man who married her dies): her first husband, who sent her away, is not permitted to take her again to be his wife after she has been

## “Love and Marriage”

### Sermon – October 6, 2024 Stone Presbyterian Church

---

defiled, for that would be abhorrent to the Lord, and you shall not bring guilt on the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession.”

First off, this passage is not placed in the section of the Deuteronomic law dealing with adultery, but in the section dealing with theft, as in property.

Also, it neither legislates divorce nor sanctions it. The actual legislation deals only with the prohibition of remarriage to the first husband after an intervening marriage.

Even by Jesus’ time this passage had been reduced to simply what constitutes “objectionable” for a man to divorce his wife in general, ignoring the rest of it.

Jesus comes down on the side of relationships and protecting the vulnerable, which includes the wife. Jesus reminds us that God intended for us to be in relationship to one another and that we take a commitment to each other seriously, not just for our sake but for others who are affected as well.

You could infer from the passage that one of the concerns were men perhaps divorcing their wives out of lust for another woman or lust after another woman’s family connections and wealth. All they needed was a little excuse.

And the wife they were divorcing had little recourse and often became destitute because she was blamed for the divorce—she did something objectionable. The power imbalance with the man and the consequences for the woman were enormous and unfair.

Admittedly, Jesus does add, “if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” The remarkable things about this

## “Love and Marriage”

### Sermon – October 6, 2024 Stone Presbyterian Church

---

statement, though, is Jesus elevates a woman to have equal rights to a man—and equal obligations.

The ideal is for the two people to become one, but we recognize that relationships, like people, are not ideal. Jesus wants our intimate relationships to be committed relationships where we truly love, honor, and respect each other. He wants us to deeply consider that commitment and the effect breaking that commitment would have on all the parties involved.

But he was not for obeying the law for the law’s sake, but for loving God and each other. Throughout the gospels Jesus always has compassion for those who are hurt, who are ignored, who are marginalized, which we can often say for those in unhealthy marriages and in the pain of divorce. God wants a man and a woman to be “fitting helpers.” But if they end up not fitting, they can’t help each other. But God still loves them.

For those who receive the kingdom of God like a child, he will take them up in his arms, lay his hands on them, and bless them.

In name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer.  
Amen.