

No Longer Two

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"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. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." (Matthew 19:4-6)

Jesus teaches that God made husband and wife to be an inseparable unit. Their union supercedes their relationship to their parents. This commitment and loyalty are to be for life. They are to be "*no longer two, but one.*" Jesus is referring to an intimate sharing of the whole of two people's lives, including the past, present, and future. Consider the implications of such oneness in marriage.

The Past

Sharing in the consequences of past sin. She committed sexual sin before they were married. He accepts her child as his. He made some greedy business decisions before he became a Christian. She is careful to budget as they dig out of a deep financial hole. When two people become one, they share the consequence of each other's past sins. Jesus' message would not support an attitude that says, "This is your fault. Why should I have to suffer for what you did?" Instead, it leads to an attitude that says: "We are both forgiven. As Jesus loved me enough to accept the consequences of my sin, so I will love you enough to share the consequences of your sin."

Sharing in the consequences of mistakes and errors in judgment. We all forget to do important things. We all make mistakes in judgment. What my husband forgot to do today, I could just as easily forget tomorrow. We need to extend grace immediately. We have committed ourselves to be one. He forgets to pay a bill, and she gets an angry phone call from the bill collector. She forgets to thaw the meat, and he eats a peanut butter sandwich. But no matter what happens, oneness leaves no room for blaming and being self-righteous. As a wife, I need to freely own up to my mistakes, while never withholding respect from my husband because of his.

The Present

Not making selfish decisions about our lives. In a marriage, we should never live like two singles, but we should accept the responsibility of living an intertwined life. If we did not want this, we should not have ever married. We cannot have "the best of both worlds." We chose marriage--therefore we must consider each other. When either partner lives and thinks independently, oneness is destroyed. When this pattern continues, "emotional divorce" is the result. When I feel insecure and helpless, I want to be a unit. I desperately need that acceptance and support. But when I feel confident and on top of things, sometimes I feel that being a unit curbs me. This is not only the sin of independence, but of tremendous self-centeredness. I want my husband to meet my emotional needs, and I do not care if his are met. This is not the oneness that Jesus talks about.

Encouraging each other's ministry. If in my marriage I begin to feel competitive, think that my ministry is more important, or feel that my husband's success diminishes my ministry, I have violated the oneness of life that Jesus expects. The result is that neither ministry will be all it can be. I will not grow because of competitive, self-centered thoughts, and he will not be as effective because of my lack of support. Oneness, however, will enrich our ministries, even as it enriches our marriage. At a recent picnic, we divided into teams and ran relays. One thing we learned during the three-legged race was that it did not matter how agile one partner might be, she had to adapt to the other one. If they did not synchronize movements, neither of them would go anywhere. How true that is in a Christian marriage as we try to go forward in our ministries.

The Future

Committing ourselves to each other no matter what happens. Life will bring some tough moments. Inevitably, we will have health problems and we will age. Oneness means saying to each other, "I am committed to you if you have a breast removed, or if you lose your hair, or if your face becomes wrinkled." Oneness brings a self-discipline and commitment that trains the eye and heart not to wander lustfully in search of a younger, more attractive body or face. My sister Emily and I saw the deep commitment our parents had to each other until death parted them. They faced poor health and trying times, but they stayed *together* for forty-eight years. They knew what Jesus meant by oneness.

Committing ourselves together to do God's will no matter what he asks. If half of the unit says, "Let's go," and the other half says, "Let's stay," the net result is inertia or stagnation. The norm in the Christian marriage should be a oneness that says, "We trust God." The norm in a Christian wife's life should be a submission that says, "I trust my husband because I trust God."

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The worst mistake any married person can make is to try to maintain independence. In the effort to be "yourself" and "do your own thing," you lose the oneness that is the essence of marriage.