

MARRIED IN GOD'S EYES

Adapted from Village Church

"We feel like we are already married in God's eyes."

Maybe you've heard that sentence or have said it yourself. It typically comes from the mouths of an engaged couple that are already living together and subsequently engaged in the physical benefits that such an arrangement entails.

On some level, it sounds right. Technically speaking, you're right on target in suggesting that, in God's eyes, marriage has more to do with the sex act than it does with church ceremonies or legal documents. According to Scripture, marriage is fundamentally a matter of a man and a woman becoming one flesh (Genesis 2:24). Sexual intercourse is central to that process. But is a sincere commitment synonymous with marriage and does it justify what would otherwise be deemed premarital sex? Is a heartfelt resolution to be faithful all that is needed to consider yourself married?

Here are four reasons why we believe such reasoning is unconvincing and ultimately unbiblical:

1. **Submission to Governmental Authority**

In some ways, this point is the weakest as laws tend to be fickle, but the Bible clearly states that all believers are to submit to their government in all things (Romans 13:1-7). The only exception is in cases that submission to authority requires us to disobey the greater law of God (Acts 4:19-20, 5:27-29).

In any and all areas where the laws of the land do not conflict with a biblical mandate, believers are expected to obey. If the government says, "*You must do A to be considered legally married,*" and A does not conflict with God's Word, we must submit. God does not need government registration to recognize a marriage. However, Christians cannot get married in the eyes of the government without getting a marriage license.

2. **The Importance of Ceremony**

No one can read the Bible and conclude that ceremonies are not important. They are far from it, as feasts and festivities saturate the Old Testament. These ceremonies told a story of God's redeeming love and covenant with his people. The calendar rhythms of these ceremonies served as a reminder of the commitments made between God and His people. Moving from the general theme of celebration to the particular celebration of marriage, we see biblical evidence of the importance of a marriage ceremony.



From the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-12) to the images of Christ's various parables (such as Matthew 22:1-14) to the ultimate feast in glory, the "marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:6-8), the Lord has revealed a pattern and picture of marriage and it consistently involves a celebratory and ceremonial element. Certainly, Jesus' presence at a wedding ceremony by no means indicates that God requires a wedding ceremony, but it does indicate that a wedding ceremony is acceptable in God's sight. Nearly every culture in the history of humanity has observed some kind of formal wedding ceremony. In every culture, there is an event, action, covenant, vow, or proclamation that is recognized as declaring a man and woman to be married.

Some have argued that Adam and Eve were married in God's eyes, but didn't have a legal ceremony. However, there are two points we'd like to suggest. First, the text does not rule out a ceremony taking place and arguments from silence in either direction are weak. Second, no one else was alive at that time, so let's not build our theology on this unique situation. If you are stranded on a desert island with the opposite gender and want to get married with no formal ceremony or license, we have no problem with that. As long as you view that marriage as permanently binding, even if you get rescued and then go through the proper legal and ecclesiastical channels.

3. **The Nature of a Covenant**

"I'm committed to God in my heart, so I don't need to be baptized."

Something is deeply and obviously wrong with this statement. It miscommunicates the nature of commitment and the purpose of baptism.

Marriage is more than just a commitment. It involves a covenant and covenants are always accompanied by signs and ceremonies. Rainbows, circumcision, the law, baptism, and communion were all signs given by God for His people at distinct times to represent the realities of His covenants.

Our culture has grown more and more casual. We have lost sight of the richness of pomp and circumstance. Formality for the sake of formality is a dead and empty religion, but custom and ceremony that communicate the importance of a reality is a good and right thing. And what relationship represents greater realities than marriage?

All covenants are marked by signs. Some give rings; others give cows. Some are more serious and somber, while others are less so. One may not partake of baptism or communion until they have put their faith and trust in Jesus. Likewise, one who has not entered into marriage through the appropriate means cannot rightly enjoy the blessings and gifts attached to the relationship.



4. **Mary and Joseph: A Pattern for Reflection**

Last, let us consider Mary and Joseph. They were betrothed to be married. Jewish betrothal was somewhat like modern engagement but much more legally binding. Mary and Joseph were legally, spiritually, and emotionally committed to each other. They even traveled to be registered for the census together (Luke 2:1-5). Their bond was so strong that it would have been considered “divorce” to break it (Mathew. 1:19).

But they were not sexually active (Matthew 1:18, 25; Luke 1:34). Here was a righteous couple legally pledged and formally bound to be married. They were registering and traveling together for a census. Yet, they were clearly refraining from sexual activity. Why? Because, although in some sense they were married (we might even say “*in God’s eyes*” since separation at this point would be considered divorce), in another sense they were not. Since they were not yet fundamentally married, they were not fully engaging in all the benefits of a marital relationship.

Conclusion

Marriage is an incredibly good gift given for God’s glory and humanity’s joy. It is far more than a ceremony, but that doesn’t mean that the ceremony is dispensable. Instead, the ceremony and accompanying signs are actually part of the way we portray the glory and beauty of marriage. Not only for itself, but as a portrait of the greater reality of the gospel.

If you are not yet married in the eyes of your church, family, or state, then do you really think that you are married in the eyes of God?

