

Biblical Guidelines for Choosing a Husband¹

After giving us strict admonishments about marriage in Ephesians 5:22-30, Paul says in verse 32: "This mystery is great, but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the Church." In other words, Christian marriage is intended to be a living illustration of the Bride and Christ. Therefore, God's teaching on the Bride and Christ should inform, shape and define our understanding of, and attitudes toward, marriage.

"We love because He first loved us." If marriage, and Christian marriage in particular, is an illustration of Christ and the Church, then the fact that Christ loved the Church first is part of the illustration. Thus the husband should be the initiator. The wife should be the responder. This is a very important principle. The husband, then, should be striving to sacrificially love, nourish, and cherish his wife. He must also take some responsibility for her sanctification, as Christ does. If he is her head, leading and guiding her, then he must also be looking out for her spiritual welfare. His headship must be of the same kind as Christ's: sacrificial, servant-hearted, and arising from love, not coercive, demanding, or self-serving. In response, the wife should be cooperating with this process (even if it is being done imperfectly, which it will be). She should respect (in the sense of "give honor to") and obey her husband as unto Christ (1Peter 3). When we wives deliberately surrender headship to our husbands, it lays a tremendous weight of responsibility on them that the Holy Spirit can use to conform them to the image of Christ. If we do not submit, this process will be seriously hindered.

This illustration (the Bride and Christ) does not work well in marriage when only one person is acting out their part.* It is like a dance. Someone has to lead and someone has to follow. Both partners have to be on the dance floor (committed to the program and engaged in the process), moving to the music (doing their best to listen to and follow the Holy Spirit's leading), connecting with each other (striving for true intimacy and fellowship), and playing their part (being obedient to God's instructions). Otherwise, though you will still be illustrating something, it will be a perversion of true marriage and a tool of the devil to denigrate Christianity and Christ. Do not deliberately enter into this!

In order for you to conform to this image of the Bride, you must do everything possible to see to it that you accept a mate who reflects the attitudes and behavior of your Lord. Otherwise you condemn yourself to a life of impossible contradictions, confusion, hopelessness, frustration, and probably considerable sin. In light of that, here are some principles to consider when choosing a mate. These are not exhaustive. You can probably think of many more yourself. But this will get you started.

1. Don't marry a man who *NEEDS* you, especially desperately. If he says, "I can't live without you," or words to that effect, run! Chances are he will resent you for his dependency and

¹ This title implies that you have a choice here. As women, we sometimes feel that we are at the mercy of the male contingent. We have to *wait* for someone to ask us. And that is true, for the most part. However, we do still have the option, at least in our culture and time, to say "no" when the suitor clearly is not suitable. (Or for any other reason.) In that sense, we do have the option to choose, and we must choose wisely, or doom ourselves to a sorry future, full of regret, missed opportunities, and a boatload of pain. The best of all possible courses is to surrender this area of our lives to God and allow Him to bring the appropriate mate at the appropriate time, without manipulating or controlling in our usual fashion. God has our best interest at heart, and He knows what we need in order to be sanctified. We can trust Him.

neediness and make your life a living hell. Christ does not need the Church in that way. Christ *loves* the Church and *wants* her in His life (we are “in Him”) so that He can bless her, giving to her out of His abundance. His desire for her is for *her* good. Yes, He wants a relationship that is based on mutual respect, admiration, friendship, loyalty, and good will. Yes, He wants a wife who is beautiful, pure, holy, radiant, Yes, He wants his wife to reflect well on Him. But He doesn’t *need* her to make life worth living or to distract Him from His pain. He wants her because they will accomplish more together than either of them will separately. A healthy man isn’t a needy man. Nor is a healthy woman a needy woman. She doesn’t need a man for emotional wholeness if Christ is her bridegroom. The same should be true of any potential husband.

This, however, does not mean he should take the attitude that he is doing you a favor by marrying you. It also does not mean he should not be “inter-dependent” with you.

Interdependence means that you both “need” each other, in a healthy sense, if certain tasks and roles are to be fulfilled. You recognize you can’t do it all. You’re not super woman. If he wants children, he needs a wife. If you want to stay home with your children and raise them, you need a husband. If either of you wants to engage in mutually satisfying, safe sex, you need a faithful mate. Needs are a reality, but *neediness* is not born of health.

2. Don’t marry a man all of whose hobbies, interests and activities you dislike, disrespect or don’t want to participate in. Men want a companion. Someone who will do things with them just to be with them. Does he love to fish? Better plan on fishing a lot. Or at least be willing to go now and then if he wants your company. Isn’t it interesting how often a woman will adopt her mate’s hobby, whether it’s snowboarding, skydiving, jet skiing, watching football, boating, etc., even before they’re married? How often do you see a man adopt a woman’s hobby? Woman was made for man, not man for woman. (Thus, the name “woman.”) Don’t expect him to view your interests as equally deserving of *his* participation. He was not created to complete you. He probably won’t want to go shopping, learn to quilt, or watch soaps with you. You were created to come alongside *him* and help him carry out his calling and mission in life. The Church is going to rule and reign with Christ. The Bride is not going to have her own separate “career” in heaven, or be calling the shots and ordering Jesus around. We will be assisting Christ under His Lordship, carrying out His commands and wishes, participating in His plans. Marriage pictures this quite well.
3. Don’t marry a man who has no vision for his future. And don’t marry a man whose vision you can’t support or be enthusiastic about. You are hitching yourself to his wagon and your role is to follow him. Make sure you like where he is heading. (This doesn’t mean he has to have it all figured out, a ten-year plan, but he should have a sense of what he wants his life to look like and be able to share that with you.) Christ has a vision and a plan and it’s glorious. And we are an integral part of it. This should also be true on the earthly plane. Your future mate should see you as indispensable to his greater success, but not in a pathetic, “needy” sense. He should

value you and see a role for you to play in his calling. This may, or may not, have anything to do with his "life work," career, or active participation in his ministry. It may mean as prayer support, a sounding board, an encourager, an asset to his good name and reputation and so on. But he should also value your unique contributions, gifts, and callings and encourage you to develop into the person God designed you to be. A man who thinks riding in his wagon is the best thing since sliced bread may not be too accommodating when you decide you'd like to walk alongside.

A man without a vision for his future may just be young. Or he may be without a firm root in himself. He may not know who he is. Hitching your wagon to a man who not only does not know where he's going, but also does not know who he is, is a dangerous gamble.

4. Don't marry a man who won't initiate, take risks or lead in the pursuit of love. "We love because He first loved us." Jesus is the great initiator, the leader of the church. He extends real, selfless love. He offers himself at the risk of rejection to all mankind. And yet that very real potential for rejection doesn't cause Him to abandon His plan of redemption. Nor does our rejection diminish Him in any way. A man who withholds love (affection, verbal affirmation, gifts, sharing his true feelings) for fear of rejection is not ready for marriage. The Church doesn't pursue Christ as He runs the other way. Christ has pursued the world and is always there, available, actively waiting with open arms for us to receive Him. But He isn't unconditional in His expectations. He has plighted His troth and He expects an answer. But He doesn't beg. Neither should a potential husband.
5. Don't marry a man who has nothing good to offer you or who expects you to settle for a life of cornflakes and corndogs. Jesus offers us eternal life, co-rulership, a lavish inheritance, love, forgiveness, joy, peace, wisdom. The Bride may be a pauper, but she isn't marrying a pauper. Jesus wants to give us everything He has and He has a lot. If a man has nothing to offer you and you have considerably more than he has (stability, income, possessions, future potential (i.e. inheritances, job advancement, etc.) you should beware. Unless he has strong contributions to make in the spiritual arena, or has a lot of emotional maturity (i.e., he is much superior in the non-material realm) then you should think twice about entering into such a union.

In days gone by, men used to be required to "pony up" something for the privilege of taking their intended bride. Terms like "a ten-cow wife" are reminiscent of that time. A responsible father would evaluate the prospective groom based on his wealth, or his potential wealth, before releasing his daughter and risking her future. Men would build their asset base in order to qualify for the most desirable virgins. Jesus went home to prepare a place for us. Your future groom should have the same attitude.

One exception: if you've both decided to abandon this world and pursue a life devoted to missions, serving the poor, or other charitable works, and are equally committed to this vision,

then obviously you cannot expect your groom to provide for you in the manner to which you may have become accustomed.

6. Don't marry a man you feel sorry for or pity, or because you don't want to hurt him. A man who inspires this kind of caretaking, mothering response is probably a user. The Bride will never pity Christ. The Bride chooses to marry Christ out of love, admiration, respect, devotion, and finally submission.
7. Don't marry a man you don't believe you can trust without reservation. Not that any human is infallible, or deserving of absolute trust or total adulation. But you should never marry someone about whom you have serious misgivings or questions regarding their character, their finances, their history, or their spiritual condition. Christ is totally trustworthy. And the Church must believe in such a way as to put her trust completely in Him. A good marriage should reflect this.
8. Don't marry a man who is less spiritually mature than you are. You will end up leading, by default. You can't follow someone who is behind you. If your husband is less mature than you are, you will not be able to trust his judgment, respect his opinions, value his input, honor his decisions, and put yourself in his care without anxiety, fear, resentment, and probably manipulation and sabotage creeping in. And you will very likely end up with an upside-down marriage, in which you will actually be the husband and he the wife. And he will resent you for it. He will become more and more childlike and emasculated, passive, and at the same time resistant to your leading. Or, you will spend your life praying for God to protect you from your husband's foolishness and begging Him to change things. This is a recipe for disaster. The Church will always look up to Christ and model herself after Him. She will always be able to trust His leadership.
9. Don't marry a man who is not submitted to the Father. Jesus only did what He saw the Father do. He only said what He heard the Father say. He did not *take* the throne. He was given the throne. He walked in complete obedience. This should be your future husband's highest priority as well. God must be first in his life. That is your best guarantee that he will never abuse you, abandon you, demean you, or emotionally detach from you. If he is abiding in Christ, He will obey the Father.
10. Don't marry a man you don't love with all your heart above every other suitor. Your husband represents your Lord. He wants this from you, just as Christ does. The Church must love Christ from the heart, and with all the soul, mind and strength and this will evidence in spiritual fruit, obedience when convicted, and intentional effort to please Him. Idolatry is not acceptable. Divided hearts are not acceptable. God is not mocked. (A cautionary note here: some people do not know what love is. They equate it with sexual attraction, or emotional neediness. That is not love. That is infatuation *or* dependency. Love is born of respect, admiration, mutual

good will, friendship, and physical attraction. It is not two people using each other up to get through this scary life.)

11. Don't marry a man you can't give yourself to fully and without reservation. You cannot become one with someone when you are withholding parts of yourself, not fully committing all that you are and all that you have to the union. Any holding back will resurface later as disloyalty, and misgivings about the marriage itself. When temptation comes, you will be a ripe candidate for adultery. Jesus has given Himself fully to us. He requires the same in return. No half-baked commitment will do. The Church must be His in mind, heart, body, emotions and will. Nothing can be held back. A double-minded heart is a divided heart. And a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. Such a marriage is broken before it begins.
12. Don't marry a man who is cruel, critical, demeaning, rude, hostile, abandoning, manipulative, unaffectionate, rageful, impatient, lazy, demanding, or abusive in any other way. This is not love, See 1 Cor. 13. This is emotional suicide and you should recognize it as such, and run as fast as you can in the other direction. Jesus is none of these things. He is patient, kind, loving, honest, affirming, edifying. He builds you up. So should your husband.
13. Don't marry a man who will settle for being No.2 in your life, behind your career, hobby, starry-eyed ambition, or another man. If he does, then he doesn't recognize God's design for marriage. God won't settle for second place, even behind our children. However, God is not a selfish little narcissistic brat who demands that we do nothing else but worship Him all day long. He recognizes that there are practical realities that require our attention; that we have duties, responsibilities, challenges, trials, weaknesses, confusion, and trouble in this life. He waits patiently for us and accepts what we are able to do at each stage of our development. He continually calls us to a higher standard, but He doesn't beat us over the head with it. This is a model for your husband. He isn't your lap dog, ready to jump into your arms whenever you condescend to give him a pat on the head, but he also isn't a bully who whips you into submission and turns you into a doormat upon which he regularly wipes his boots.
14. Don't marry a man you think you're going to change or fix. Or love to wholeness. Or any other such foolish notion. This is grandiosity and idolatry. You think you are the answer. Hell-oooo! Men resist controlling wives, whether they control by manipulation (coyness, subtle suggestions, hidden motives), co-dependency (needing to be needed, believing your husband can't make it without you), or domination (nagging, upbraiding, criticizing). It's automatic. They will not follow their wife because it makes them feel like the powerless little boy who had to submit to mama. It emasculates them. They will either become passive (and usually passive-aggressive) or domineering and possibly violent. Or they will just disappear, into work, TV, hobbies, fishing trips, the bar scene, sports. Choose your venue. That's where they'll be. Christ does not need us to fix Him. He won't permit it. And He won't submit to our efforts to

manipulate or control Him. He sees right through it and yet continues to act for our good. So should your husband.

15. Don't marry a man who can't make decisions. Or who operates from fear. This is not a man you can follow. Again, you will become the spiritual leader by default. Jesus based all his decisions on the Father's leading and sometimes took great risks. But He never operated from fear.
16. Don't marry a man whose character you question. How does he manage his money? Is he impulsive? Does he seek instant gratification? Is he an addict of any kind? Can he feel his feelings and does he express them appropriately? Can he hold a job? Is he diligent? Is he impatient? Is he kind? Is he critical? Do you feel safe with him, emotionally and physically? Does he need your worship? (All men seem to want it, but if he *needs it* to feel okay about himself, you have a problem.) Can you be honest with him? Can he hear the truth? Does he get defensive if you bring something he did to his attention? Does he "unload" on you? How about when he's had a bad day? Does he take it out on you? Does he seem threatened by your other relationships? Does he recognize and acknowledge his weaknesses or shortcomings? Can he admit when he's wrong? Is he looking for a soul mate or primarily for a housekeeper, gardener, sex toy and girl Friday? You can think of lots of other questions to ask. No earthly husband will be perfect in the way that Christ is perfect, but he can be someone you trust and admire and are willing to submit yourself to for the long haul, knowing that he is submitted to Christ.

*Note: If you are already in a dysfunctional marriage and it is a tolerable situation (i.e. safe, not abusive to you or your children), do your best to conform your own actions to the illustration of Christ and the Church, and let the Holy Spirit deal with your mate. Be honest about your feelings and thoughts, but do not try to take over and do the other mate's job. In other words, if you are the wife, do not try to be the spiritual leader of your husband. Avoid stepping into the power/headship vacuum. Continue to give that responsibility to your husband. If there are children, you may have to take responsibility for their spiritual and moral training. But try not to usurp your husband in areas where it is possible to leave room for him to act. If you are the husband, do not submit to your wife's attempts to "take over," dominate and/or control you. Do not dominate *her* either, but let her know, gently, that you will not be taking orders from her. If you are unequally yoked but there is peace and safety in the home, you can continue to be obedient to the Word and let God do the rest. He will show you if and when it is time to take evasive action or corrective measures. If the situation becomes intolerable, unsafe, or such a perversion that you cannot in good conscience be party to it, you will have to set some firm boundaries and expectations and adhere to them, or else remove yourself from the situation somehow. Seek God at every step for His specific peace. Do not act without His peace.

Some good books:

The Verbally Abusive Relationship, by Patricia Evans
Codependent No More, by Melody Beattie
Beyond Codependency, by Melody Beattie
Men Who Hate Women and the Women Who Love Them, by Susan Forward, Ph.D.
When Your Lover is a Liar, by Susan Forward, Ph.D.
Getting the Love You Want, by Harville Hendrix, Ph.D.
Families Where Grace is In Place, by Jeff VanVonderen
Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus, by John Gray, Ph.D.
Love Must Be Tough, by James Dobson
Boundaries, by Henry Cloud, Ph.D. and John Townsend, Ph.D.
Safe People, by Cloud and Townsend
Changes That Heal, by Henry Cloud, Ph.D.
When Someone You Love is Someone You Hate, by Stephen Arterburn, M.Ed., and David Stoop, Ph.D.
Christian Men Who Hate Women, by Margaret J. Rinck, Ed.D.
One-Way Relationships: When You Love Them More Than They Love You, by Alfred Ells
Telling Yourself the Truth, by William Backus and Marie Chapien
Telling Each Other the Truth, by William Backus
Caring Enough to Confront, by David Augsburg
Transformation of the Inner Man, by John and Paula Sanford

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