

The **Two** shall become **One**

from "I Married You" by Walter Trobisch

There are three things which belong essentially to a marriage: **to leave one's parents, to cleave to each other, and to become one flesh.** In other words, there is a legal, a personal, and a physical aspect of marriage. They are inseparable. If you do separate them, the whole thing falls apart. Marriage is like a three-legged stool. If one of the legs is lacking, the stool won't hold you up when you sit on it."

Should we approach marriage first from the legal, the personal, or the physical side? **What is the best way?** The traditional answer was to start with the legal aspect, with the wedding. Here the great danger is that the personal aspect, the aspect of love, is then left out of the picture. This is why young people in your midst rebel today against this traditional answer, for they are just in the process of discovering the beauty of this personal aspect.

The modern answer was to start with the physical aspect, with sex. The danger is that then the legal aspect is left out and it never comes to a wedding. This is why the older people among you reel against this modern answer. They are afraid that family life will deteriorate altogether.

Today we shall hear the biblical answer to our question. In order to find this answer we have to consider the first word of our key Bible verse, Genesis 2:24:

Therefore a man
**leaves his father and his mother
and cleaves to his wife,
and they become one flesh.**

In order to understand this word "therefore" we must recall the story which comes before it. It is a well-known and often ridiculed story. It tells about the incomprehensible kindness of God which He wanted to show to man when He made him a "helpmeet," a "helper fit for him," a partner equal to him, completing him:

"So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man."

This story is the most wonderful and unique description of the reality of love. "Why do the two sexes long for each other without ceasing? How can it be explained that they are magnetically attracted to each other? The answer is: They are made out of the same piece - just like the Liberian carving I showed you the other night. They are parts of a whole and want to restore this whole again, want

to complete each other, want to become "one flesh." The power which drives them toward each other is the power of love. *"Therefore, truly, for love's sake, the two shall leave their parents, cleave to each other and become one."*

The Love Entrance

When we ask ourselves the question, at which angle do we enter the marriage triangle, the Bible would answer, **at the angle of cleaving.** (I took my wooden triangle in my hand and pointed to the left angle.) It is this angle of cleaving which is the best door to use to enter the triangle. Love has to precede marriage and sex. It is not marriage which leads to love, but love which leads to marriage. It is not sex which creates love, but love which seeks, among other things, also the physical expression.

The entrance at the angle of love is the most promising as far as the development and unfolding of the dynamism of the triangle is concerned. Therefore it corresponds with God's will. There is another reason why God wants us to enter through the door of love.

The public and legal act of the wedding
as well as the sex act
create irrevocable facts, while love does not.

An engaged couple may one day feel that they made a decision too soon, that the time was not yet ripe and that their engagement was a mistake. They then have the possibility of breaking their engagement without causing an incurable wound to the partner. *For love's sake they can let each other go.*

So long as the other two angles are not involved, the angle of love is like a revolving door - a door through which you can enter, *but in case of necessity, through which you can also leave.*

The wedding act is not like a revolving door. It's like a door which shuts and there is no handle inside. Of course, it can be forced open. But this is much more difficult. *We could say that a divorce is more difficult and has more consequences than a broken engagement, regrettable as this may be.*

The same is true about the sex act. It also creates an irrevocable fact. According to biblical thinking, two human beings who have shared the sexual act are never the same afterward. They can no longer act toward each other as if they had not had this experience. It makes out of those involved in it a couple bound to each other. It creates a one-flesh bond with all its implications.

According to the Bible, this is the case regardless of whether the couple is serious or not, regardless of whether they intend to get married or not; yes, says the Apostle Paul, it is true even in the case of prostitution. In I Corinthians 6:16 we read: *“Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her?”* After the sex act they are a couple in spite of themselves.

You may also succeed if you enter through one of the other doors, but it is risky. **If you want to retreat, you will hurt your partner and yourself.** This leads us to a very practical question. I know many young couples who say: 'We would like to enter through the door of love. But how can we know that our love is deep enough to lead us to a lifelong cleaving, to complete faithfulness? How can we be sure that our love is mature enough to take the wedding vows and promise to stay together all our lives until death separates us? If sex is no test of love, what is the test then?

The Sharing Test

Real love wants to share, to give, to reach out. It thinks of the other one not of himself. When you read something how often do you have the thought, I would like to share this with my friend? When you plan something you think of what you would like to do or what the other one would enjoy? As Hermann Oeser, a German author, has put it:

“Those who want to be happy should not marry. The important thing is to make *the other one* happy. Those who want to be understood should not marry. The important thing is *to understand one's partner.*”

The first test then is this: Are we able to share together? Do I want to become happy or make happy?

The Strength Test

I got a letter once from a worried lover. He had read somewhere that one loses weight if one is truly in love. In spite of all his feelings of love, he didn't lose weight and that worried him. It is true that the love experience can also affect you physically. But in the long run, real love should not take away your strength; instead, it should give you new energy and strength. It should fill you with joy and make you creative, willing to accomplish even more.

Second test question: Does our love give us new strength and fill us with creative energy, or does it take away our strength and energy?

The Respect Test

There is no real love without respect, without being able to look up to the other one. A girl may admire a boy when she watches him play soccer and score all the goals. But if she asks herself the questions: “Do I want this boy to be the father of my children?” very often the answer will be in the negative.

A boy may admire a girl when he sees her dancing. But if he asks himself the question: “Do I want this girl to be the mother of my children?” she may look very different to him.

Third test question: Do we really have enough respect for each other? Am I proud of my partner?

The Habit Test

Once a European girl who was engaged came to me and was very worried: “I love my fiancé very much,” she said, “but I just can't stand the way he eats an apple.” Love accepts the other one *with* his habits. Don't marry on the installment plan, thinking that these things will change later on. Very likely they will not. You must accept the other one as he is now, including his habits and shortcomings.

Fourth test question: Do we only love each other or do we also like each other?

The Quarrel Test

When a couple come to me and want to get married, I always ask them if they have once had a real quarrel - not just a casual difference of opinion, but a real fight. Many times they will say: “Oh, no! Pastor, we love each other.” Then I tell them: “Quarrel first - and then I will marry you.” The point is, of course, not the quarreling, but the ability to be reconciled to each other. This ability must be trained and tested before marriage. Not sex, but rather this quarrel test, is a 'required' pre-marital experience.

Fifth test question: Are we able to forgive each other and to give in to each other?

The Time Test

A young couple came to me to be married. “How long have you known each other?” I asked. “Already three, almost four weeks,” was the answer. This is too short. One year, I would say, is the minimum. Two years may be safer. It is good to see each other, not only on holidays and in Sunday clothes, but also at work, in daily living, unshaved and in a T-shirt, or with hair that needs to be washed and set, in situations of stress or danger. There is an old saying: “Never get married until you have summered and wintered with your partner.” In case you are in doubt about your feeling of love, time will tell.

Last test question: Has our love summered and wintered? Do we know each other long enough?

SEX IS NO TEST OF LOVE

If a couple want to use the sex act in order to know whether they love each other, one has to ask them: “Do you love each other so little?”

If both of them think: “Tonight we must have sex - otherwise my partner will think that I don't love him or that he does not love me,” the fear of a possible failure is sufficient to prevent the success of the experiment. Sex is no test of love, for it is precisely the very thing that one wants to test which is destroyed by the testing.

Try to observe yourself when you go to sleep. Either you observe yourself, then you don't fall asleep. Or you fall asleep, and then you haven't observed yourself. The same is true about sex as a test of love. Either you test, then you don't love. Or you love, then you don't test. For its own sake, love needs to wait with its physical expression until it can be included in the dynamism of the triangle.

This waiting is usually harder for the young man than for the girl. Therefore, the girl has to help the young man here, who, because of his natural impetuosity, is more tempted to aim short of the goal. The first help she can give him is to learn how to say 'no' without wounding, how to refuse without breaking off. This is an art.

She will soon discover, however, that a simple and definite "no" is more helpful and effective than long explanations and excuses. If he loves her, the young man will respect her the more because of it. She will have to teach him, too, that an honest compliment may be more meaningful to her than a passionate embrace.

Another help she can give him is through her ability to blush. One says that formerly girls blushed when they were embarrassed. Today they are embarrassed when they blush. But this blushing, *this natural reaction of shame*, is nothing to be ashamed of. It is a defense and a protection at the same time. Girls should consider their natural feeling of shame and modesty in certain situations as a gift and put it into the service of love.

The Special Situation of Engaged Couples

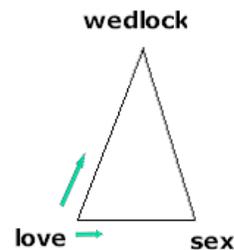
Let's imagine now that we have a couple who did not enter into the triangle through the sex entrance, *but through the love entrance*. Their situation is different and we have to discern very carefully these two approaches.

They have known each other for a long time. They do not need to test their love by sex. They have learned how to share. They both have more energy and strength because of their love. Their mutual respect has deepened. They have accepted the habits of each other and really like each other. They have quarreled and gone through stormy times. They know they can forgive each other.

They are now at the point where they can make the promise to each other: 'We want to cleave together for life.' This means they become engaged. They have entered the triangle through the door of love - love resolved to cleave.

But now they have to make a crucial decision:

“Which of the two other angles shall we reach first? Shall we first get married and then sleep together or first sleep together and then get married?”



This situation is entirely different from the one we had yesterday when we discussed the "sex entrance." This couple do not consider sex as the first step without any commitment to each other. They have committed themselves and this after a long careful examination. They really have no egotistical motives but have accepted responsibility for each other.

Now they ask:

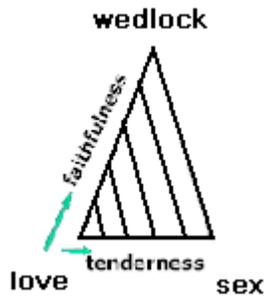
“Why can't we express this love also in a physical way? Why must we first get an official license to go to bed together? Is it really that piece of paper which brings marriage into being?”

Of course it isn't - any more than a birth certificate brings a baby into being. Still, it's more than just a piece of paper. *It protects human life legally*. The same is true about the marriage license. It protects marriage legally. We have seen that the legal aspect is an essential for the unfolding of the play of forces within the marriage triangle as is the personal and the physical aspect. Those engaged couples who want to take a right turn and start their marriage before the wedding overlook one fact: *the unpredictability of human life*.

How can they be so sure that they will get married? What if one of them dies before the wedding? Car accident? Heart attack? Is he then a widower or not? Is she a widow? Can they inherit from each other? Is she a Miss or a Mrs.? And in case she is pregnant - what is the family name of the child? These questions show that a marriage license is more than a piece of paper. So long as they are not yet ready to take the legal step, they are not ready to take full responsibility for each other. Responsibility calls for legality.

Does this mean that they suppress all signs of affection? Walk first to the altar and then expect the great revelation? No, certainly not. This would block the unfolding of the play of forces just as much as the disregard of the legal aspect. The secret is that the lovers grow and make progress in both directions at the same time without skipping any of the steps."

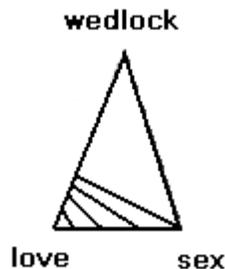
I turned to the blackboard and drew parallel lines in this way:



Each step in the direction of faithfulness and wedlock should go hand in hand with the deepening of tenderness and intimacy, until finally, coming from the entrance of love, the two other angles - wedlock and sexual union - are reached *at the same time*. Only from the perspective of the goal can this question be answered. The point is that each step toward intimacy must be balanced by the same measure of responsibility and faithfulness.

What usually happens here is this: The young man says to the girl, 'I love you,' and what he means is just an inch in the direction of faithfulness. But the girl is so happy about it that she, in turn, allows him to go three inches in the direction of intimacy.

Then the boy thinks, This worked fine, so he adds another inch toward faithfulness. The girl replies by giving him four more inches in the direction of intimacy. Before they know it, they end up at the sex angle, without being able to carry the full responsibility for this step. Instead of parallel lines you then have slanted lines. Then Daniel rubbed out my parallel lines and replaced them with slanting lines:



"As you see," I said, pointing to the slanting lines of the triangle, "there is now a vacuum, an empty space in the triangle." This is the situation of many of our engaged couples in America and Europe, too. They think they love each other. But then they go too far too soon. An emptiness creeps into their relationship. They become less and less sure of their love. So they intensify their intimacies in the hope of intensifying their love. The more they do it, the less they are sure of their love.

On the other hand, they don't dare to break their engagement because they have already gone too far. So they get married, but they carry this emptiness into their marriage and thereby lay the foundation for many troubles and problems later on.

To keep the parallel lines from slanting is a difficult job. It takes more than human wisdom and strength. It needs divine wisdom and strength.

It needs the help of the master artist of marriage who is God Himself.

He knows why He relates the three elements of marriage - leaving, cleaving, one flesh - so closely together that they become inseparable. We have to *trust Him* and know that by doing so He does not want to take something away from us, but He wants to give us something - to help us create a work of art. This confidence and trust in Him will give us strength to obey His divine will:

"Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh."

In closing, let me call your attention to the following verse: *"And the man and the wife were both naked, and were not ashamed"* (Gen. 2:25).

"Naked, and ... not ashamed."

"Naked" is not meant here in a physical sense only. It means to stand in front of each other, stripped and undisguised, without pretension, without hiding anything, seeing the partner as he or she really is and showing myself to him or her as I really am - and still not to be ashamed.

"Naked, and ... not ashamed." But this ultimate goal of mature love is promised only to those who, as the previous verse says, have left father and mother and cleave to each other; in other words, those who have been publicly and legally married.

These two - not the ones before or outside of marriage - become one flesh. It is very meaningful that the Bible uses the term 'becoming one flesh' only in the context of marriage.

Maybe there has to be a sense of shame before marriage in order for there to be within marriage the grace of not being ashamed.

"Naked, and ... not ashamed."

This is what the Bible means by the word "to know."
"Adam knew Eve his wife" (Gen. 4:1).

Husband and wife can "know" each other only within the tent.

"Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh."