

Study 0085

Practical Issues in Marriage (3.2)

As we began to look at the five 'C's that should attend every marriage, in the last study, we focused on one of them; Commitment. In looking at Ruth's commitment to her mother-in-law, Naomi (**Ruth 1:1-18**), we saw that when you are committed to a person, you stick to them for all time—through thick and thin, in good times and bad times, and, when things are pleasant and when things are unpleasant. And this is the essence of the marriage vow: *for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health; till death do us part*. True commitment requires first, that a husband and wife are committed to God, as it is through their commitment to God that they are divinely enabled to be committed to each other. Commitment requires trust and loyalty between a man and his wife, and implies a refusal by either of them to consider a way out of the marriage. Unfortunately, there are Christian couples who are not committed to each other, with the result that one or both of them become unfaithful, betray the other, and, deal treacherously. The reasons are not far-fetched: couples living the self life; people not allowing God to show them who their life partner would be; treating marriage as though it were a trial-and-error affair; building unrealistic expectations; and, taking one another for granted; to mention a few. Taking a cue from the Lord, we have learnt that we have to depend on God to tell us who to marry so that we can then be committed to that person, because He alone knows who will be committed in a marriage (**John 2:23-25; 6:1-31**)! It is important to note that you are either 100% committed or you are not committed at all! And for those who may have gotten married under false pretenses, they should go to God in true repentance, seek His forgiveness, and then go and be committed to their spouse. Furthermore, Christians (married or single) should live the crucified life daily, be open to, and accept God's choices for their lives; be completely trusting of God, otherwise, commitment will be a dream.

In this study, we will look at Commonality.

Commonality

Commonality in general can be described as the joint ownership of things, ideas, interests, etc., and is naturally an offshoot of commitment, for one (commitment) leads to the other (commonality), and ensures the survival of the marriage. Indeed, commonality is how we put to practice the idea of unity in a marriage. Commonality in marriage has to do with having common interests, common pursuits, common possessions, etc. The opposite of commonality, is individuality. Individuality is the interest or possession of an individual, as distinguished from commonality, which is the interest or possession of a community or family (a man and his wife). Individuality is what happens when a person keeps his possessions to himself and for his own purpose and sole benefit; while commonality is what happens when two or more people come together and agree to bring their resources together under a common umbrella, to achieve a common goal and purpose. The closest non-family description would be what happens when two or more individuals come together to form a company: they each bring their individual resources into the company and then use these resources as the company's to prosecute the business of the company. If anyone of these individuals should use any of the resources brought in, even the specific resource he brought in, for his personal use without appropriate authorization, he will be considered to be in violation of the company's statute.

In **Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35**, we see a clear example of commonality in Christendom in the early Church. We note the following from the two scripture verses:

- (a) The early Church Christians formed a community: they were a family.
- (b) They had all things in common; some even sold their possessions and brought them into a pool under the leadership of the apostles.
- (c) They had a commonwealth, out of which needs were met.
- (d) None was compelled to bring their possessions and goods: it was voluntary.
- (e) The distribution of what was brought under the apostles' oversight was distributed as people had need, neither did the apostles use it for themselves exclusively.
- (f) The conditions precedent to this communal lifestyle or Christian "communism" were:
 - i) The Holy Spirit was at work in their lives forging them into a community;
 - ii) They were united in heart and soul, and hence, in agreement with one another (**Amos 3:3**); and,
 - iii) No one claimed exclusive ownership of their possessions and goods.

In applying these principles to marriage, it is imperative that the man and his wife are open to the operation of the Holy Spirit in their lives in seeking to bring them to be of one heart and one soul. A Christian couple must see themselves as a family, having common interests, a common purpose, common possessions, etc. They should work at regarding everything that they owned before the marriage, as now jointly owned. None of them should claim exclusive ownership to what was owned before the marriage; rather, they should now regard these possessions as jointly owned. This means that prenuptial agreements (as is the practice in most Western cultures, even among Christians in such cultures) should not be encouraged, for they neither help commitment nor support commonality.

Purchases made after the marriage should be considered jointly owned, except for things like items of clothing, which have to be exclusively for a man or his wife. Hence, husbands and wives should have access to virtually every item of property acquired in the course of the marriage. This should also apply to bank accounts, where both husband and wife should have equal access—joint accounts with equal signing rights. Where, for the purpose of salary payment, for example, an account has to be in the name of one person only, the spouse should be named as the next-of-kin on the account. However, because of peculiarities in certain cultures which claim that everything owned in a marriage belongs to one Party (in most cultures, the husband), it is wise to make purchases in the name of the wife, so that, in the eventuality of the death of the husband, the wife can lay legitimate claim to what they jointly owned without interference from the husband's relatives. There have indeed been unpleasant cases where a wife and children have been dispossessed of property that is rightfully theirs, after the demise of the husband, by the family of the husband. As a general rule, we propose that even though commonality may be understood and practiced by a couple, it is divine wisdom for ownership to be in the name of the disadvantaged Party, so that, in the event of the death of the advantaged Party, the disadvantaged Party does not lose out.

Since property is jointly owned, its use or utility should take cognizance of the joint ownership. Thus, there can't be provision for selfish desires in utilizing family property, neither is there any provision for unilateral decisions by one person. For example, one person cannot, and should not lay exclusive claim to the use of the only car, or the only working car in the home. Similarly, one person cannot use the funds in a joint account without the couple first agreeing on how much should be withdrawn and for what purpose. Please note that commonality cannot be forced or faked. There needs to be trust, understanding, discipline and consideration for the other Party, between a man and his wife, before commonality can be successful.

Commonality should also apply to the children in a marriage. A situation where one spouse considers the children as his or hers, using the expression, “my children” in conversation with the other spouse is a threat to commonality. Children should not be seen as exclusively ‘belonging’ to one of the parents, but must be seen as jointly ‘owned’. Thus, their upbringing should be a joint responsibility, and issues like their education, where they visit during the holidays should be mutually discussed and agreed upon. The same can be said of in-laws. In-laws should be considered as a part of one’s extended family, and as such, a joint responsibility. However, no one set of in-laws should dominate; and distribution should be as the need arises. This is by no means suggesting that a couple should live for their in-laws. On the contrary, they live for God, but may extend assistance (which is how such help should be seen) as God has blessed them. Couples should avoid trying to give to in-laws, what they cannot afford.

Please note that for commonality to make any meaning, there must be full disclosure between a man and his wife or bride, they must be willing to put it to practice, and there should be no manipulation, or subtle coercion (**Acts 5:1-4**). If a spouse is unwilling to bring everything into a marriage, that spouse cannot be forced to bring everything in; however, the other spouse cannot also be expected to bring everything in, and commonality effectively dies! Similarly, a spouse who is selfish, inconsiderate, or, lazy, will give commonality a death blow, because he or she will only be taking and giving nothing (**Acts 20:35**). Unless there is first trust between a man and his wife (the result of openness to each other), commitment and commonality will be non-existent. Instead, each one of the couple will maintain their respective individuality. In the absence of trust, which, in Christian marriage, is an aberration, there can be no joint ownership of anything; only individual ownership! It is therefore our prayer that God will develop in husbands and wives, the trust that they need to ensure commonality, and the eventual survival of their marriage, through the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives, as they each put their trust in Him. We also pray that the commonality of the early Church, where they were “... *of one heart and of one soul: [and] neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.*” (**Acts 4:32 KJV**) will be practiced in our marriages.

EXERCISE

Please state whether you **Agree** or **Disagree** with the statements below.

1. One Party in a Christian marriage can practice commonality even if the other is unwilling to.
2. Commonality can still be practiced even though there really is no commitment.
3. A woman who is getting into marriage should bring everything into the marriage, while the man may not, because the man is the head!
4. A husband can unilaterally decide on what the funds in a joint account should be used for, because he is the head.
5. Jointly owned resources should be used exclusively by the head of the family, because he is taking care of everyone in the family.
6. If a woman owned a car before marriage, her husband should stay away from it, so that he can keep his pride intact.
7. Commonality without the crucified life can encourage loafing (laziness).
8. Everything that you owned before salvation can safely be excluded from commonality.