

THE MEANING OF MARRIAGE - Part thirteen

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE MARRIED TO A REDEEMED SINNER?

Colossians 2:13-15, 3:12-19 - "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, [14] by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. [15] He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him....3:12-19....Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, [13] bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. [14] And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. [15] And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. [16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. [17] And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.[18] Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. [19] Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them."

When I started this whole series I emphasized why I called it "***The Meaning of Marriage.***" God created marriage, and He is the only One who gives it its ***meaning***. We can pass different laws, but in the ultimate sense the meaning of marriage - the ***definition*** of marriage - was established by our Creator.

And the bedrock truth upon which this entire series is based is marriage exists ***only*** because redemption in Christ exists. If Jesus Christ hadn't come into this world to redeem His bride (the church) there would be no such thing as marriage. This is Paul's whole point in **Ephesians 5:31-32** - "**Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.**" [32] **This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.**"

In other words, the relationship between Christ and His bride is the ***rock solid substance*** that casts the ***shadow*** of marriage. The shadow is temporary and gets its shape and definition from the solid object that casts the shadow. In heaven there will be no more marriages. None at all. But the reality that marriage pictured will endure forever. Christ will have His bride. We will all be there at the ***marriage*** supper of the Lamb. The ultimate ***purpose*** of all of creation will at last be manifested. We will finally see the ultimate reality to which all our marriages were only pointing.

But what about right now? How does this understanding of marriage register in these temporary earthly unions? What does this knowledge of God's design ***do*** to our marriages? If they are a picture of the ultimate reality of Christ and His relationship to His bride, the church, how does ***knowing this*** change things for my marriage right now - right here? That's the key issue in tonight's teaching.

And I think we need to drill down deeply into this issue because when you define marriage by Christ's redemption of His bride, the Church, it looks like you are more interested in ***theology*** than the actual relationship of ***marriage***. This definition of marriage sounds like ***doctrine***. And what many, many marriages in the church are in need of appears to be ***healing***, not ***doctrine***.

And I want to confront that kind of thinking. I want to proclaim and demonstrate as passionately as I can that there is more healing hope in knowing the ***meaning*** of marriage than there is in the study of ***therapy*** for marriage. The most priceless thing anyone can know about his or her marriage is that its meaning is derived from something else. Marriage - ***your*** marriage - is the shadow cast by Christ's redemption of His bride, the Church. And here's why we need to know this:

1) **KNOWING THE TRUE MEANING OF MARRIAGE PLANTS IT FIRMLY ON THE FOUNDATION OF GRACE RATHER THAN SELF-FULFILLMENT**

Here is the difference knowing the meaning of marriage makes. The reality which marriage pictures is a union established by the shedding of Christ's blood. The union between Christ and His bride, the Church, is a ***blood-bought*** union. It is ***created*** by grace and forgiveness and ***sustained*** by ongoing grace and forgiveness. The relationship from which marriage gets its meaning is a relationship of grace from beginning to end.

Jesus didn't redeem His bride by **establishing** His rights. He redeemed His bride by **abandoning** His rights. He created His relationship with His bride through **self-denial**. The relationship never was based on our worthiness or accomplishments.

And the most important point here is simply this. God created marriage **after** He planned the terms of redemption. He created marriage - **your** marriage - to reveal visibly to the whole world what His redeeming grace in Christ Jesus looks like. How is the life of Christ manifested in His bride, the Church? How did she come into this divine place of union?

Well, it was all of grace, self-denial, and ongoing forgiveness. **That's** why God created marriage. It was to put that kind of self-denying grace on display in this fallen world. People are to look at my relationship with Reni and her relationship with me, and say, "**Oh, that's what God's grace in Jesus Christ looks like!**"

2) **THE TRUE MEANING OF MARRIAGE ESTABLISHES THE ONLY GENUINE SOLUTION FOR THE SINS OF MARRIED PEOPLE**

This is why a proper understanding of the **cross** is essential for a proper understanding of **marriage**. No marriage will last long if each partner is forced to **pretend** the perfection of his or her spouse. No one will be married long before he or she understands the other is a **sinner**. Spouses can hurt each other deeply. And sometimes **intentionally**. So how shall we come to terms with being married to a redeemed sinner?

God designed marriage to reveal how He deals with my real sin through Jesus Christ. And the way God deals with my sin is this. **He** pays for my sin. I **don't**. Dealing with each other as sinners has its finest solution in remembering that marriage is a picture of Christ's redemption of His bride, the Church. There is no pretending with sin in the cross of Christ. The cross acknowledges sin and God's wrath against it. The cross establishes the union between Christ and His bride, the redeemed church, by revealing grace big and strong enough that sin can be confessed and confronted without the fear of rejection:

1 John 1:7 - "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."

1 John 1:9 - "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

This is the reality upon which the union between Christ and His bride, the Church, is secured. In marriage, by God's design, we walk in that grace and then **bend it down horizontally** into the earthly marriage relationship. We **manifest** the nature of Father God's redemption grace in the visible model of our marriage.

Let me take this point one step further:

3) **WHATEVER GRACE I'M CALLED TO EXTEND FOR THE SINS OF MY SOUSE, GOD HAS ALREADY BESTOWED GREATER GRACE TOWARD ME THROUGH CHRIST'S REDEEMING WORK ON THE CROSS**

To overlook this point is to tear apart the fabric of marriage. Every day of my life I will live like a blind ape if I forget that the distance between what Christ expects of me and what I actually achieve is **infinitely greater** than the distance between what I expect of my spouse and what he or she actually achieves. In other words, I constantly live in greater, richer grace than I'm called to extend to my spouse:

Colossians 3:12-13 - "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, [13] bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."

Now, those words deal with **all** my earthly relationships. True enough. But if they apply generally to **all** earthly relationships, they apply far more deeply and specifically to **marriage** because marriage - by **definition** - is **designed** to reveal redemptive grace like no other relationship on earth. God **created** marriage to model the kind of forgiveness Christ purchased for His bride, the Church:

Ephesians 5:31-32 - "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." [32] This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the

church.”

Don't rush over those incredible words. God put husbands and wives together, not first of all, to create babies. He put husbands and wives together **first of all** to display the kind of grace and forgiveness He had extended through Christ's death on the cross.

Living together outside of marriage is wrong **fundamentally** because it doesn't display how God has extended His grace through Christ's death on the cross. Christ purchased a **covenant** relationship with His bride. Christ gave **strong, permanent grace** to an **undeserving bride** who could not and does not earn His approval. And He said He would, through His redemption covenant, never leave or forsake His bride.

God created marriage to display self-denying, cross-carrying, sin-forgiving grace between a husband and a wife. Every marriage is to display **crucified spouses** to the watching world. Knowing who we are as redeemed sinners has a way of softening our pride and tenderizing our hearts. When we sink our souls down into God's amazing mercy as redeemed sinners we will find it easier to be merciful to **other** redeemed sinners. And so both Jesus and Paul call us, as believers, to ponder on receiving grace through Christ's cross. We're to celebrate communion **together**, regularly, until Jesus return because until He returns, we need to live with other sinners **remembering the cost of our own forgiveness**.

Unforgiving sinners are fundamentally **arrogant** because they forget they draw on more mercy daily from Christ than they are ever called to extend to their fallen spouse. Unforgiving spouses should fear one day hearing these scathing words from Christ - **Matthew 18:32-33** - “**Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. [33] And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?'**”

4) **HERE IS HOW MARRIAGES DIE - WE DEMAND PAYMENT FROM OUR SPOUSE FOR HIS OR HER SIN**

It's one thing to say marriage is created to be the model - the visible model - of Christ's redemption of His bride, the Church, through the giving of His life and grace in the cross. But we all know there is a difference between the original reality and the nature of all the models in marriage. Jesus was **perfect**. The person you have covenanted with in marriage is **not**.

But while none of us **is** Jesus, we are called, with the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit, to live through the dynamics of the marriage relationship based on the original pattern of the cross. We are called to so reflect - every day - on the **nature** of the grace we have received that we **feel** the inconsistency of not extending the same kind of forgiveness and grace to our spouse.

And here's the primary closing point. By nature (**fallen** nature) we tend to demand some form of **payment** when our spouse sins. We may give him or her the silent treatment. We may unload in rage. We may return unfaithfulness for unfaithfulness. We may turn and forsake our vows. But we all tend to exact payment for a wrong received from our spouse.

And we need to prayerfully confront that dark, fallen heart. If there is one thing I know about the nature of Christ's redeeming work for His bride, the Church, it's this. He doesn't exact payment from **me** for my sins. He never strikes back in kind. He bears the weight of all my sins **Himself**. There is never any attempt on His part to even the score.

And to the extent that I still attempt to extract payment from my spouse for her sins I reveal I have never, ever, been sufficiently **broken** before the cross of Jesus for **my** sins. I haven't been **humbled** into realizing Jesus bleeds for my guilt rather than extract payment from me for it.

So nothing on earth is more practical for the life of marriage than knowing the power of the cross like you know your own thoughts. How else shall we deal with the demands of our opening Colossians text? It seems to demand the impossible - **Colossians 3:12-13** - “**Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, [13] bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.**”

But how can I put these things on? Paul talks as though it were as simple as changing my shirt - “**Put on then....**”(3:12). But it feels more like he's commanding me to breathe under water! Paul explains - **Colossians**

3:16-19 - “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. [17] And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. [Then comes the specific application to marriage - 18] **Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. [19] Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.**”

We must think of God’s grace more than we do. We must be amazed again by it. We must be broken by it. We must take every step in life with nothing but **thankfulness** for such overwhelming mercy. And perhaps above all, note that amazing **seventeenth verse** - “**And whatever you do** [especially in your marriage to your sinful spouse], **in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**”

Jesus isn’t just **in my heart**. He must be **on my mind**. I do everything I do, especially with my spouse, focusing on all the good I have received from Father God through Jesus on the cross. Nothing makes a greater difference. This is where the “**power of the blood**” that we all used to sing about manifests itself in daily, visible life.

Toward the end of his life, **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** wrote these words about marriage in his prison letters, “**Letters and Papers From Prison**” - “**God gives you Christ as the foundation of your marriage. ‘Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God’(Romans 15:7)....Don’t insist on your rights, don’t blame each other, don’t judge or condemn each other, don’t find fault with each other, but accept each other as you are, and forgive each other every day from the bottom of your hearts.**”

And everyone said.....