

THE MEANING OF MARRIAGE - Part five - Teaching #1352

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THE COVENANT OF MARRIAGE AND THE GLORY OF GOD - WHY STAYING MARRIED IS NOT PRIMARILY ABOUT STAYING IN LOVE

Genesis 2:24 - "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

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."

The reason this series is called "**The Meaning of Marriage**" is my conviction that most marriages end **not** because people lacked the skills to make them better, but because they didn't **apply** those skills when they could have. And the reason they **didn't** apply all the resources they could have to **saving** their marriage was they didn't **choose** to do so. And they didn't **make** their marriage better because either one or both didn't **want** to make the marriage better. And they reason they didn't want to was they never, ever, understood what they entered into when they **got** married.

If we allow the producers and the novelists and the comedians and the therapists and the educators to **define** marriage for us, we will always make it smaller than God says it is. And if we first make marriage smaller than God says it is we will also think more lightly about both entering and leaving marriage than we should.

Today I want to say that marriage isn't first of all about finding companionship. And it isn't first of all about being in love. And it isn't first of all about producing children. It isn't first of all about finding fulfillment or joy or completing yourself in any other sense of the word. If, when you think of marriage - whether you're presently single or married - if you think primarily about finding love or joy or happiness or companionship, you're programing the future failure of your marriage.

What we're going to see today is that apart from revelation from our Creator God we simply have no way of discovering what marriage is. Our culture of self and pleasure doesn't equip any of us to agree with God's revelation on the subject of marriage. In other words, for marriage to be all that God wants it to be for **any** of us, requires a radical departure from the kinds of conclusions we would naturally reach on our own as to what is the fundamental reason for entering into marriage.

Here's why this matters. **The vision you bring to marriage is crucial to how you will behave in that marriage.** No one will for very long apply difficult skills - communication, forgiveness, social skills, etc. - to marriage if he or she doesn't have a lofty vision of what marriage **is**. Before we tell people how to **build** their marriage, or **save** their marriage, we must make sure they understand how precious marriage - **every** marriage - **is**. And we need to have a lofty **meaning** for marriage especially when being married feels difficult, demanding, and restricting. Because, at those times, no marriage **feels** like a beautiful thing.

Here's where we're going in this teaching. There is really only one central point, though we'll come at it from several angles. **Everything that happens in this created world is designed to turn our hearts toward God.** And I mean absolutely **everything**. This **includes** every marriage, but goes far **beyond** marriage. I mean **everything** that happens in God's created universe points us toward Him.

Every time a leaf falls from a branch we're reminded of the passing of seasons and time. Eternity is coming after each of us. Every time we pick a blueberry we are to remember our Provider. Every time it rains we are to remember how God's grace falls on the just and the unjust. When an earthquake strikes Haiti we are to remember with pain that we don't live in a world as good as God originally created it. The Fall has bent and broken so much. And we can't **turn off** the effects of the fall by ourselves. Every time terrorists fly planes into buildings we see how sin sucks sinners into deeper depravity than anyone could imagine. And we see how innocent (not **sinless**) people are involved when others sin. Every time we hold a baby we are to marvel at the creative work of God in the womb. Every time we look at a sunset or into deep space we stand in awe at the power and creativity of God.

The big, panoramic truth here is God uses **everything** to put Himself on display in one way or another. Everything you and I see, feel, hear, and experience is about **Him** and almost nothing whatsoever is about **us**. And that's the way it's supposed to be. **Creators** rule - not **creatures**. The Bible reverberates this gigantic truth like an echo through the Grand Canyon:

1 Chronicles 29:11 - “Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all.”

Psalms 19:1 - “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”

Colossians 1:15-18 - “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16] For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. [17] And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [18] And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.”

Because this world has a **Creator**, everything that happens is designed to turn our thoughts to Him in one way or another. This created world exists to teach **God** to us. Everything is to put God on **display**. Now, for you or me to lift ourselves up for display would be nothing but **arrogance**. That’s because we are fallen and fallible and sinful. We aren’t safe objects for display.

But such is not the case with God. For **God** to design the whole universe to point to Himself isn’t **arrogance**, but **love**. That’s because there is nothing more beautiful and just and praiseworthy to worship. Being **God-absorbed** is the safest, most fulfilling way to live. In fact, to set our hearts on anything **but** God is the ultimate form of **self-destruction** in this world. God calls us to worship Him, not driven by **ego**, but **love** for His sin- confused, idolatrous creatures.

This truth applies to every part of our lives. It’s much bigger than the subject of marriage but applies to marriage very directly. Because we are constantly trained by the spirit of the age **not** to think this way about the world in **general**, we also don’t think this way about marriage in **particular**. And that’s where the biggest adjustment to our thinking is most essential. And it brings us right back to our opening texts:

1) THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE IS TO MAGNIFY GOD’S REACH OF GRACE IN CHRIST JESUS

Genesis 2:24 - “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

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.”

It’s important to note the relationship between these two texts. We know there **is** a relationship because Paul quotes the Genesis text verbatim in verse 31. The Genesis text tells us what marriage **is**. The Ephesians text tells us how marriage came to **be**.

Here’s a question. And the answer you give reveals your understanding of marriage. “**What was God planning before He planned the institution of marriage?**” Paul specifically says there is a “**mystery**” - in fact, a “**profound mystery**” - pushing through **before** and **behind** the joining of a husband and a wife.

Paul says God had another plan for the human race **before** the creation of male and female and marriage. He says God was doing something more than **Moses** understood about marriage when he wrote those words from **Genesis 2:24** - “**Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.**” Paul says God was planning on revealing something deeper than **Adam and Eve** knew about marriage when they walked together in the cool of the Garden.

And here’s the mystery Paul says God was revealing when he created man and woman and marriage. God **first** planned on sending Jesus Christ to redeem the race that He knew would fall into sin in the garden. **Then** he created man and woman and marriage so we would have a **visible picture** of the union that would exist between Jesus Christ and His redeemed church.

Here’s what I’m piling up words to say. Before God planned **marriage** He planned **redemption in Christ**. The idea of marriage came **from** the idea of redemption through Christ. Christ’s covenant with His church is the **reality**. Marriage is the **illustration** of that reality. Paul says when God planned the marriage between man and woman

He did it to illustrate what He had already planned to do between Christ and His bride, the church. Redemption in Christ is the **answer** to the **mystery** of marriage.

That this is absolutely certain is clear from Paul's words - "**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.**"

Look carefully at the wording of these verses. There's something quite strange going on. Look at that little word "**it**" in **verse 32** - "**....I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.**" To what does that "**it**" refer? It can only refer to the subject of **verse 31** - "**Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.**"

So what Paul is saying is the relationship between the husband and wife gets its **meaning** - is really all **about** - Christ and His relationship to the church.

Here is the first truth the **Bible reveals** but the world, for the most part, **doesn't know**. If you are married at all, the reason you **are** married is to display visibly to this God-created world the relationship that exists between a presently **invisible** Christ and His redeemed church. To **manifest** that relationship is why you **are** married or why you will one day **get** married.

And now I want to close in on the second truth. I want to wrap up studying why knowing this **meaning** of marriage has everything to do with how we behave **in** our marriages.

2) **STAYING MARRIED IS NOT PRIMARILY ABOUT STAYING IN LOVE**

Now that we've established what marriage **is** - now that we know the Biblical **meaning** of marriage - the next question we need to ask is what does this meaning imply about the marriage relationship? What is the nature of the **bond** in marriage? What is it that keeps this relationship together? If marriage is primarily a picture - a living illustration - of the relationship that exists between Christ and His bride, the church, what is the force that holds this relationship together?

Can we walk away from it? Is it held together by **romance**? Or the **need for companionship**? Is it maintained by **sexual passion**? Or held together by the **quest for personal happiness and fulfillment**? Is this union held together by the **standards and practices of culture**? Can we **switch partners** when we so desire? Or do we stay married as long as we **stay in love**? Or **leave when we love someone else more**?

These issues are addressed in Paul's words 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.**"

What is the nature of the bond of marriage? Paul says it's to be a living illustration of the same bond that exists between Christ Jesus and His bride, the church. In other words, the **kind** of bond that Christ establishes with you and me, His church, is of the same **nature** as the kind of bond that exists between a husband and wife in marriage.

And the bond that exists between Christ and His church is a bond of **covenant**. It was a covenant established at the cost of Christ's life - **Luke 22:20** - "**And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'**" Christ established His covenant by paying for it with the laying down of His life. That's what Christ **paid** to be joined to His bride.

So marriage is sustained, not primarily by romance, or joy, or fulfillment, or even love, but by **covenant**. Christ will never, ever, ever desert His bride - **Hebrews 13:5b** - "**....for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'**"

The unbreakable nature of a **covenant** is what makes it different from a mere **decision**. You **decide** to paint your bedroom green and then realize you actually would prefer blue. No problem. You just make a different **decision** and re-paint it blue. That's the nature of decisions. In fact, the reason we **make** decisions is to help **further our interests**.

We **choose** the things and actions that we feel are best for us, or for those close to us.

There are also **contracts**. Contracts are a bit tighter than decisions in that they are usually made between at least two parties. In a contract each has responsibilities. And the contract is set up to ensure I get what's coming to me and you get what's coming to you. If either party welves out, then the other is off the hook in terms of responsibility.

Because we now know the **meaning** of marriage, we also know it is held together neither by **decision** nor by **contract**. We know this because Jesus didn't lay down his life for His bride thinking He might merely **decide** to change His mind about her later on. And we also know He didn't lay down His life for His bride only if she were worthy and deserving of some kind of **contractual** agreement.

No. He gave His covenantal love for us while we had nothing whatsoever to bring to the table - **Romans 5:8,10** - **"...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us....5:10....For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."**

Remember, there are **two** foundational revelations about marriage in God's Word. Marriage **cannot** be Biblically understood without them. We would never have discovered them without God **telling** us they were so. First, marriage, like everything else in God's universe, exists to display God in this world. It is His idea and His creation. It can't be redefined or manipulated by man. And second, what marriage is designed by God to display **in particular** is His covenantal love revealed in the laying down of Christ for the church.

This is **why** marriage exists. It is **not** primarily about staying in love. And it is not about the pursuit of companionship and self-fulfillment. It is about displaying Christ's covenant keeping love for His undeserving bride. It displays the covenant love of the One who said to a sin-broken, self-infested bride, **"I will never leave you nor forsake you...."**(Hebrews 13:5).