

THE MEANING OF MARRIAGE - Part six - Teaching #1354

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“NAKED AND NOT ASHAMED” - DOES A BINDING COVENANT MAKE MARRIAGE DIFFICULT OR SAFE?

Genesis 2:21-25 - “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. [22] And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. [23] Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ [24] Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. [25] And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”

Genesis 3:6-7 - “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise [remember - the tree of the knowledge of good and evil], she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. [7] Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.”

Genesis 3:8-13 - “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. [9] But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” [10] And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” [11] He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” [12] The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” [13] Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

In our last teaching in this series we saw that marriage is designed by God to be held together by **unconditional covenant**. This is so because every marriage is intended by our Creator and Designer to reflect God’s covenant love extended to guilty sinners. Christ created that covenant - we call it the New Covenant - at the cost of His own life. And there is nothing tentative about it. We didn’t and couldn’t earn it. And He doesn’t take His covenant back. Not ever. Covenant redemption in Christ is the reality of which marriage is the illustration.

That means your marriage isn’t designed by its Creator to be held together by love. And it isn’t designed to be held together by joy. And it isn’t designed to be held together by personal fulfillment. It’s designed by its Creator to be held together by **covenant**. Not just by **decision**. Not just by **contract**. By **covenant**.

For some people that has a fearful ring to it. It seems to leave no wiggle room - no chance to back out or change one’s mind. And that’s true. So for many people this shocking Biblical truth doesn’t feel like good news. It feels like a life sentence. We announce those fearful terms at every wedding ceremony - “**For better, for worse....**” And when those words are pledged, no one knows which it will be. We all know what this world can dish out. We all know it can get a lot worse than we think. So an unbreakable covenant seems a risky business.

That’s the issue we want to study today. Does the covenant reality of marriage make it hard, or easy? Is this good news, or bad? And what I want to argue is that, for those who take the covenant seriously, for those who give themselves to their marriage just as **Christ gave Himself for His bride, the church**, the cement of covenant is much more joy producing than the cotton candy of romance. Our text tells us why.

1) THE TEST OF THE GARDEN IS BASIC. WILL ADAM AND EVE LIVE LIFE ON GOD’S REVEALED TERMS OR WILL THEY ESTABLISH GOOD AND EVIL ON THEIR OWN TERMS?

Genesis 2:8-9, 15-17 - “And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. [9] And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil....15-17....The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. [16] And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, [17] but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

God sets up the very simple terms of this Edenic Covenant. Will this first person live life on the terms of God's revelation or will he pursue self-rule? The issue is whether or not Adam (and then Adam and Eve) will trust God's way as best simply because **God** gave it? Or will they assume they are intelligent people who can make their own evaluations of what are good deeds and what are bad deeds? Much is at stake. If they choose to become their own moral adjudicators they will die.

This understanding is needed or we will find nothing sensible in the account of the Fall in Genesis. How is it possible that our world is plunged into anarchy and pain and death - wars, tsunamis, cancer, crime, terrorism, greed, prostitution, child-abuse, rape - how does this come about from eating a piece of fruit? It all seems so out of proportion. The punishment hardly fits the crime. Adam didn't assault Eve. Nobody was physically hurt. They ate some fruit. That's it. What's going on here?

And what's going on is something we've grown so accustomed to that we don't see the evil in it. But the created order - the world **before** the Fall - was aghast - horrified - thrown into catatonic shock - because, for the very first time, one part of God's Genesis creation was acting **independently** of God. One part of God's own creation - the creation that was **His** - was taking its existence into its own hands.

The only reason we don't find this as horrifying as the angels is we now live in a world that acts this way **all the time**. We have been trained to prize **self-expression** and **independence**. It's not acting **independently** of God that seems out of sync, but acting **humbly and obediently** to God that now seems weird and abnormal. But that's only because of the moral environment in which we constantly move - like those who lives near the garbage dump so long they no longer notice the smell - until they move to a cabin near the mountains.

2) **BEFORE ADAM AND EVE BROKE THEIR COVENANT OF FAITHFULNESS TO GOD'S REVELATION THEY SEEMED UNAWARE OF THEIR OWN NAKEDNESS. AFTER THEY SINNED, THEY FELT SHAME**

We know both Adam and Eve lived in ignorance of their own nakedness until after the Fall because of the wording of God's question to them while they were in hiding - "**But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'**" [10] **And he said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.'**" [11] **He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?'**"(Genesis 3:9-11).

"**Who told you that you were naked?'**" God assumes they had no possibility of self-awareness of their own nakedness. They would have to have received this information from someone else. That is, **unless** there was **another** reason for their awareness - "**Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?'**"(11). And immediately God forces them to see the link between their present shame and their breaking of His covenant with them. Out of sync with the will of their Creator, they are also no longer safe being exposed so completely with each other.

Please take very careful note of the sequence - the **progression** of events as they unfold. This matters so much. Before the Fall there is no awareness of their **exposure and vulnerability** to each other. They are living by God's rules and they experience no sense of **shame**. Joy and contentment reign. They are both lovingly self-assured in their place in God's creation.

Then they decide to live by their own moral evaluations. For the very first time, they act **independently** of their Creator. And the first thing they experience is **shame**. They try to hide both from **God** and from **each other**.

They hide from **God** because they know they have done wrong. They **fear**. They know, in spite of all their babbling excuses, that they have disobeyed and are **responsible** for their disobedience. That much is easy. But **why do they cover up and hide from each other?** Where does this sense of **shame** come from? They never felt it before they broke covenant with God. Why do they feel it now?

This is the heart of the matter. This is the must answer question. Is it that they suddenly became **ugly** the moment they ate from the tree? Did Adam cease to be handsome? Did Eve immediately cease to be beautiful? Did Adam suddenly become fat and bald? Did Eve suddenly grow crooked teeth and a hooked nose, like a witch in some fairy tale? Did they suddenly feel shame because they **lost** their physical attractiveness?

And the important answer to all those questions is **no**. There is nothing in the passage to suggest this was the case. Then what happened?

3) **WHEN WE ABANDON THE COVENANT BASE OF GOD'S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE WE WILL BE LEFT WITH NOTHING BUT INSECURITY, BONDAGE AND SHAME**

When marriage is rooted in love, fulfillment, happiness, contract, or romance, you lose what is most precious about the marriage relationship. Look again at how this is highlighted in the Genesis text:

Genesis 2:24-25 - "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. [25] And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."

Notice how the text preserves the link between the unbreakable covenant of marriage and the blissful state of living shame-free. We're blessed by the fact that it is Jesus Himself who gives the best commentary on **verse 24 - Matthew 19:4-6** - "He answered, 'Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, [5] and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh'? [6] So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.'"

So what is being expressed in Genesis 2:24 is an unbreakable covenant of marriage. Jesus says so. One man, one woman, one flesh, for life. And I return to the opening question of this teaching. Is that covenant **confining** or is it **liberating**? Is it too **demanding**, or is it **life-giving**? And now we're at the point where we're Biblically ready to answer that question.

There are two - and **only** two - ways of being **totally exposed** (naked) with the one you love and yet still be **unashamed**. The first way is to be **absolutely perfect** in every way. In other words, you must now and always have absolutely nothing about which anyone could ever find fault. And the second way to be **totally exposed** and yet **unashamed** is to be held together by a covenant where you don't have to **earn** the approval of your spouse. Which do you think brings security and inner joy and peace?

Do you think it's coincidental that we live in a world where, since the late 1990's, cosmetic plastic surgery procedures increase at about 150% per year? Do you think it's an accident that 44% of all women surveyed feel "**wholesale displeasure**" about their physical appearance?

Make no mistake about it. This is the only treadmill left when we **earn** acceptance by outward flawlessness. Apart from covenant commitment you can only escape shame as long as you **earn** acceptance. And that's a horrible way to live.

This is something to ponder for those who are single. Whether you're 18 or 30, don't buy into the pressure to somehow either **catch** or **choose** a relationship based merely on money, looks, fashion, or charm. Look for **deep things** in the relationships you form. And don't panic or rush. Above all look for someone whom you know will one day keep covenant with **you** because of the way he or she presently keeps covenant with **God**. That's the most important thing. If they aren't faithful to God in everything **now** nor will they be faithful in their covenant with you **later on**.

C.S. Lewis was way before his time when he wrote these brilliant words in "**The Screwtape Letters**." Screwtape (the senior devil) teaches Wormwood (the apprentice) on the art of sexual taste and how the spirit of the age manipulates this world's thinking when it comes to selecting a mate: "***In a rough-and-ready way, of course, this question is decided for us by spirits far deeper down in the Lowerarchy than you and I. It is the business of these great masters to produce in every age a general misdirection of what may be called sexual 'taste.' This they do by working through a small circle of popular artists, dressmakers, designers, actors, actresses, and advertisers who determine who will be the day's fashionable type. The aim is to guide each sex away from those members of the other with whom spiritually healthy, helpful, happy marriages are most likely.***"

Absolutely brilliant words! Choose **deep** when you build any of your relationships with the opposite sex. Trends don't count. Money isn't the final arbiter. Physical beauty, however hard we try, doesn't last in the same way forever.

If you don't honestly see **Jesus** in your partner, you will never find lasting joy or security because, one day, you may find yourself speaking words like "**...till death do us part**" to that person. And if they haven't been faithful with their **heavenly Bridegroom**, Jesus Christ, they can't be trusted to keep their covenant vows with you either.

People don't **turn into** faithful people just by getting married. They prove their faithfulness to Jesus long before. Look for it.

One day you will cherish saying those words to someone you will love, and who will love you, not just out of romance and attraction, but out of a rich, firm, unbreakable, selfless covenant faithfulness. Remember, if you build a relationship on anything less than the beauty of holiness, you will have to work very hard to hold shame at bay the rest of your days.