

Lesson 1: God's Good Purposes For Marriage

Introduction

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Introduction

Question: *If you wanted to take out an enemy and destroy their plans, where would you focus your attack?*

Answer: *You would want to focus your attack on the targets which would yield the greatest devastation and cause the most disruption.*

This is why the fallen world and their leader, the Devil, make God's design for marriage and for the family a relentless focus of their attacks. By God's design, marriage is intended bring much *blessing, order, and flourishing* into God's world —not just *personally*, but *socially*. God's design for marriage and the family are intended to be a source of *help, strength, joy, peace, purity, and a major catalyst for the fulfillment of our calling to be fruitful and multiply in the extension of the gospel to the nations.*

Therefore, if you can successfully corrupt God's design for marriage and family in the minds of individuals, and even more so, in the collective mind of a given society, you will thereby introduce all manner of disorder and destruction into God's world.

Moreover, consider how God has deliberately chosen to use essential *marital* and *familial* pictures to describe his relationship to us and our right relationship to him:

1. He calls the Church his *bride* and himself her *Husband*. (*Marriage*)
2. He calls believers his *children* and himself their *Father*. (*Family*)

Therefore, where a right conception of marriage and the family become splintered and disfigured by sin, our understanding of God's own goodness, wisdom, and glory become blurred and disfigured with them.

In view of all this, Christians should be *fierce defenders* of God's design for marriage and the family. Even more importantly, we should strive to be *faithful practitioners* of that design in our personal lives. The reason we should take God's design for marriage and family so seriously is *not* because it happens to align with our personal preferences, or because it fits with our historical cultural norms, or because of our particular political affiliations. Those are not the foundational reasons why we should strive to practice and defend these truths.

The real reason is because, as Christians, we have all experienced first hand the devastations caused by man's rejection of God's ways. We have felt the brokenness and despair of hearts, minds, and homes shattered by sin. These are the very things God has rescued us from through the gospel of his Son. God has given us redemption from following the wicked pattern of this world and being led astray by the lusts of the flesh. He has granted us repentance, turning our hearts from sin and self to Christ and salvation. And therefore, as God's beloved children, we should be fierce defenders and practitioners of God's design for marriage and family because in our born again hearts, we have come to see the folly of living life on our own terms and the wisdom of trusting our heavenly in all that he commands. By the grace of the new birth we have come to see that all of God's ways are justice and peace; all his paths are blessing and life.

We should stand guard over these truths because we have come to know that the true definition of human flourishing is not found in man following his own heart, but in man being subdued by the Spirit of the living God unto Christ as Lord and being gladly conformed, more and more, day by day, to the perfect counsel of his holy will. **In other words, the gospel of our salvation is not only *the pattern for marriage* (as we will see in the coming weeks), but it is also *the supreme motivation for striving to promote God's design throughout the public sphere, and to practice God's design in the privacy of our own living rooms.***

The Goal of These Lessons

Over the coming weeks, we will be considering God’s design for the marriage and family. My hope is that this series of lessons will not only be *instructional*, but also *transformational*—that is, that God will expose areas of our marriages and our parenting in which our sinful habits and practices need to be renewed by the Spirit according to God’s wisdom and grace. And then, having exposed those areas to our hearts, that we will repent and receive God’s abundant mercy to help our own hearts and homes more and more reflect the character and purity of Christ himself.

Laying the Foundation From Scripture

In this first lesson, we are going to begin laying the foundation by seeing directly from Scripture some of the core tenets of God’s wise design for marriage and family. In order to do this, we will use **Genesis 2:18-25** as our anchor text. We will use this passage because this is where the first marriage took place and the first human family began.

18 Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” 19 Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. 21 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.

1. **Marriage is good.**

This might, at first, seem condescending to consider. You may think, *“I woke up early to come to church for this? Everyone knows this.”* But is that true? Does everyone know this? Dear ones, we live in a world where even this most basic premise is challenged on every side. Thus, it needs to be said again. Moreover, it needs to be proven by the Word of God.

We may prove this in many ways, but the simplest are these:

- *Marriage existed before the fall of man. It is not the fruit of rebellion, but part of the fabric of a righteous, holy, and happy life.*
- *Marriage is declared good by the Word of God: “He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord,” (Prov. 18:22).*
- *Jesus himself uses the metaphor of marriage to describe his own love for his people, and the love they should return to him. If marriage is not good, how could Jesus use it as a picture to describe the nature of his own heart and devotion?*

2. **Marriage is God’s.**

That is, just as God is the creator of man, and therefore holds Lordship over men, so he is the creator of marriage and holds Lordship over marriage. Marriage is God’s design and is to be formed according to God’s will.

3. Marriage is a blessing. (v18, 23)

There is a seven-fold refrain repeating throughout the opening two chapters of Genesis. Do you know what it is? *“And God saw that it was **good**.”* Seven times we hear the Lord make this utterance. That repetition is what makes the words of Genesis 2:18 intentionally jarring: *“Then the Lord God said, **‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him.’**”*

Granted, it is difficult to describe what the words *“not good”* could mean in a world free from sin. But perhaps the best way to understand the words is to interpret them through the word *“helper”* which is the chief description standing behind the creation of woman. She is to be a *“helper fit for him.”*

By God’s design, the husband is strengthened in his ability to be all that God has called him to be through the loving care and support of his wife. Likewise, the wife is strengthened in her ability to be all that God has called her to be through the sacrificial leadership and protection of her husband. We see something of these truths expressed in Adam’s joyful exclamation in Genesis 2:23,

“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.”

Now, we need to be careful here. It is not true that a man is less of a man or a woman is less of a woman if it should be God’s will for them not to marry. The Lord Jesus himself never married on earth, and those called to singleness should take great comfort in that fact. But we are saying that for those whom God has called to marriage, it is his intention to use that marriage in manifold ways as an enriching blessing.

The wife is to be a blessing to the man by being his helpmate—supporting and strengthening his leadership—and the husband is to be a blessing to the wife by being her servant-leader and protector—laying down his own life for her good. Together, as equals, they are to serve one another, according to the roles God has assigned to each, so that both are deeply blessed by their marital union.

4. Marriage is normative. (v24)

We have already noted that Jesus himself was unmarried during his earthly life, and therefore it is impossible to argue that singleness is a lesser life or a lesser calling. Such things should never be said. God calls some men and women to serve him by singleness and their contributions to the kingdom are of tremendous worth.

At the same time, it is biblically true that marriage, by God’s design, is normative. We see this set forth in Genesis 2:24, *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife.”*

The language of “a man” is intentionally vague because it is meant to describe the normative pattern for all humanity. This is important because it means that if a society begins to adopt the notion that marriage is bad, or not normative, or something to be discarded altogether, that society has abandoned one of the God-given pillars of its own stability and blessing because marriage is the fundamental foundation of the family, and the family is the fundamental foundation of society.

5. Marriage is stabilizing for society.

Even among unbelievers marriage is given by God as a good thing. It is a good thing because it provides order to human relations; it restrains sin by providing the proper atmosphere for the expression of human sexuality; it gives stability to societies by creating a nursery in which children can be raised to adulthood with care, provision, and instruction in morality and life skills, and much more. But the point we are

making here is that it is good for us to understand that God's normative design for humanity is marriage, and that where marriage is discarded, even in non-Christian societies, the fundamental fabric and stability of that society will necessarily crumble.

6. Marriage is singular. (v24)

God's design for marriage from the beginning was for one man to be marriage to one woman. While it is true that many men in the bible had multiple wives—even some men who are otherwise notable for their godliness—God never approved of this and, indeed, explicitly teaches to the contrary (i.e. I Tim. 3:2). One place where this is taught is right before our eyes this morning: *“Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife.”*

Note carefully that the text offers no hint whatsoever of the notion of “*wives*” (*plural*). Not only is “*wife*” singular, but God also took one rib to create one woman as provision for Adam. Here at the opening of Scripture where God is setting forth the pattern for all humanity to reflect upon for the millennia to come, he gave one woman to one man.

7. Marriage is permanent. (v24)

Moreover, that marriage between one woman and one man is to be permanent—that is, life-long. We see this reality taught, not only by the fact that no duration of time is mentioned concerning marriage, but even more by the words, *“[he shall] hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”*

It is gruesome to imagine, but I want us to see how strong this image of “*one flesh*” really is. Husband and wife are “*one flesh*” in the same way that your arms and your torso are one flesh, or in the same way that your eyes are one flesh with their sockets. It is as painful and devastating for a marriage to end in divorce as it is for a man's arms to be ripped from his body, or his eyes to be plucked from their sockets. The pain caused to the heart, the mind, the children, and to the testimony of the gospel (which marriage is meant to image), is indescribable.

I know that some of you have felt this pain in very personal ways. My intention in bringing it up is not to bring shame to anyone's heart or draw attention to the painful moments of our past. But rather to rightly set forth the proper expectation that anyone entering upon the covenant of marriage should have from the very beginning. Marriage is **not** something to “try out for a few years”. Marriage is **not** something you should enter into while thinking, “well, if it doesn't work out or if I fall out of love or if I find someone better, then I will just leave this marriage.” All such thinking is contrary to God's design, sinful in its very nature, and yields devastations to our own hearts, our own children, and to the societies in which we dwell. This is especially true if we profess to have faith in Christ. Let us recognize and passionately affirm that the right view of marriage and approach to marriage is that it is a permanent relationship, enduring “until death do we part.”

8. Marriage is intended to produce “godly offspring.” (v24; Malachi 2:15)

It is very popular today for people to get married with no expectation or desire to have children. This, no doubt, is a saddening sign of our times. But it should be said, without shame or hesitation, that this is **not** God's normative design for mankind. This truth is implied in Genesis 2:24 where it is said, *“A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife...”*

We must ask: Where did fatherhood and motherhood come from? As of yet, there is only Adam and Eve. No children have been born. So why is God speaking of fatherhood and motherhood here? ***The answer is because, as God defines what marriage is meant to be according to his will, it is assumed as normative that the permanent union of one***

man with one woman will produce children, and that those children will be raised up within the nursery bed of that stable marriage to maturity where they themselves will then leave the home to start a reproducing family of their own.

If this implied teaching from Genesis 2:24 is not enough to satisfy the point, then we can look to God's express will set forth in Malachi 2:15. There, in the context of a discussion of what a proper marriage should look like, God says, "*Did [God] not make the two one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring...*"

From this verse we see that it is not only God's normative design that marriage would produce offspring, but that as a unified team, both husband and wife would focus the rearing of their children on helping them be godly—that is, to know, love, obey, and serve the Lord Jesus Christ with all their heart and all their life. The chief end of our child-rearing, according to God himself, is ***not*** about preparing our children for successful careers, but *preparing them to live fully devoted to the service of Christ in whatever station or vocation he may call them to hold for his glory.*

For those who have experienced barrenness, take heart and remember that many of the men and women of old whose names we remember most, are those whom God called to walk through barrenness. The Lord is with you in this pain and sorrow, and is using it for his own purposes and glory. But let us all understand with clarity that the bearing of children—indeed ***many children***—is part of God's good design for marriage. This is what God meant when he called Adam to "*be fruitful and multiply.*"

9. Marriage is an integral part of fulfilling the Great Commission. (Gen. 1:28; Matt. 28:18-20)

God's original design for marriage is that through the union of husband and wife, two believers, would "*be fruitful and multiply*"—that is, produce more image-bearers who will give glory to God through their lives.

Because of the fall of man, many marriages are not Christian at all. But for those that are, *the children within them are to be the chief disciples that we make with our lives.* The fulfillment of Jesus' words in the Great Commission do ***not*** begin on another continent or in another country, they begin in the living room of our homes in the way that we raise our children together as husband and wife in the Lord. ***Surely there is no one we will ever have the same level of opportunity to influence for Christ as our children.*** And it is God's intention that we do so, day by day, striving by all the means of grace afforded to us, to nurture them "*in the discipline and instruction of the Lord,*" as the Apostle Paul instructed the Ephesians, (Eph. 6:4).

The majority of Christians today have lost sight of their God-given privilege and responsibility to be disciple-making parents. ***But the marriage and family, together with the local church (which is made up of families!), is the sovereignly appointed soil in which the seed of the gospel grows best.*** Moreover, this has always been God's design, even after the fall. It was the reason that not just Abraham, but also his male descendants, were to be circumcised and brought into the covenant community from infancy. Likewise, it is the same reason that the children of believers are to be baptized into the membership of the church from their infancy today. It is God's design that the children of believers are raised in the faith, surrounded by the means of grace, and pointed to Christ from the earliest days of their lives so that they not only carry on the faith of their parents, but even go further in that faith such that the elect from all nations are gathered unto Christ.

10. Marriage is designed to be a picture of and preacher of the gospel.

Finally, marriage itself, is meant to be a symbolic representation of the gospel of our salvation. Paul teaches us this very thing in Ephesians 5:32, *“This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”*

Through the sacrificial role of the husband, and through the submissive role of the wife, the love of Christ for his people, and the love of his people for Christ are to be visibly set forth for the world.

Moreover, through marriage, our personal need for Christ and for the gospel are also made manifest to us, are they not? For those of you who are or have been married, has that marriage not been a major catalyst for revealing the sinfulness of your heart? Has it not been a primary way that God has shown you how much you need mercy, patience, and forgiveness? How frequently you fall short in your duties, and how far you are from truly being holy as he is holy?

In these ways, God uses marriage not only as ***a picture of the gospel for the world***, but as ***a preacher of the gospel to our own hearts. By divine design, marriage shows us, day by day, both the love we need as sinners and the love we are called to extend to the sinner to which we are married.***

Closing

I hope you will join us again next Lord’s Day as we delve deeper into the wonderful teaching of God’s Word on the subject of marriage and family. In the mean time, continue to meditate upon the foundational truths we have seen today and prayerfully consider how they apply in your own life as you endeavor to faithfully follow Christ.