

Redeeming Marriage From Rebellious Revolution

Genesis 1-3; Eph. 5:22-33

Introduction: There is a relentless attack going on around us. It is not on American values, capitalism, or the way things used to be in our country. This attack is much more insidious, ominous, and pervasive. It has been going on for thousands of years, and the weapons of warfare, though changing because of differing times, have not changed much. It began with the serpent asking Eve, "*Did God actually say?*" and has continued the same today. We are faced with a challenge of our enemy confusing, cajoling, and coercing our world that what God has stated clearly is no longer relevant, has been eclipsed by science and our own intellect, and falls short of its own truth claims. The fight ultimately has never been over the enforcement of marriage laws, gay rights, or gender issues, but these are simply the battle grounds of a much larger war. The true war is over the hearts and minds of mankind, and the issue at stake is faith. Faith in God, in Jesus Christ, in His substitutionary work on the cross, in our sin and deserved punishment, and God's plan of redemption. This is what we are ultimately committed to, and why these battles are so important, not only to be fought, but to be fought in the right way, for the right reasons, with the right weapons.

For the next 4 weeks we will take a look at some crucial areas of life that God has made very clear: **marriage, singleness, and sexuality**. These are areas that God has created, given us commands for, and are ways that we can glorify Him. Each of these has been systematically (and craftily) deconstructed and have been re-defined by our culture. It has lead to a revolution of sorts, with the main goal being total rebellion from God and personal autonomy for the individual. The thinking behind this is that the reason for our unhappiness is God, and if people could rid themselves of God (the cosmic killjoy), true happiness can be achieved. We know the truth: that the end of that line is misery, and what seems free is really bondage, and Christ has come to bring freedom and joy to all who would believe. Now a few disclaimers before we get going.

Disclaimers:

- **We presuppose a hermeneutic of submission, not suspicion** - We approach Scripture from a position that it is *authoritative, inerrant, and sufficient*. We understand the Bible literally, historically, and written with all the rules of grammar. We seek to submit ourselves under Scripture, whether or not we *like* what is written or whether it *fits our desires* or not. An interpretive grid of **suspicion** is rooted in modern skepticism and approaches the Bible with the assumption that it must be interpreted in light of present needs, and the meaning in the original may not be the meaning in the present age. We evaluate every change in culture and area of life submitting ourselves to the timeless truth of Scripture, letting it determine the outcome, rather than us changing Scripture to fit what we want.
- **We desire to do all things to the glory of God through the work of Jesus Christ** - Jesus is everything. He is the focus of all our efforts, it is by Him and through Him that we worship and glorify the Father, and He is the way that we can truly change. Jesus is what separates a debate from a mission, from winning an argument to winning a heart. This sets the course of how we proclaim the truth, how we approach people, and how we determine success.
- **We uphold the virtue and value of marriage, but understand that many do not or will not enter this covenant** - by choice or circumstance - and we affirm that those will not be married, are divorced, or widowed are NOT second class citizens, have NOT missed out on God's best, and are NOT somehow relegated to a lesser position in God's family. We also know that there is often pain, disappointment, and loss that is conjured up during these discussions, so we pray

that God's grace will be greater as He gives peace and comfort as we walk through this important subject.

- **We want to be equipped to help the struggling and reach the broken** - Our goal is not to win an argument or prove we are right. We are striving to be equipped in the truth so that we can reach out to those struggling in areas of relationships and sexuality. In this world we will continue to struggle, even though we have been washed clean from our sin (1 Cor. 6:11). We want to be open, caring, and gracious to anyone here who desires to glorify God and yet struggles in multiple areas of sin. We also want to reach out lovingly to those who are bound in the captivity of sexual sin. We must learn to be compassionate rather than fearful, merciful rather than vindictive, and gracious rather than hateful. We are entering into a time in our culture where we will be seen as the worst of the worst since we believe in truth, an absolute morality established by God, and that life apart from Christ leads to death and judgment. We will be rejected, disliked, hated, and we must respond in love and truth.

So we begin with a Biblical view of marriage that we believe, uphold, and live out before a world that has made marriage optional and has even refined the essence of a covenant relationship.

The Fight for Marriage

A Biblical Plan (Genesis 1-2)

God created image bearers with specific genders - *male* and *female* (Gen. 1:27) God saw this created order as "*very good*" (Gen. 1:31)

Man was created to have dominion over the earth, to subdue it, work it and keep it (Gen. 1:26, 28, 2:15)

Man was created to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth (Gen. 1:28)

God created Adam to do this (Gen. 2:15), but he could not do it alone, and God stated that it was not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18)

God created marriage to fulfill His mandates, to bring needed companionship to mankind, and fill the earth. God took woman out of man (not out of dust), and *gave her to man*.

Adam saw Eve as the perfect complement to him ("*This is at last bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*") that no other created being could afford

When Adam spoke, he spoke in **covenant language** (see 2 Samuel 5 as the tribes of Israel pledged their loyalty in a covenant with David) signifying the permanency of the union

Adam and Eve engaged in sexual union as a sign and expression of the covenant, where the two distinct image bearers become one flesh (Gen. 2:24)

There was no shame, no fear, no sin (Gen. 2:25)

God established the pattern of "leaving and cleaving" before there were any parents to leave from (Gen. 2:24)

God established marriage before the Fall of man into sin as the most central institution of human civilization and human flourishing. It was not reactive to the Fall, not based on any cultural norms or governmental oversight, but a proactive program where families would grow and fulfill their design to bring glory to God on the earth. Marriage was given high value since it was created by Him alone, ultimately for His glory. Marriage is a **covenant relationship**, one that is monogamous, committed, selfless, willing to serve, sacrifice, and love.

A Biblical Purpose (Eph. 5:22-33)

Obedience to the fulfillment and upholding of the institution of marriage is enough, but there is a greater picture that marriage paints.

A Picture of Christ's love for His Bride

Paul lays out marriage in Eph. 5:22-23 as a consummation of the positional realities that we have in Christ (the first 3 chapters of Ephesians). The last 3 chapters are practical application in all areas of life. In marriage relationships, this means that **wives will submit to their own husbands as to the Lord** (5:22), which is based on both every believers willingness to submit to one another (5:21) and our fearful relationship to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Wives follow the leadership of their husbands, and husbands lovingly serve and sacrifice for their wives, seeking to see them sanctified, being more like Christ as a result of marriage as before (5:25-27). **Marriage, then, is not about us.** It is not about our fulfillment or getting what WE want. It is an opportunity to submit to Christ, trusting Him, and finding our satisfaction in Him. It is about **God changing us rather than us trying to change or fix our spouse.** It is about **loving** our spouse from our **will rather than simply emotions, deciding to daily die to self and uphold the goodness of Christ.**

We know that marriage is a greater picture in what Paul said at the end of the section. He quotes from Genesis 2:24, speaking of the mystery of a man leaving his father and mother and cleaving to his spouse. Then Paul expands the meaning of this verse to include "**this mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.**" In other words, the covenant of marriage is a profound picture of Jesus' covenant relationship with His bride, US! A relationship that lives out the Biblical realities reminds us of the grace, forgiveness, commitment, and faithfulness of Christ to us. This makes marriage much more than a token option or cultural expectation, but a glorious picture of Christ's love for His Bride.

An Anticipation for our complete union with Christ

In a future look at what will take place between the rapture and the return of Christ to reign on the earth, we see a feast that takes place between Christ (the bridegroom) and the Church (His bride). This will be a time of glorious celebration and preparation to reign with Christ (Revelation 19:6-10). Christ views His church not only in terms of master/servant, but as Bride and Bridegroom, and not just temporally but in preparing us for eternity.

The Slight of Marriage

Now marriage as God has designed is under attack (which is nothing new). This is not a recent phenomena, since there has been a relentless, systematic dismantling of Biblical marriage from the beginning, and also in our own culture.

Cultural Opposition

- **Marriage has been transformed and minimized to the status of a contract, rather than a covenant** - Marriage is no longer primarily defined or viewed as a lifelong committed relationship where we grow, are changed, and learn to love over our lifetime, but is viewed as a contract of convenience. There are factors that have lead to this:

1) The introduction of easily obtained contraception - This is a relatively new reality (before a ruling in 1972, unmarried couples could not obtain prescription contraceptives) but has lead to a separation of sex and procreation. *"It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the separation of sex and babies from the moral equation."*¹

2) The introduction of "no fault" divorce - Divorce was a difficult path to walk down less than half-century ago, but in 1969 Ronald Reagan signed the first major "no fault" divorce law in California (say it ain't so Ronnie!). This meant that couples could secure a divorce rather easily, without a court trial, painful testimony, or some finding of guilt.

3) Advancement in reproductive technologies - this has allowed couples, singles, and same sex couples to have children without sex

4) The proliferation of cohabitation and sex outside of marriage - In previous centuries, non-marital cohabitation was not only frowned upon, but was sometimes illegal. Now, it has not only become normative but is also encouraged and assumed. When couples can live like married couples, have sex without commitment, children without covenant, the overall view of marriage is dismantled.²

- **Marriage has been redefined according to emotional satisfaction rather than objective status - erotic love vs. the sanctity of a vow** -It makes sense that now marriage is defined from a starting point of *"self"*, and when anyone enters into it selfishly, the reason for leaving a marriage is when self is not satisfied.
- **Modern people, including far too many Christians, now define marriage according to the nations legal standards, rather than Biblical standards.** - As followers of Christ, we submit to the government set over us, but we never let a government *dictate* our beliefs. Even if laws are passed and litigation is threatened , these never change the timeless truth given in Scripture.

Sinful Opposition

There is a reason our culture is opposed to marriage, and it's the same reason that marriage is so difficult. The answer to both: **sinful rebellion**. This goes back all the way to the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 3 gives us insight into the problem.

When Satan set out to deceive Eve, he exposed humanity and marriage to sinful reality and consequence. As Eve ate from the forbidden fruit, her husband looked on in silent abdication of his role of leader and protector (remember, God gave Adam the command not to eat in Gen. 2:18, with the idea that he would teach his wife). This plunged humanity into death and separation from God, but also left mankind impotent of the ability to live out marriages the way God intended. There were distinct consequence to marriage because of the sin of Adam and Eve:

¹ Albert Mohler, "We Cannot Be Silent", p. 20.

² The above list comes from Albert Mohler's excellent book "We Cannot Be Silent", pp. 17-32.

- 1) **Shame** - Adam and Eve originally experienced shameless existence - each played their role (leader, help mate) without shame, and functioned without clothing. However, they quickly covered their nakedness to hide from God and each other after they sinned. Sin caused guilt and shame, and we carry these into our marriages, where experiences of our past (both those we've done and those done to us) color the present experience of our present. We have issues of trust, respect, submission, love, and sacrifice often because of unresolved sin in our past. This leads to **isolation from each other**
- 2) **Fear** - This shame lead to improper fear, where they ran FROM God instead of TO God. Fear lead to isolation between us and God. When that relationship is broken, we are left with selfishness as the rule, since we cannot truly embrace His grace and forgiveness, but go into self-security mode, no longer willing to selflessly sacrifice for our spouse since we are **afraid of losing what we have**.
- 3) **Blame shifting** - Instead of upholding and protecting, we now seek to uphold ourselves. This lead Adam to throw Eve and God under the bus, blaming them for his sin, and Eve tried to blame the serpent. This means in marriage we are not naturally willing to admit our sin, confess that we are wrong, but are willing to point out the issues in our spouse. This has caused marriages to be **50/50 ventures**: I will do this ONLY if they do that. If my spouse does not perform their part, I will withhold mine. This affects our intimacy, love, respect, and submission in marriage, and leads to unhealthy, unhappy, and miserable unions.

PLEASE NOTE: This is true of EVERY MARRIAGE! This is regardless of background, experience, or upbringing. We ALL face dysfunctional marriages because we are ALL dysfunctional sinners in need of grace. Marriage is the hardest, most time consuming, heart revealing, gut wrenching, glorious, joyful, rewarding ventures you will ever enter into, but it is **impossible to do it to the glory of God apart from the gospel of Jesus Christ**.

The Light of Marriage

How the gospel redeems marriage

The question that is begged at this point: *how do we get back to marriages that reflect the way God intended?* The answer is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Marriage is not ultimate. It ultimately does not satisfy, cannot bring absolute contentment, and is by nature temporary (Matthew 22:30). When we think marriage is ultimate we believe the fairy tales of Prince Charming and what's-her-face. Marriage is a covenant relationship that reflects Christ's love and sacrifice for His Bride, is a place of *forgiveness and grace* (since it exposes much sin), and a place of sanctification. We learn to love someone who sins, lets us down, hurts us, and does not keep up their end. We learn to trust Christ, that even in the midst of struggle, pain, and unfulfilled expectation, He is growing us into His image by sustaining us by the power of His Spirit in the grace that He provides.

This is why God is so clear about being equally yoked with believers (2 Cor. 6:14). It is a follower of Jesus Christ that can faithfully live out this reality. This means that the pathway to a healthy, happy, and honoring marriage begins with each spouse seeing God as perfect, holy and glorious, admitting our sin (we are the problem in our marriage), and repenting in faith of our sin as we believe that Jesus died in our place, bringing us back to Christ. This means that we **daily admit** that we are sinful, thus are a contributing factor to the unhealth of our marriage, and that we are in need of grace EVERY DAY. When we move away from these realities is when we encounter joyless existence in marriages. God may or may not change your spouse, but He relentlessly is changing you. We marry a believer because that ensures that they desire to change the same way, into conformity to Christ, burning off the dross of selfishness, pride, and fear.

How the gospel helps us move forward

Those struggling - This helps us understand how to move forward. There are some (maybe many) here this morning in the midst of joyless, unhappy, tense, unfulfilling, unloving, sexless, disappointing marriages. There are some here that have contemplated divorce, leaving your spouse, or finding fulfillment in the embrace of another. First understand that the **struggle** is real and you are not alone. There are people who will listen, will talk, and help. Secondly, know that the gospel is the solution. The gospel assures that God will change us, give us hope, and reconcile us to God through Jesus, but does not assure our situation will change. In the gospel we can play our role in marriage with joy, knowing that God is glorified when His kids obey by His grace, and seek to glorify Him by loving a hard-to-love spouse who does not return the love or respond the way they promised. The struggle is not sinful, but our response to the struggle determines whether we are going to glorify God or ourselves.

Those who've been divorced - Some here have been divorced, either by choice or reluctantly, some before you were a believer and some after, and most are still feeling the sting. Every divorce is a result of sin, whether overt (adultery, leaving) or passive rebellion (selfishness, pride, unbelief in what God has called us to). The beauty in the gospel is that we ARE NOT products of our past but RENEWED CREATIONS in Christ. This means that we uphold that God hates divorce, yet we seek to love and uphold the repentant sinner. We will call every married couple here to keep your marriage covenants, and walk with grace with those who have broken that covenant.

Those who desire to be married - We also understand that there are those who have a desire for marriage (a good desire) that has not been realized. To you, we will spend next week looking at 1 Corinthians 7 and what Paul said about singleness, because singleness is an invaluable reality in God's church.

So we conclude with what the writer of Hebrews wrote: ***"Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous."*** Hebrews 13:4

Concluding Questions to Discuss:

- Review the plan and purpose of marriage in Genesis 1-2 and Ephesians 5. What are the areas that are the hardest to uphold? Roles (submission and love), commitment, or where happiness is found?
- What are other areas that we see marriage being attacked in our culture?
- What does a 50/50 marriage vs. an all in marriage look like? What is the inherent problem of a 50/50 marriage?
- Where do we sometimes believe what the culture says about marriage, rather than what the Bible lays out?
- How do we overcome the curse of the Fall in marriage (shame, fear, blame-shifting, abdication of leadership (like Adam) and a desire set against a husband (Eve - Gen. 3:16)?