

God's good design for life - God's design for marriage

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[0 : 00] One other thing I might say at this point as well, that in a talk like this, we're not going to be able to cover everything. And it would be good just to have an open time and for people to throw back questions.

If you do have questions afterwards, please talk to me. But what we're going to be doing is over the next few weeks on our Wednesday, on our Gospel Community, our home group nights, we're going to have opportunity to think this through a bit more.

So if you have questions and you want to think through it more, then come along on a Wednesday night and we'll be asking more about it and your opportunities to discuss and question.

So, what is your position or your opinion on the proposed same-sex referendum? At the end of last year, our coalition government announced that they were going to hold a referendum to redefine marriage, which will include same-sex couples.

Listen to the views of our Tornister, Eamon Gilmour. This is what he says. I believe that in certain key areas, our laws are out of step with public opinion.

[1 : 17] I don't believe, for example, that it should ever be the role of the state to pass judgment on whom a person falls in love with or whom they want to spend their life with. The right of gay couples to marry is, quite simply, the civil rights issue of this generation.

And, in my opinion, its time has come. Very strong and persuasive words. So, what will you say when somebody asks you for your views?

Yes, I think it's great. Everybody should be allowed to marry. It is a civil rights issue. Or, will you say, no, I don't agree with it. Marriage is just between a man and a woman.

It's a biblical issue. Or, will you just try and avoid the question, keep your head down and stay quiet? You see, I think that if you haven't yet been asked, you will be asked, because this is a topic that is going to dominate much of our thinking in this coming year.

And it's important that we are all able to give a well-informed answer. And, depending how you give that answer, it may mean your demotion at work or your promotion at work.

[2 : 40] It may mean that you lose friends or it may mean you gain friends. So, it is a critical issue and an important one that will affect all of us.

But, this debate about marriage is nothing new. Jesus himself was confronted about his views on marriage. So, look at Mark's Gospel, chapter 10, verse 2.

The reason we left this section out in our studies in Mark was because we wanted to look at it under this issue. So, look at verse 2 of chapter 10.

Some Pharisees, the religious leaders, came and tested Jesus by asking, Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? So, there was an issue, a debate about marriage.

And, while the question here is about divorce, Jesus' answer, I think, helps us to understand what God's design for marriage is and why we should follow his design for our life.

[3 : 45] So, it's not a new issue. So, first of all, the definition of marriage. Central to this debate is the whole issue of redefining what marriage is all about.

Listen to this again, and it's on the screen. This comes from the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, the group who have been charged with presenting a case for same-sex marriage.

They say this, The ICCL believes that everyone is entitled to equal treatment under the law and that no one should be discriminated against or denied access to services on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, civil status or family status.

This includes equal access to the right to marry and found a family. Denying same-sex couples the right to marry runs contrary to the spirit of equality and non-discrimination protected by the Irish Constitution and by international human rights treaties to which Ireland is a party.

Furthermore, the existing prohibition on marriage for same-sex couples unfairly discriminates against the section of Irish society, including the children in the families of same-sex couples who are otherwise entitled to equal protection before the law under the Irish Constitution.

[5 : 17] Again, it's very strong and very clear as to how they wish to redefine things. Now, while our Constitution doesn't actually define marriage, it is defined in law as between a man and a woman.

So the proposal here is to change that. Now, when Jesus in Mark 10 is asked his opinion in marriage, he takes everybody back to God's design for marriage and I think that's where we should go in our discussion.

It's not what I think or what you think, but what does God think? What's God's design? So look at verse 3. Jesus answers the question like this.

Well, what did Moses command you? Well, they said, Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away. Now, we'll come back to this in a minute because this is important. But notice where Jesus ends up. Look where he starts his discussion. Verse 6. But at the beginning of creation.

[6 : 26] So this is something foundational. He takes them right back to the very beginning. But at the beginning of creation, God made them male and female.

For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh, so they are no longer two but one.

Now, that wasn't Jesus just making up something. This is a direct quote. And keep your finger in Mark 10 and go back to Genesis chapter 1. This is a direct quote from Genesis.

So this is God's order, God's design from the very beginning. In fact, it's the earliest text in all literature that actually defines or says something about marriage.

So, chapter 1, verse 26. Then God said, Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

[7 : 40] So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, He created him. Male and female, He created them.

Now look at chapter 2, verse 24. This is where the male and the female come together. So chapter 2, verse 24, and it reads, For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

The man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame. Now that's important, verse 25. They felt no shame. This was part of God's order, part of His design, and being together was good and right and beautiful.

So, back to Mark 10. You see, this is not an invention of man. This is a gift from God to His creation. So when the Irish Council of Civil Liberties, when they say they want to redefine marriage, they're not actually changing Irish law.

They are interfering with God's design and order for creation. So again, it's not about what you or I think. It's not about what the Irish law says.

[9 : 06] But it's what God's design and order says. Now I think that's very interesting because even the ICCL actually have limits on their definition.

Even they have some kind of standard by which marriage should be contained. So I ask the question, why does their definition not include, say, something like polygamy?

Why not have multiple wives and husbands? Who's to say we shouldn't? Or what about incest? And by that I mean marriage to someone within your own family.

So a brother marries a brother or a sister marries a sister. Why not? Who's to say that's wrong?

Who's deciding where the barrier should be? Or what about an age limit?

Why do we have an age limit? Who decides that? You see, even those who are wanting to say, let's redefine it, they themselves have limits and they see that there actually are good limits and standards.

[10 : 13] But again, I want us to come back and say, it's not us who decide where those boundaries are. It is God who has defined marriage and it is for our good.

So that's the first thing. The second is the disorder of marriage. You see, the discussion between Jesus and the religious leaders in Mark is really about submission to God's design.

That's the key issue here. It's about submission to God's design. And that includes you and I in every area of life, not just marriage.

So let's look at the issue again in verse 2. The question has come to Jesus. Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? Well, what did Moses command you?

He replied. Well, they said, Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away. Now, it's important we've got to get the context here and what's happening.

[11:17] You see, society had become very patriarchal. It had become male-dominated. And it was all about husbands' rights. And it was little to do with the protection and the care of wives, which was at the very heart of God's design.

The protection and care of wives was central to God's design. So husbands who had got fed up with their wives and they wanted to move in with somebody else down the road, well, they could leave them on the basis of, well, anything that they wanted to.

They could say something like, well, you failed to live as a good wife in the house and to fulfil all your duties. You didn't please me as a wife. And on those basis, they could just dismiss their wife, go move in with somebody else, and the wife would be left to no rights at all.

You see, marriage had become twisted. The husband was abusing his role and his wife had no rights.

So to protect his wife, who was being neglected and abandoned, verse 4, Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.

[12:40] But, verse 5, it was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law.

You see, a law had to be introduced. Why? To protect the woman or wife from the sinful behaviour of the man or husband.

Moses' law wasn't to say, oh, you know what, men, you can do and live however you please. No, it was all about caring for and protecting from those who were abusing marriage.

So the real issue is they didn't like God's design for marriage. They wanted to live as they pleased. They wanted an opt-out clause and live and change their partner if they wanted to.

And if they got fed up with their wife, they wanted any reason to leave. Now, when Jesus is addressing this issue, he doesn't redefine marriage.

[13:42] He takes them back to God's good design. So look at verse 7. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife.

The implication there is is that husbands now have a responsibility. They've left their mother and father. He's left their care.

And now he is given the responsibility to care for his wife, to protect his wife, to provide for his wife, to serve his wife, to love her in that relationship.

But let's not lose sight of why they were wanting to change God's design for marriage. It's in verse 5. It was because your hearts were hard.

In other words, they didn't like God's design. They wanted to create their own design. Now, when I think about that, I don't think any of us are any different.

[14:47] Because all of us rebel against God's design for life. We're not different. None of us like our Creator telling us how we should live our life.

That's the history of the world. That's what happened to the first married couple, Adam and Eve. Read on in Genesis. As soon as they're married, they begin to go against God's design.

And havoc is wrecked. So let's ask ourselves a few questions. Husbands, and that includes myself, do we love, do we care and protect our wives as we should?

Have you ever sulked and got annoyed because your wife said, no, not tonight? Have you ever planned your day off so that you do things that you want to do without first taking into consideration the needs of your wife or your children?

Have we ever looked at another woman lustfully? I know I have and a lot more. I fail to live up to God's good design.

[16:01] What about wives? Do you encourage and support your husbands as you should? Have you ever soaked and nagged until you get your own way?

Or have you ever read a nice romantic novel and then imagined yourself in the arms of the hero and lover? You see, none of us live up to God's good design.

Maybe you're not married. Maybe you're single. Do you live up to God's good design? Completely pure in your thoughts and your attitudes? You see, the big point is this. Whether we support same-sex marriage or whether we don't, all of us rebel against God's design in some way. Every one of us. We don't want, we want to live life my way. We want to define life so that it suits me and it fulfills my needs and my desires. Look at verse 5 again. It was because your hearts were hard that Moses had to write this law. [17:10] it is because our hearts are hard that we want same-sex marriage. It's because our hearts are hard that we get annoyed with our wives.

It's because our hearts are hard that we nag our husbands. So just as Aemon Gilmore needs to repent, repent, so I also need to repent. We all need to come back to God's good and perfect design. Which brings us to God's design for marriage.

Let's look at this carefully. God's design for marriage is for our good. Firstly, male and female, verse 6. At the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. It's clear, it's obvious. That's how God made us. And these two sexes form the basis and the foundation of a married life. The man wasn't given a mirror image of himself. [18:19] Instead, he was given the opposite. He was given a woman. This is the way God planned it. And let's remember that within marriage there is firstly equality.

We're all equal in God's sight. Men are not greater than women. And women are not better than men. There is no inferiority, there is no superiority. We are equally loved and treasured by God, equal in value, equal in position before God, equal in worth. However, within that equality, there is complementarity. Men and women, in case you didn't notice, are different. Physically, we are different. Sexually, we are different. But the thing about that difference is, we complement each other. And for good reason. children. Because central to God's design for marriage is children. [19:29] Having made male and female, God says in Genesis chapter 1 verse 28, this is the first command that God gives to people. He says to the man and the woman, God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number.

God bless him and God bless him and God bless him and have sex. Go make babies. And the only way to have children is by one man and one woman coming together. Physically and sexually we fit together. One was made with a penis, the other was made with a vagina. It's not just a biblical fact, this is a biological fact. Nature tells us what the right design is for life. We don't need to interfere with it. Two men and two women can't produce a child. So physically and sexually God made us distinct. He made us different. But through marriage we complement each other. [20:39] This is part of God's good and beautiful design for us. God's design is so crystal clear. The man leaves his father, a male, and mother, a female, and is married or joined to his wife. He enters into a covenant relationship, a bond that unites them together. And this leads to, firstly, unity. Look at the end of verse eight. they become one flesh, so they are no longer two, but one. No longer two, but one. It's no longer about two individuals trying to get what they want from the other person. That's how many people exist within marriage. It's what I want and what I need. It's not about me or I, but now it becomes we and us. [22:05] We are joined together in a mutual service of one another, supporting one another, caring for one another, fulfilling one another. And when that unity is broken by adding in somebody else into that relationship, either through adultery or through pornography, it becomes destructive and divisive.

To add in another person ruins the marriage. This is to be an exclusive, special relationship between one man and one woman. And this is God's lifelong plan for us. Verse 9. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate. You see, even in the design of us coming together, I say, well, I chose Kirstie, Kirstie chose me. In a sense, that's true. But I also believe, verse 9, what God has joined together.

This is something that God works in our lives. So there is a deep unity. And there is also intimacy. Again, look at verse 8.

[23 : 18] It says, the two will become one flesh. You see, sex is not just about making babies. it's intended by God for intimacy.

The coming together as one flesh is God's way to develop and to grow the marriage relationship. In marriage, we are to give our lives to each other, including our physical bodies.

Not just for individual pleasure, not just to get out of it what I can get for myself and to please me. It's about mutual pleasure of service towards the other person.

Now, people will often say, you know, the Bible is against sex. You're not allowed to have sex if you're a Christian. God doesn't allow it. Well, that's not true.

Read your Bible. Read the Song of Songs tonight, men and women, husbands and wives. You see, the problem only comes when we take sex outside of God's design for marriage.

[24 : 26] When we do that, then it leads to emptiness and brokenness because what sex does is it binds people together. So to have multiple or other sexual relationships means that you are actually binding yourself, you're gluing yourself to another person and you can't break apart, you can't walk away from that without some part being broken, emotionally, psychologically, physically.

You can read the reports yourself, it's all there. The facts say that it damages. Of course, God's grace is great enough to heal and to restore, but the point is that to live outside of God's design is not good for us.

So if you are in a marriage, it's about unity, intimacy, intimacy, and if you are struggling within your marriage sexually, then I encourage you to talk to someone.

You can talk to me if you're a man, you can talk to my wife, Kirsty, and ask what is God's design for us, because it is a vital part of our relationship together.

The last part is this, a divine marriage, and perhaps this is the most important of all.

[25 : 55] God's design for marriage is clear, we've seen that, but let's not lose sight of the ultimate purpose of what marriage is to point to and to direct people to.

The marriage between a man and a woman illustrates and pictures God's marriage towards us. And for this I want us to go to Ezekiel, which is, where is it?

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel. So it's kind of in the Bible, if somebody's got a page number there, could they, chapter 16, sorry, chapter 16, 842, 842, 842, and we're going to finish with this, 842, Ezekiel, chapter 16, page 842.

Now what we have here is a picture, it's imagery, to show God's pursuit, God's loving pursuit, it's describing almost how the man pursues his woman to marry her.

And so this is showing how God pursues us, his desire for us, his love for us, so that he might rescue us and bring us into the ultimate relationship ever, a relationship with him, where we find ultimate satisfaction and joy in every area of life.

[27 : 38] So as I read this through, just go with the picture, don't try and sort out all the different images, but just go with the picture and see it as an illustration of God's marriage towards us.

We're going to pick it up in verse 4 and read through to verse 14. Here we go, chapter 16, verse 4. So on the day you were born, your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in clothes.

No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather you were thrown out into the open field, for on that day you were born you were despised.

Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, live. I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew up and developed and became the most beautiful of jewels.

Your breasts were formed and your hair grew, you who were naked and bare. Later I passed by and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness.

[28 : 51] I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the sovereign Lord, and you became mine. I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you.

I clothed you with an embroidered dress and put leather sandals on you. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments. I adorned you with jewellery.

I put bracelets on your arms and a necklace round your neck and I put a ring in your nose, earrings on your ears and beautiful crown on your head. So you were adorned with gold and silver. Your clothes were of fine linen and costly fabric and embroidered cloth. Your food was fine flour, honey and olive oil. You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen.

And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty because the splendour I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the sovereign Lord.

[29 : 56] It's wonderful poetry. It's a picture, it's an image of God's pursuit of his people. And the Lord Jesus has made that a reality for us.

He has come to us in our sin, in all of our mess, in all of our failure. When we were unlovable, he was the one who loved us. He gave us not just jewels and fine clothes, but he gave us his life for us so that we might become beautiful in his eyes.

He was the one who took our impurity from us. He took all of our sin and all of our mess and he took it all on himself and he suffered in our place.

He died for us and in exchange of our impurity, he gives us his purity so that we might become beautiful, treasured, cared for, welcomed, brought in to that most beautiful of relationships with him. That is the most perfect marriage, God to his people, and that is for all of us. He will never leave us, he will never forsake us, he will never divorce us, he will never drift and give his love to another.

[31 : 14] His love is perfect, perfect, it is intent, it is true. This is the divine marriage, this is what he calls us all to live in and it is only when we live within that marriage and in within his design, life will be good.

This is the true marriage that we all need. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Our Father God, we thank you for your word, we thank you for how clear it is, but yet each one of us find that we struggle to live under your design.

We confess and we repent that all of us have rebelled against your design in life in some way or another.

And therefore we need your grace. We need your healing. We need your love. So please forgive us and please bring us to be people who live under your design.

I pray for every marriage that is represented here, that you would protect it, that you would grow their love for one another, that you would create unity intimacy and intimacy, that you would bless them, that you would bless every family that is represented here.

[32 : 53] And I pray for every single person here, that you would help them to live lives that are pure and right. And we pray that they would live a life that reflects your goodness, and that for all of us, in whatever circumstance of life we may find ourselves, that we would find our ultimate relationship in Christ.

The one who gave his life for us. The one who is our everything. The one who gives us joy, peace and fulfillment in ways that nothing else ever can.

We thank you for what you have done. and please help us to talk about this issue to others, graciously and in love, without superiority, but submitting to your good design.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.