

Marriage

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Date: 13 October 2019

Preacher: Greg Hendrickson

[0:00] So we're continuing in our Adult Sunday School class on gender and sexuality. I am re-recording this session because the Sunday School recording device did not work on the 13th, so we won't have any Q&A; recorded from that session, but I did want to re-record the lesson.

Last week we considered how our bodies, gender, and sexuality are all good and beautiful gifts from God. And we also considered how every part of human nature and experience is broken because of sin and its effects.

And that's how we wanted to begin this class, to recognize that we are beautiful because God has made us in his image, and yet we are broken because of sin and its effects.

And in order to have a healthy perception of ourselves and of others and of God, we need to hold together these two biblical truths because they reflect the reality that we live in.

We're both beautiful and broken. God's Word helps us to receive and celebrate what is beautiful and to resist being pulled along by what is broken.

[1:10] So today and next week, we will be focusing on the shape of God's redemption. That's sort of the third part of the biblical story. We're created in God's image. We're fallen and broken by sin.

But Christ has come to redeem us. And one of the things that we see in the New Testament is that Christ's redemption includes our bodies. Christ redeemed us by taking on our human nature, including a fully human body.

He accomplished our redemption through his faithful obedience to God throughout his entire earthly life, culminating in his atoning sacrifice on the cross.

I've included some verses on the handout. The Word became flesh. Jesus Christ came in the likeness of sinful flesh. He bore our sins in his body.

And because Christ accomplished our redemption in his body, his redemption is also applied to our bodies. Some of the early church fathers were particularly responding to a heresy called docetism.

[2:17] And docetism basically meant that Jesus only appeared to be human, or he only appeared to have a body. And some of these docetists taught that Jesus sort of appeared in a body, but really he was a spiritual being, and he abandoned his body, so he didn't really, so the Son of God really didn't die on the cross, is sort of what they were saying.

But the early church fathers were saying, no, it's important. It's important to affirm the biblical truth that, these biblical truths that Christ became flesh, because he came to redeem all of us.

He didn't just come to redeem our souls, to sort of zap us away, but our salvation involves the redemption of the whole person. Athanasius says, the Lord touched all parts of creation and freed them all from every deceit.

And that's wonderful news, that every part of us can be touched and renewed by the power of God. But Jesus, so Jesus redeemed us through his body, Jesus was raised bodily from the dead and ascended into heaven, and he will come again with his body.

And so just as the consequences of the fall are written on our bodies, our redemption in Christ is also written on our bodies. Hebrews 10.22 talks about our hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies are washed with pure water.

- [3 : 55] Most likely that's a reference to baptism, right? The New Testament commands believers in Christ to be baptized in water, and among other things, that outward act is a sign that our bodies are now set apart for the holy service of Christ.

Our bodies are now as holy, and even more so perhaps, than the temple in the Old Testament, and the objects that were used in the sacred worship of God.

In the Old Testament temple. So Paul encourages us in his letters to live in light of that reality, to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, and be transformed by the renewal of our mind.

Again, Paul holds together our outer selves and our inner selves, our minds and our bodies. 1 Corinthians 6, he says, Don't you know your bodies are members of Christ?

He doesn't just say, Your souls are united to Christ, and Christ lives in your soul. No, he even says, Now our bodies are members of Christ, and so glorify God in your body.

- [5 : 04] So what we're looking at today, and next week, is what does it look like to glorify God in our bodies, in light of how Christ has redeemed us, particularly as it relates to our gender and sexuality.

Now there are many aspects of this, there are many complex challenges that we may find ourselves having to navigate, but today and next week, I want to focus on two positive visions, two paths that are clearly and repeatedly affirmed in the New Testament, as ways that we can glorify God in our bodies, namely, faithfulness in marriage, and celibacy in singleness.

So today, we're going to focus on marriage. And next week, we're going to focus on singleness. But really, these two need to go together.

Jesus, in Matthew 19, he begins by affirming the goodness of marriage, God's creational design from the beginning. He quotes from Genesis. And then in the same passage, Jesus also affirmed that some of his disciples will voluntarily renounce marriage for the sake of God's kingdom.

1 Corinthians 7, The Apostle Paul also affirms singleness and marriage for the sake of God's kingdom as ways that followers of Jesus can glorify God in our bodies.

- [6 : 23] Paul begins by saying, I wish that all were single, as I myself am. And he goes on in that chapter to elaborate some of the benefits of being a single person and a follower of Christ and the particular opportunities that provides to express devotion to Christ.

But then he goes on to say, each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. Marriage and singleness are both gifts from God that can be received and offered to him.

So today, we're going to focus on God's affirmation of marriage, which we see in both the Old and New Testaments. And the next week, we'll look at the distinctively New Testament affirmation of singleness for the sake of God's kingdom.

So here's the question we're looking at today. In our beautiful and broken world, how does marriage bear witness not only to God's original design for created humanity, but also to God's redemptive purposes for fallen humanity?

Well, from the beginning, from Genesis, we see that God intended marriage to be faithful, fruitful, exclusive, enduring, and full of love and wonder.

- [7 : 35] So, marriage is meant to be faithful. Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, that was an ancient vow of loyalty. It's what the Israelites said to King David when he came, when they were acknowledging him as their king.

They're saying, we are bound together. We are in this together. We are yours, and you are ours. And that's what marriage is supposed to be. Faithfulness to that one flesh union.

Marriage is also, we see in Genesis, intended by God to be fruitful. God says, be fruitful and multiply. Genesis 1.28.

And so, one of the outcomes of marriage is that it would be blessed with offspring, and that life would be continued in that way, and fruitful in other ways as well.

Exclusive. Marriage is also meant to be exclusive. We see in Genesis, the man shall be united to his wife, the two shall become one flesh. There are only two.

[8 : 42] There are a man and woman, and they become one. Enduring. Right? Marriage is supposed to hold fast, and full of love and wonder. The first bit of poetry is what, is the word in the Bible are the words that come out of Adam's mouth when he sees Eve.

This at last. This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. And Adam rejoices. He bursts out in exclamation in love and joy and wonder.

And so that's what marriage is meant to be from the beginning. Faithful, fruitful, exclusive, and enduring, and full of love and wonder. However, the Bible is realistic, and the Bible recognizes that on this side of the fall, we see the effects of sin in marriages that do not, and marriages or spouses who don't embody those qualities.

So we see examples in the Bible of marriages that become adulterous instead of faithful. For example, David and his relationship with Bathsheba. Now, the assumption throughout the Bible is always that sexual union is the bodily expression of the marriage promise.

So that's why adultery is so serious because it's a bodily act that is in itself a repudiation of the marriage promise.

[10 : 11] It's the opposite of confirming and affirming the marriage promise. It's absolutely repudiating it because sexual union is inherently the bodily expression of the marriage promise.

It's saying, I am giving myself completely to you, holding nothing back and to you alone. So in the Old Testament, adultery and other violations of the marriage covenant were punishable by death.

Premarital sex was also something that had serious consequences even though it was not punishable by death. But if an unmarried man and woman had sex together consensually, the man was required to pay the bride price that was given to the woman or her family.

It was sort of a form of life insurance if the husband were to die or abandon the marriage. He was required to sort of pay up and marry the woman. Now, the point of that law was to build a culture where sex among God's people was neither cheap nor casual.

And in particular, the law prevented a man from taking advantage of a woman and then avoiding responsibility to her and or children in the future. The New Testament also contains strong warnings against sexual intimacy outside the marriage covenant.

[11 : 38] Now, on the other hand, the Bible unabashedly celebrates sexual love within marriage. It says, this is something that married couples are intended by God to enjoy.

We see that in Genesis, we see that in Proverbs, we see that in Song of Songs, an entire book of the Bible, which is love, poetry, celebrating that relationship between the man and woman.

And we see that affirmed in the New Testament as well. So that's sort of the first distortion of marriage that we see is when marriages are adulterous instead of faithful.

We also see examples in the Old Testament in particular of marriages that are infertile instead of fruitful. Now, infertility is not itself a sin. But in the Old Testament, it is seen as a curse because God's covenant promise was established with Abraham and his physical descendants.

And the primary way that God built his kingdom in the Old Testament was through the people of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, having babies and circumcising the male descendants and raising them according to the law of the Lord.

- [12:52] So, the emphasis shifts in the New Testament from expanding God's kingdom primarily through the physical descendants of Abraham to expanding God's kingdom through the spiritual family of Jesus.

So, in other words, we seek to expand God's kingdom and to be fruitful not only by having lots of biological children but by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and by showing hospitality to our children, to our neighbors and even to our enemies.

And we'll see that this shift influences the New Testament vision of singleness for the sake of God's kingdom. We'll get to that next week. So, that's the second way that we see marriage not living up to God's creational design is when it is infertile instead of fruitful.

And again, that is not a sin but that's sort of in the bigger picture it's one of the effects of living in a fallen world. Something that is to be mourned.

The third way that we see marriages falling short in the Bible is when they are polygamous instead of exclusive. Polygamy begins within the line of Cain. Then the first polygamous Lamech is characterized by violence and vengeance.

- [14:13] Polygamy's negative effects and associations are evident. It leads to rivalry, jealousy, conflict, neglect. So, you know, there are many prominent characters Abraham, Jacob, David, and Solomon who had multiple wives or concubines but this is always presented as a deviation from God's original plan with clearly negative effects.

Fourth way that marriages fall short of God's design is when they end in divorce instead of enduring until death. Divorce is always a result of sin even if in some circumstances such as one spouse engaging in unrepentant adultery pursuing divorce is not in itself a sin but a response to an unrepentantly sinful situation.

And finally, we see marriages that are characterized by complacency and contempt instead of love and wonder. For example, Nabal who's verbally abusive toward his wife Abigail in 1 Samuel 25 or Michal who has contempt for her husband David in 2 Samuel 6.

So, again, the Bible is very honest about these distortions of God's design, the pain and the sorrow caused by sin and by its effects but God doesn't get rid of marriage and he doesn't replace it with some other arrangement in this fallen world.

Throughout the Bible, marriage is seen as a gift of God to the entire human race. it's a creation ordinance. Even non-believers can recognize and experience some of the good effects of marriage.

- [15:47] If a married couple from another religious background or no religious background become Christians, they don't need to get married again for their marriage to be seen as fully legitimate before God. However, while marriage is a creation ordinance, while it is a gift that all human beings can experience and enjoy from God, among God's redeemed people, marriage is also a covenant sign.

And this is really the point of this whole lesson as what I want to sort of lead us up to here. Marriage, biblical marriage is intended to point to something greater than itself.

In particular, marriage is a sacred picture of the covenant union between God and his people. So, in the Old Testament, God is the husband and Israel is the wife.

We see that in Hosea, sort of very dramatically portrayed in Jeremiah, in Isaiah. I think it's also in Deuteronomy, though I don't have the reference. In the New Testament, Christ is the husband, the church is his bride.

But in both the Old and the New Testaments, the great mystery, as Paul puts it in Ephesians 5, the great mystery of marriage as the union of male and female bears witness to the far more staggering and awe-inspiring union of God and his people and the hope that one day heaven and earth will be reunited for all eternity.

- [17:22] See, Christian marriage is meant to be a sign of that. The union between God and his people, the coming union between heaven and earth when Jesus comes again and is united with his bride, the church.

And so this idea of marriage as a covenant sign is the main difference between the biblical vision of marriage and other understandings of marriage. In some traditional societies, marriage is primarily the union of two families for the sake of, for social reasons, for social cohesion, for family honor.

marriage is mostly about the broader society or community. In individualistic societies like the modern western world, marriage is primarily a means of promoting the happiness of the two people involved, however those two people might define it.

But the biblical view of marriage is distinctly God-centered rather than human-centered. Why is marriage intended to be faithful and fruitful, exclusive and enduring and filled with love and wonder?

Because that kind of relationship between a husband and wife reflects the character of God's relationship with his own people. You see, those characteristics aren't arbitrary.

- [18:48] And they're not just things that people like. They're characteristics of God's relationship with us.

God is faithful. He unwaveringly follows through on every one of his promises to us. God, in relationship with us, bears fruit.

God's word produces the spiritual fruit of godly character, of good works, of transformed relationships, of spiritual children, other people coming to know Christ and grow in him.

So the union between Christ and his church is faithful and it's intended to be fruitful. It's also intended to be exclusive. God allows no idols, no rivals, and no third parties.

Nothing that can take God's place in our lives. And God is not distracted but devoted to our well-being. Enduring marriage endures for a lifetime but our relationship with God will last for all eternity.

- [19:57] Marriage is to be a picture in this life pointing to an even greater relationship with God that will last for all eternity. And finally, our relationship with God is meant to be full of love and wonder.

That only increases as we come to know Christ better. Paul prays that we would know how high and wide and long and deep is the love of Christ.

See, that's the core of what biblical marriage was meant to be. A picture of God's very own relationship with us. when Adam and Eve sinned, they were sent out of the garden and sent away to wander in the wilderness.

So much of our life in this world is wandering in the wilderness. So much of the history of God's people, they were wandering in the wilderness, they were sent into exile, and marriage in this fallen world where we are far from our true home, marriage is a picture of God's mercy in bringing his people back into a temple of intimate fellowship, into a garden of pure delight under the protective shadow of his wings resting in his reliable promises.

And isn't that at some level what all human beings truly long for? That place of intimacy and delight and protection and provision and promise faithful love.

- [21:34] Now, that salvation is not found by getting married. Let me be clear about that. If you think that marriage will be your salvation, you will eventually be disappointed because all idols eventually disappoint.

But marriage in its most ecstatic moments and its most enduring legacies as well as in its deepest struggles and disappointments, marriage is intended to point us. to God's unchanging and redeeming and eternally satisfying love.

Marriage is temporary, but it's a picture of a relationship with our covenant keeping God that will last for all eternity. Now, the questions I wanted us to discuss and reflect on were these.

First, what difference does it make for you, either as a married or a single person, that marriage is intended to point beyond itself to the reality of a faithful and fruitful and exclusive and everlasting and full of joy and wonder relationship with Christ?

second, how can we promote a God-centered rather than human-centered vision of marriage in the Christian church? Third, can you think of any examples of Christian marriages through which non-Christians have seen God's character or Christ's gospel display?

[23:00] break.