

Principles of Marriage
1 Corinthians 7:1 – 5
Fairview Presbyterian Church
May 3, 2009

We begin today a four part study of the place of marriage in our world. We seek to be biblical people. We intend for our understanding to be shaped by the teaching of the scripture.

Typically on Sunday morning my style of preaching is labeled biblical *exegesis*. We take a passage of scripture and more or less march right through it to see what it says. Another way of preaching is known as biblical *theology*. Biblical theology focuses more upon organizing the Bible's teaching around its various themes and doctrines. Today's sermon is more biblical theology than biblical exegesis. Bible verses will still anchor each point, but the verses will be chosen from various places in the Bible because they address the theme we are exploring: marriage. Though we have read 1 Corinthians 7:1 – 5, I will not begin to specifically analyze these verses until next week. We will get to them.

It is important, as we begin, to ground our study of marriage in the full sweep of biblical teaching. The first three points will briefly explore the place of marriage in creation, redemption and in our fallen world. After that we will look at the component parts of a marriage leading to a definition of marriage. We will close today briefly answering some of the questions that typically are raised when in articulating biblical teaching regarding marriage.

First, marriage is a common grace, woven by God into the fabric of creation.

Marriage is a common grace, woven by God into the fabric of creation

Genesis 2:24 ²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.¹

The opening chapters of the Bible speak of God's creation of the universe. These are important passages, for they lay the foundation for understanding much of what God intends in the creation of our world. We are told in Genesis 1 that God creates man, male and female. In Genesis 2 we are given a fuller explanation of the details of the creation of man, male and female. God creates Adam and places him in the Garden of Eden, giving instruction to till and care for it. After a period of time, 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."² God brings to Adam all the animals of creation and Adam names them. In the naming of the animals it is made clear that nothing in the animal kingdom can satisfy the need to remedy Adam's *aloneness*. Next, God sends Adam into a deep sleep, a coma, and removes from Adam a rib from his side and using this part of Adam as a starting point,

¹*The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (Ge 2:24). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

²*The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (Ge 2:18). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

God fashions a suitable companion, Eve. Adam awakens and God presents Eve to him. Adam responds with the first recorded human sentence in the Bible.

“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.”³

This story concludes with an explanation of the nature of marriage in God's good creation.²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

A few observations. Marriage is woven into creation. Marriage is part of God's purpose at the very beginning. Remember, Genesis 2 comes before Genesis 3. Marriage exists before Adam and Eve's disobedience and expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Every society in the world has marriage. Yes, the rules and regulations vary from one society to another. But there is no society without marriage. Indeed, a case can be made that it is impossible to have society without marriage. Marriage satisfies and meets a fundamental human need: *it is not good that the man be alone*, God declares. Marriage is the means established by God to satisfy this need for companionship and relationship. It remedies aloneness.

This is how marriage is understood in creation. Let us now turn briefly to see how marriage is understood in redemption. The message of the Bible here is that marriage is intended to mystically reflect the spiritual union of Jesus Christ and his church.

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Ephesians 5:31 – 32³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.⁴

One of the repeated images of the church in the New Testament is that of the Bride of Christ. Nothing happens in the New Testament story by accident. Each detail was planned and had its purpose in the unfolding story. Why was Jesus' side pierced as he hung on the cross? What is God's purpose in this detail? We say that Jesus Christ is the *New Adam*, the *Second Adam*. What was the result when the first Adam was wounded in his side? From that wound, Adam is given a wife. When Christ is wounded on the cross, we are told that out from the wound flowed blood and water, symbols of baptism and communion, the identifying marks of Christ's people, the church. As Paul says, this is a *profound mystery*. Christ's creates the church in his sacrifice upon the cross. We are Christ's bride. The intimacy of the union between husband and wife is a reflection of the spiritual union between Christ and his people.

Marriage is woven into creation. Marriage is a reflection of the mystery of redemption. Thirdly, we must now add that marriage exists today in a fallen world.

³*The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (Ge 2:23). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

⁴*The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (Eph 5:30-32). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Marriage exists today in a fallen world

Genesis 3:8⁸ 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.⁵

1 Corinthians 7:5⁵ Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

In Genesis 3 the story of God's good creation takes a dramatic turn as a consequence of the disobedience of Adam and Eve. They now hide from God. They are expelled from the Garden of Eden. There is a profound reordering of life as the end result of their waywardness. Every aspect of life is affected by the entrance of sin into the world. The relationship between Adam and Eve in their marriage is also affected. No facet of life escapes unaffected.

It is at this point that we find the appropriate context for understanding Paul's instructions to the people at the church in Corinth. We live in a fallen world. This has consequences upon the place of marriage in life. Our world today is not that different from the world of ancient Corinth. The people of Corinth had written Paul asking questions about the Christian understanding of marriage. Paul answers those questions in his letter. We are going to look at Paul's answers in detail in upcoming messages. For now, let us fill out a bit more fully the biblical understanding of marriage.

Marriage has component parts:

Genesis 2:24²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

A valid marriage has component parts. There are things that go into a marriage that make it a marriage. There are reasons why marriage is the way that it is. Let's look at these things. First, marriage is the God-established way society creates new families.

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Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother

This is so obvious as to be almost self evident, yet regrettably, the modern world seems intent upon forgetting this truth. The fundamental principle is articulated in Genesis, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother. Our children grow up. They leave home. The biblical model is that a man leaves his father's house and establishes a new family, a new household. Marriage is the glue, the cement, the means through which new families are created in our world. Families are the basic building blocks of society. This is a radical thing to say in modern America. In modern America, the presumption is that the individual is the basic building block of life. But this is not the biblical view. *It is not good that the man should be alone*, God observed. The poet John Donne put it differently, *No man is an island*. We are made for marriage.

⁵The Holy Bible : English standard version. 2001 (Ge 3:8). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Are there exceptions? Are there those who are given the gift of celibacy? Of course. Yet what I have said represents the norm, the typical intent God has for people.

The next thing to be said is that marriage is a covenant, a form of contract.

Marriage is a covenant (contract)

and hold fast

In modern America, a couple about to be married obtains a marriage license. Traditionally, part of the ceremony of a Jewish wedding included the formal signing of the ketubah, the marriage contract. There is a contractual facet to marriage. Husband and wife share mutual legal obligation to one another. For us Presbyterians, coming out of the Reformed Tradition, we prefer the language of covenant over that of contract, for the word covenant includes a clearer expectation of relationship, the bonds of love, fondness and friendship.

A son leaves his father's house in order to hold fast to his wife. Sons leave. Daughters are given in marriage. Traditionally, the idea is that a man is to seek a wife when he is at a point in life that he can care and provide for a wife and family. Have you ever wondered why a young man is supposed to ask the father of his fiancée for permission to marry his daughter? There are those in the modern world who reject this, dismissing it as patriarchal and old fashioned. A couple about to be married are joining their lives together, to be sure, but they are also joining two families. It is important to have the support and endorsement of both families. In the biblical witness we see negotiations between the families as part of the process through which marriages are arranged. Marriage is not *only* about the bride and groom. A father has raised and protected his daughter as she has grown into adulthood. It is important for a young man to express his respect and gratitude to his fiancée's family – and this is primarily done through the ritual of asking the bride's father for his daughter's hand in marriage.

Next, marriage is a spiritual institution.

Marriage is a spiritual institution

and they shall become one flesh

There is a mystery in marriage. Marriage involves a spiritual bonding. The two become one. Spiritual things are unseen things, so this truth is not easy to illustrate, but it can be seen by those who have eyes to see. The longer a couple is married, the more their lives intersect, doing so in surprising ways. Couples begin to think like one another, even anticipating each other's thoughts. Some couples even begin to look like one another – do pray for Lois Ann. The lives of a husband and wife become ever more intertwined as life moves on.

Next, marriage is God's established means for the satisfaction of sexual desire and sexual intimacy.

Marriage is God's established means for the satisfaction of sexual desire and sexual intimacy

and they shall become one flesh

We are sexual beings. Woven into our creation is our identity as man or woman. Sexual desire and the need for intimacy is part of who we are as men and women. These desires are natural, normal and powerful. They can, and should be, expressed and satisfied. God has provided marriage as the context for sexual intimacy. Marriage is the means God has given for intimacy.

Sexual knowledge is God's idea. God creates Adam and Eve, and the first thing he tells them to do is to make love.

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth"⁶

In marriage, sexual intimacy is private, but not secret. It is expected that married couples will enjoy sexual intimacy. The Bible is not prudish. Bible translators and preachers are often prudish, but the Bible is not. There is a book about the love between a man and a woman in the Bible. It is called *The Song of Solomon*. A literal translation of the Hebrew of the Song of Solomon would be banned in Boston.

Finally, marriage is God's way of providing for the nurture and care of children.

Marriage is God's way of providing for the nurture and care of children

and they shall become one flesh

The phrase, *they shall become one flesh*, has a double meaning that is often overlooked. On one hand, as we have just noted, it refers to the proper place of intimacy in marriage. On the other hand, it refers to the arrival of children in a marriage who are the fruit of sexual intimacy. A child is the reflection of mom and dad together. A child is a literal embodiment of his or her parent's union.

Children are a blessing the Lord. We live in an age in which children are often perceived as burdens. We speak of *unwanted* pregnancies. Such a perspective is unintelligible to the Bible's world view. Children are a gift from God. Marriage is the human institution God has provided for us to create, receive and nurture children. It is in the family, created through marriage, that children are nurtured through the stages of development leading to their taking their own place in honorable adulthood.

⁶*The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (Ge 1:27-28). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Each of these components taken together lead us to a summary of what marriage is: marriage is intended by God as a lifelong commitment between one man and one woman.

Therefore: marriage is intended by God as a lifelong commitment between one man and one woman.

In our modern world, there are many who would object to this definition for marriage. We can anticipate some of the objections, so let us turn to consider some possible responses.

Objections

What about divorce?

The Lord Jesus was asked this question, recorded in Matthew 19.

³ And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” ⁴ 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 the two shall become one flesh’? ⁶ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” ⁷ They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” ⁸ He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.”⁷

From the beginning, it was not so. Divorce is a sad reality. It is not what God intends and, except in certain very limited circumstances, God does not approve of divorce. Marriage is meant to be for a lifetime.

What about blended families?

Life is uncertain. Tragedies occur. A husband or wife may die before their time. The bonds of marriage are ended upon the death of a spouse. The obligations of marriage are completed and closed when one partner dies. There are many examples in the Bible of what we today call *blended* families. Of course, blended families that are formed as a result of divorce present added challenges, but there is no negative judgment upon the blended family per se. Raising children is a challenge. Being a single parent is a huge challenge. We can say that almost always children will do better and be blessed to grow up in a home where there is a mom and dad.

What about polygamy in the Bible?

This is a very common question. Readers of the Bible notice that there are examples, even prominent examples, of men who had multiple wives in the biblical

⁷ *The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 201 (Mt 19:3-8). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

story. This is certainly true. Two things need to be noted. First, the Bible, in significant contrast to the religion of Islam, nowhere endorses polygamy. Yes, there are examples of biblical persons who have more than one wife, but the Bible never says that this is the way things should be. Secondly, the idea of one wife is the norm from the beginning. God makes for Adam one wife, Eve. The New Testament makes explicit that marriage to one wife is the expected standard.

What about homosexuality?

The purpose of this series is to talk about marriage, not homosexuality. At the same time, given the trends in our nation, it is inevitable when discussing marriage, one must also discuss homosexuality. Can homosexuals be married? Should homosexuals be married? What is the biblical response to growing demand in the modern world that homosexuality be normalized, approved of, and blessed? How ought we to think about this matter?

The first thing to be said is that the Bible does not approve of homosexuality. Every reference to homosexuality in the Bible is a negative, condemnatory reference. Secondly, the state may declare that homosexuals may marry, but should it do so, it will be stepping outside of its proper, god-given sphere of authority. The state may issue marriage licenses to homosexual couples. Homosexual couples may be legally united in the eyes of the state. But this will not make a valid marriage in the eyes of God.

The late Jerry Falwell once famously observed that “*God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.*” There is wisdom – and a little bit of humor – in that quip. Male and female is the way God has made us. Male and female is the way we must live. Much as it might wish to do so, the state cannot repeal the laws of nature, or the law of God.

Close

This is the first of a four part series exploring the meaning of marriage from a biblical perspective. Marriage is a common grace, woven into the fabric of creation as God intends. There is a mystical element to marriage, for it is a reflection of the union between Christ and his church. Our marriages are lived out in a fallen world. Marriage is the God-established way in which new families are formed. Marriage is a covenant between husband and wife. There is an unseen spiritual bonding that takes place between husband and wife. Marriage is God’s provision to meet the human need for intimacy and satisfaction of sexual desire. And marriage is the societal institution given by God for the protection and raising of children into honorable adulthood.

The world we live in is not perfect and there are challenges to God’s ideal of marriage. Divorce is a sad reality when a marriage fails. A family is always a good thing, though blended families may face additional challenges in life. Some societies permit polygamy and though the Bible does not endorse polygamy, the biblical standard of one man and one woman is clear. There are those today who seek to redefine marriage,

arguing that homosexual unions constitute marriage. They are mistaken. They may win the day politically, but they cannot change God's law.

Marriage is a gift from God. It is a blessing he gives. Marriage should be honored and uplifted.

Say "Amen" Somebody.

Principles for Marriage

7 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”² But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.³ The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.⁵ Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

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⁸*The Holy Bible : English standard version.* 2001 (1 Co 7:1-5). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.