

Marriage part 2

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[0 : 0 0] What is marriage? As we spend today considering the subject, we are intriguingly sandwiched between the vote at Westminster on Tuesday in support of the marriage same-sex couples bill and Valentine's Day that is approaching on Thursday. So, whether we look back at the week that has passed or forward to the week that has begun, it seems fitting to consider the subject of marriage in the light of God's Word. This morning we began our consideration of marriage as designed by God as it is presented to us in Genesis chapter 2. And we suggested that the passage presents eight features or aspects of marriage as designed by God. Or in any case, we were going to highlight eight features. Perhaps more could be identified, but there are eight that we identified, and this morning we considered the first four and indicated that our intention was to continue this evening with the following four, just to remind ourselves of those features of marriage and synthesize in single words. We notice, first of all, companionship, help, suitability, gratitude. These were the four we thought of this morning, and this evening we're going to think about the matter of authority, loyalty, union, and trust. As I've just mentioned, this morning we thought of the first four aspects, and just to very quickly refresh our memories, and perhaps for the benefit of those who were unable to be here this morning, a quick reminder, a very swift and brief reminder of what we said this morning about the first four aspects. We spoke of marriage having at its heart the matter of companionship, and we did so on the basis of what we read in verse 18 of Genesis chapter 2.

The Lord God said, It is not good for the man to be alone. We highlighted how remarkable this statement was given that God was addressing His creation and Adam in His pre-fallen state. This is Adam created perfect by God, and yet God recognizes that as Adam is alone, that is not a good thing. And so marriage is provided as the means whereby Adam would have a companion, a friend to live with. So marriage has at its heart this matter of companionship, but we also notice the language of help there in verse 18, I will make a helper suitable for him. And how we could draw from that that men and women have been created by God with this characteristic, that even before the fall, men and women required help.

We're not self-sufficient. We need the help of others. And marriage is one means that God provides, whereby in the case of Adam, he could have the help that he needed. So companionship, help. But then we noticed also that the helper that he was to be provided with had to be a suitable helper. And so we have this matter of suitability at the heart of marriage, that a wife is to compliment her husband as the husband compliments his wife. We thought a little bit about what that involved. We're not going to repeat ourselves this evening. And then finally this morning, we introduced the matter of gratitude.

And we drew that from the fact that the passage that we read and the scene that is painted, that is recorded for us, is one where very evidently you have this idea of God generously giving to Adam the gift of Eve. This is the scene that we have before us. God, as a generous and loving God, gives to Adam this precious, beautiful, wonderful gift. And Adam demonstrates his excitement, and I think we can say gratitude on receiving this gift. And I think we considered and suggested that it would be reasonable to extend that matter of gratitude, not only in our own personal circumstances, if God has been good in giving us a wife or a husband, but also our gratitude for the institution itself as a good gift of God.

And that any endeavor to change the institution is not only foolish, but an evidence of ingratitude, that we think that what we have been given by God is not as good as it could be. But having refreshed our memory a little about this morning, let's move on to the continuing or the following features or aspects of marriage that we find in the passage. First of all then, the question of authority, or if you wish, headship. Within the passage there is an indication that this is one element or aspect of marriage as designed by God. I'm thinking particularly of the words of Adam recorded

for us in verse 23, where Adam, on receiving this beautiful gift of Eve, erupts in these poetic and joyful words, this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man. And very particularly what Adam does in naming Eve. Adam takes upon himself, or perhaps that's not the way to put it, he exercises a God-given authority to name the one who he has been given. Now, I think that is significant. The passage in Genesis does not, in a very explicit or developed way, deal with this matter of authority or headship within marriage in the way that it is developed elsewhere in the Bible, very especially, and perhaps very specifically in Paul's epistles. But the matter is addressed in seed form, and particularly in this matter of Adam naming Eve. You see, in the Bible, the giving of a name is a function that implies or carries with it the idea of authority. The idea of authority, authority of the one giving the name to the one receiving the name.

[7 : 04] God names Adam as one who has authority over Adam. Parents name their children as those who are placed in authority over their children. And Adam names Eve, and as he does so, he is exercising a God-given authority within the marriage that is being established. Now, as we draw the implications of that for us today, it is clearly the case that husbands today no longer name their wives in the manner that Adam gives a name to Eve. But the principle of male authority or headship within marriage holds. Now, I would recognize, concede, if indeed concede is the word or the most appropriate word to use, that it would be rather bold to build a definitive case for continuing male authority or headship in marriage solely on the basis of this passage. But we have the principle that is found in this passage confirmed or reiterated in the New Testament. I've already made reference to how in Paul's epistles particularly, and if we remind ourselves of what Paul says in his epistle to the Ephesians in chapter 5, reading from verse 22, Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Now, no doubt, this passage merits a careful consideration, and we're not going to give it that careful consideration this evening. But even though we recognize it merits careful consideration, we also would contend that it is very clear in the basic truth that it is presenting. Now, it is the case that we live in a day and a generation in a society where this aspect of marriage where we recognize the authority, the headship granted to the husband, is an aspect that would be summarily dismissed by conventional wisdom. But its unpopularity does not in any way diminish its importance. God has established that in marriage the husband enjoys a God-given delegated authority over the household and over his wife. Now, in our fallen world where we are sinners, where husbands are sinners, where wives are sinners, where we're all sinners, it is undoubtedly the case that this truth is one that has been used or abused as a pretext for tyranny.

And of course, that cannot be justified, and we wouldn't for a moment justify the manner in which this truth has been abused by particularly many husbands. But the fact that it has been abused is not a reason for us to abandon God's design. The very same passage that speaks very gratefully for some of wives submitting to their husbands in everything also places upon the husband a responsibility to love his wife in a manner that is radical and sacrificial. Let's read on that same passage in Ephesians 5.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ, loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, It has been rightly observed that a woman loved in this manner will find submission to her husband a delight rather than a burden.

And I ask myself, as I ask husbands and wives present this evening, how is this truth fleshed out and applied in your marriage?

I ask, wives, do you submit to your husband as God has instructed you to? And husbands, do you love your wife just as Christ loved the church?

[11 : 55] Now, of course, the answer to that is no, we don't. But, of course, the challenge and the call is for us to seek with God's help to increasingly love our wives in the manner that Christ demands of us.

So that's another aspect of marriage that we find, as I say, in seed form in this passage in Genesis, the question of authority or headship. But I want to move on and notice another aspect of marriage that we find, and it's what I'm calling loyalty.

I was wondering what the best word would be, and I'm not convinced this is the best word, but it's the best I could come up with. And what I'm referring to here when I speak of loyalty as being an integral part of marriage, I'm speaking or referring very specifically to what is said there in verse 24. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife. What we have in this verse, in verse 24, we have what we might call an editorial comment drawing on the implications of what has gone before.

The way that the verse begins makes that clear. For this reason, in the light of what we have said concerning marriage, for this reason. These are the implications, implications that apply across time and universally.

[13:18] For this reason, there's debate, interesting, curious debate, but ultimately not of great importance as to whether it was Adam himself who drew this implication.

And that what we have here recorded are Adam's own conclusions concerning what he is observing and experiencing. It may be, or it may be Moses.

We don't know. It is the Word of God. We know that. And who was first to originally draw this conclusion or implication is really not particularly important.

But the point is that in this verse you have this, let's call it an editorial comment, drawing out the implications of what has gone before. And one implication is the need to recognize that with marriage comes a change in a man and a woman's principal loyalty.

Before marriage, our principal loyalty as sons and daughters was to our parents. That was our closest kinship and our principal loyalty.

[14:27] But that changes with marriage, where our principal loyalty is now to be to our wife or husband. The leaving that is spoken of here in verse 24, a man will leave his father and mother, or in some versions the stronger language, but in some regards more helpful language, the language of forsaking.

A man will forsake his father and mother. The language isn't principally to do with geography, though no doubt it's good common sense for a married couple to not be too close to their appearance.

Some distance is probably sensible. But though that's true, this I don't think is the principal idea of leaving a father and mother. Rather, the principal idea is this issue of our primary loyalty.

No longer to our parents, but now to our wife or husband. Now this, as I say, is very practical divine wisdom.

How many marriages have been and are being undermined by the failure, be it of the husband or the wife, to leave or forsake their father or mother.

[15:45] And parents become unwelcome intruders in the marriage, threatening it and damaging it in different ways. Here there is a responsibility on the part of the husband and the wife, not to facilitate that or to encourage that, but also on the part of the parents to grant to the new family the space that they need and that God determines they should have.

So this is another aspect of marriage, I think, that we find here in this passage, the question of our primary loyalty. But we move on to notice the next aspect, the seventh, the third this evening, but the seventh overall, and the penultimate one that we're going to be talking about.

And this one is what we could call union. In that same verse, in verse 24, we read, For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

Believing or the forsaking of the man or woman is inextricably linked with being united to his wife or her husband and becoming one flesh.

There's language there that we need to think about. There's the language of one flesh, and we'll begin there, and then we'll just backtrack a little and speak about the language of being united to.

[17:13] Clearly, they're very related terms, but they have their own particular significance. So if we begin with the language of one flesh, they will become one flesh.

Now, many commentators are at pains to stress, and I think rightly so, that this language or this description of becoming one flesh goes beyond the aspect of physical union.

Now, while that is true, it's also true that the aspect of physical or sexual union is, I think, very obviously present in the language.

That does not exhaust the significance of one flesh, but it is evidently part of what is meant and implied by speaking of a man and a woman becoming one flesh.

Perhaps the other most significant aspect of this language of one flesh is the idea of kinship or becoming part of the family of your husband or wife.

[18:19] And so when we marry, we ought not to take a very selfish and individualistic view that, well, that marriage, all that it implies is union with this woman.

And I have nothing to do with her family. They have nothing to do with me. No, when we marry, in a very real sense, we marry into another family, as the one we marry marries into our family.

I'm not going to draw out all the implications of that. I don't pretend to know all the implications of that. But I think that aspect is implied in this language of the man and the woman becoming one flesh.

But there's also the language, the very similar or related language, in the way that it's translated, certainly in our version of the Bible, of being united. The man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife.

Now, the language of being united carries at least a couple of implications. One that I think is very important and is central to our understanding of marriage as designed by God is the notion or the principle of permanence.

[19:30] The verb used, the verb translated being united, literally means to stick to and implies very clearly a union that is to be permanent and irreversible.

Now, that's also true of the language of one flesh. But this language of being united to your wife, of sticking to your wife, of cleaving to your wife, carries within it the idea of permanence.

And that is something important to our understanding, to God's design for marriage. One man, one woman, to the exclusion of others, until death do us part.

But as well as permanence, the language of being united to your wife, or indeed the two verbs of leaving father and mother, or of forsaking father and mother, and being united to our wife, also has, I think, I don't know if I would say clearly, but certainly the suggestion of marriage as having a covenantal significance.

The language of leaving and being united, of forsaking and sticking to or cleaving does suggest that God views marriage in covenantal terms, even if in this particular passage the word covenant is not present.

[20:57] We find this same language used to describe the people of God in their covenant relationship with God. Very particularly this language of sticking to or being united to.

If I just mention a couple of occasions where that is the case in Deuteronomy, and in chapter 10 and verse 20, we read in the following way, Fear the Lord your God and serve Him.

Hold fast to Him and take your oaths in His name. So here where we have the people of God being instructed as to their covenant responsibilities, one of them being very clearly to hold fast to the Lord.

This is the same language that is used of a husband being united to his wife, of clinging to his wife, of sticking to his wife, of holding fast to his wife. And so this language, now the fact that the same language is used of a people's covenant relationship with God doesn't in and of itself imply that you have a covenant relationship in marriage, but it would certainly point in that direction.

But of course, in addition to the covenant language that we have in Genesis, we also have, on other occasions in the Old Testament, the language of covenant being used explicitly to describe marriage.

[22:21] And there are a couple of references in that regard. We won't read the first one for reasons of time. I'll mention what it is in Proverbs chapter 2, verses 16 and 17, and you can have a look at that if you wish.

But for reasons of time, we'll just read one of the references where the language of covenant is used explicitly in speaking of and describing marriage. In Malachi chapter 2 and verse 14.

You ask, why? Well, let's read from verse 13 to not start in the middle of an argument or of a train of thought. In verse 13, Malachi 2 verse 13.

Another thing you do, you flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because He no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, why?

And then listen to the response that the Lord gives. It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

[23 : 27] So there we have very explicitly the language of covenant being used to describe what marriage is. It is a covenant in which the two parties are the husband and the wife.

And that also introduces this idea or confirms the idea of permanence. Just as God's covenant with His people is a permanent covenant and implies permanent responsibility, so too the covenant between a man and a woman in marriage.

Marriage then involves, as we're understanding, as we draw together these different strands or aspects, marriage involves the union of a man and a woman, a union that is intimate, covenantal, and permanent.

One man, one woman, to the exclusion of all others until death. But then one final aspect of marriage as we find it in this passage. I'm considering it under the final word, the word trust.

And here I would draw your attention to the final verse of chapter 2, where we read, The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

[24 : 39] I think it's the case, I may be wrong, but my impression is that this part of the account is often glossed over on the basis that it is deemed to no longer apply in our fallen world.

It's describing a situation that has passed. This was the case before the fall. Adam and Eve were both naked, and they felt no shame. But following the fall, God Himself provides coverings for them. And so we say, well, yes, this is the way it was at the beginning, before the fall, but we are in a different circumstance now, and so there's very little that we can draw from this that would be relevant to our circumstances.

But I think to draw that conclusion would be wrong, and it would be unfortunate, because I think we would miss out on identifying or recognizing a central aspect of marriage that this verse is highlighting, namely the importance of mutual trust.

The description of Adam and Eve feeling no shame, though they were naked, is pointing to a relationship of complete faith and trust in one another.

[25 : 48] They had, quite literally, nothing to hide. The covering of their nakedness following the fall is both literal, it's something that was literally provided for by God, but it's also symbolic.

It symbolizes a new reality, that of trust lost, and the need or the temptation to hide from the other that which we are ashamed of.

That did not exist before the fall, but following the fall, this intruder is found within the marriage relationship. And we are hiding from one another.

We are ashamed of truths and of realities about ourselves, even in front of our husband or wife. But I think what we can draw from this verse and the implications of it is that though it is difficult for us as sinners, it's difficult for us to altogether trust another unreservedly.

It's difficult for us to altogether trust our wife or our husband in every matter. And though it is the case that we are tempted to hide, be it from our wife or from our husband, that which we are ashamed of, the challenge that is before us is to recover and to cultivate the trust and mutual faith that we find in God's design, illustrated by Adam and Eve naked and feeling no shame.

[27 : 24] And so I would ask you on this matter, a hugely practical matter and a hugely important matter in marriage. Do you trust each other?

Are there matters that you prefer to keep hidden from your wife or from your husband? It really is very difficult to imagine anything more damaging to a marriage than a lack of mutual trust.

So we have this final aspect, certainly the final one that we are touching on or identifying, trust as being central to marriage as designed by God. Now we have largely, both this morning and this evening, tried to limit ourselves to the passage in question with an occasional reference to other supporting passages.

That's what we said at the beginning we would be trying to do. One response that I just want to touch on very briefly as we draw things to a close, one response that some might make or a question that some might have is whether the teaching on marriage that we have been considering in this passage in Genesis is validated or confirmed in the New Testament.

And very especially, what does Jesus have to say on this topic? Now I would say as a point of principle that even in the absence of specific validation of the teaching of Genesis 2 in the New Testament, it would still hold universally and through time given its foundational character.

[28 : 58] That said, we do find in the New Testament, both Jesus and the Apostle Paul explicitly appealing to this passage in Genesis 2 as the definitive statement on marriage.

God's definitive blueprint, if you wish, for marriage. We've read in Matthew chapter 19, where we won't read it again or even make reference to it again, but there in our reading, it was very clear how when the subject of marriage arises, in the case in question, a question regarding divorce, what does Jesus do?

He immediately turns to this passage in Genesis. He immediately turns to it as the definitive and authoritative statement of God on the subject.

And it is from this passage that He draws the conclusions and the implications to respond to the questions that are posed to Him. And so in that way, very clearly and very unequivocally, Jesus grants His seal of approval.

As I say, not that it would have been necessary for Him to do so, for us to hold this as authoritative, but we find Jesus does, as it happens, grant this very clear seal of approval to the passage that we've been considering.

[30 : 16] And so what we've drawn out from it, if indeed what we've drawn out is legitimate and are things we've drawn out reasonably and rightly from the passage, then it is right that we should see them as being applicable for us today.

So what is marriage as we do close our thoughts on it? Well, in the light of all that we've been able to see, we can understand it as the union of a man and a woman who love each other by all means, for the enjoyment of companionship and friendship, for the giving and receiving of help that is suitable, where we complement one another.

Marriage is also ordinarily the means whereby we can have and raise children. It is a gift of God that we are to receive with humble gratitude. It is a union that is permanent and covenantal, where God has granted to each party equally important but different functions.

It is also a union that requires a loyalty one to another that supersedes our loyalties to parents or others. And it is a relationship that will blossom in the measure that mutual trust and faith and honesty are present.

Time for a marriage audit, me thinks. Let us pray.