

Biblical Sexuality Part 2

This is the second message in a four part series on Biblical Sexuality. Today we are focusing on Biblical marriage. Is there a difference between the popular, cultural view of marriage and biblical marriage? Absolutely. I believe one of the reasons the divorce rate is so high in our culture and in the church is because we don't understand marriage from God's perspective. What does the bible teach regarding marriage?

People today have this view of marriage that you find "your soulmate", you have this emotional or romantic attraction to this person and marriage is the contract you negotiate that provides legal protection and recognition. You plan on this marriage meeting your emotional, physical and relational needs and if or when it doesn't, you end the contract and move on.

While biblical marriage may include an emotional or romantic attraction, the bible provides us with a richer, fuller, more comprehensive or all-encompassing view of marriage. We see God's design for marriage from the very beginning. **"But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man.' 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."** Genesis 2:20-25

Much of what we need to know about biblical marriage is found here. We know this is not just about Adam and Eve, but this is God's pattern and design for marriage because of verse 24 that says "a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh." Adam and Eve had no mother or father but God himself, so God's design is established for our benefit. Notice the uniqueness of biblical marriage expressed in this phrase: the man and wife become one flesh! This is more than just companionship, more than a strong emotional bond, this is an all-encompassing physical, emotional, spiritual, one-flesh union. There is no other relationship as complete as the union between husband and wife. Kevin DeYoung writes, **"The *ish* (man) and *ishah* (woman) can become one flesh because theirs is not just a sexual union but a reunion, the bringing together of two differentiated beings, with one made *from* and both made *for* the other."** Kevin DeYoung

The biblical view of marriage is that man and woman were made uniquely, physically, biologically, for one another, so that literally they become as one flesh. Todd Wilson, in *Mere Sexuality* writes, “The one flesh union is not just a uniting of bodies in some general way, like exchanging hugs or holding hands. It refers to a coming together of two bodies in a very specific way...Men and women have one, and only one, bodily organ that has been specifically designed for a complement and when these two organs – the male and female sexual organs come together to perform one unified and unifying act, they form a one-flesh union quite literally, physically, indeed even biologically.” Todd Wilson. This unique one-flesh uniting of two lives can only be between a man and a woman. Church tradition and common law has referred to this act as the consummation of a marriage. The consummation of marriage in this physical act and this comprehensive uniting of a man and a woman in an exclusive and permanent covenant relationship is what the bible calls marriage.

Notice this one flesh union is to be exclusive and permanent. God said the man leaves father and mother and is united to his wife and they become one. They are not united to multiple partners, but to each other in this union. Jesus spoke of this one-flesh union and said of biblical marriage, **“Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” Matthew 19:6**

Exclusive and permanent, it was also to be life-producing. God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and increase in number. Bearing children and raising them in the safety and covering of that one-flesh union was God’s design for passing on the faith and for creating a healthy and functioning society. It can only happen biologically in God’s design for marriage between a man and a woman. But there is more to this biblical view of marriage.

God intended biblical marriage to be a portrait of the covenant between God and his people. The prophet Isaiah said to the people of God, **“For your Maker is your husband – the Lord Almighty is his name.” Isaiah 54:5** The covenant relationship between God and his people is like the relationship of husband and wife. Our relationship with God, like the one-flesh union of marriage is exclusive. **“So you will be my people and I will be your God.” Jeremiah 30:22** We are to have no other gods, no other lovers but the Lord. Exclusive.

Our relationship with God, like the one-flesh union of marriage is to be a permanent covenant. **“I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you.” Ezekiel 16:60** Permanent.

We see this analogy in the New Testament as well. The Apostle Paul writes to husbands and wives, **“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...”** Paul then quotes from Genesis 2 about a man leaving his father and mother and being united with his wife in this one-flesh union and then states, **“This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.” Ephesians 5:32** The relationship between husband and wife is to be a picture to the world of the love and devotion Christ has for the church. How are we doing in making our marriage a portrait of Christ’s love?

The gospels also are full of these images. The Kingdom of God is like a wedding feast in Matthew 22:1-14. John the Baptist refers to himself as the best man and Jesus as the groom coming for his bride in John 3:29. Jesus is the groom in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in Matthew 25. Paul refers to us, the church as the bride in Ephesians 5. Revelation speaks of the marriage supper of the Lamb where Jesus is the Groom and the church his bride without spot or wrinkle, dressed for the consummation of all things as we are united forever with Christ. These images are found throughout Scripture, which is one reason God hates divorce. It mars and distorts the picture of God’s covenant relationship with his people, his church.

Let me say again, biblical marriage is to serve as a portrait of the relationship between Christ and his church. Paul Stevens, in *Married for Good* writes, **“From Genesis to Revelation the bible intertwines these two covenant marriages: God’s marriage to his people and our marriage to our spouses. Marriage helps us to understand God’s relationship to us and God’s relationship to us helps us to understand marriage.” R. Paul Stevens**

Jesus said, **“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” Hebrews 13:5.** That is what we are to say to our spouse in a biblical marriage. I won’t forsake you, just like Jesus won’t forsake you. Exclusive. Permanent. A covenant that helps the world understand the lasting covenant of Jesus and his church! That’s biblical marriage. So...let me sum this part up.

If marriage is just a civil status created between consenting adults who feel some kind of romantic or sexual feelings for each other for a time, then there is very little reason to limit this to one man and one woman. But, if marriage is the one-flesh union of two people physically, emotionally, spiritually as a picture of the covenant relationship between Christ and the church, and if marriage is the fulfillment of the created order that it is not good for humans to be alone, and in marriage we are to live in deeply committed covenantal relationship and join God in the sacred responsibility to fill creation with human life, then the one-flesh union of one man and

one woman is the only way this works. Nothing else fits. This is not bigotry, this is biology and divine design. This is biblical marriage.

When we talk about biblical sexuality and biblical marriage it is important we point out that according to the bible sex belongs only within the safe confines of that one-flesh union of husband and wife. Peter Kreeft writes, “Sex is for marriage. No adulterating sex, no sex outside of marriage either before, during or after marriage. That is the unquestioned, uniform tradition. It is not a tradition of Christian morality alone; traditional Jewish and Muslim morality as well as most pagan morality teach the same thing.” (*Making Choices*). R. Paul Stevens said it this way, “The Bible puts sex in its proper place – inside the covenant of marriage.” This is God’s design. But why? Why did God create and design sex for us and then put boundaries around it?

What is the purpose of sex? In our culture most everyone thinks of the purpose of sex as being for pleasure. It is pleasurable, but from a biblical standpoint that was not God’s primary reason. Todd Wilson writes, “**Sex is a blessing not because of the pleasure it brings but because of the purpose it serves; to unite lives and to create life.**” ...**Todd Wilson**

It was not good that we be alone and without that sex drive to move us beyond ourselves and toward relationship, the human race wouldn’t continue. In addition, if sex was painful, the race would die off so God made it pleasurable. God’s intent was that sexual desire would drive us to appropriate relationship in that one-flesh union and when it was God’s will, it would result in the birth of a new life. Sex was about uniting and creating life, but we’ve tried to divorce sex from its’ God designed purpose. We’ve made it about pleasure for ourselves. Stevens said, “Sex is a tool of the covenant that was never meant for ‘me’ but for ‘us.’” When you fail to recognize the purpose of a thing, you’ll misuse or abuse that thing. When we divorce sex from God’s design and purpose, it becomes misused and abused and it becomes far less than what God intended it to be! I said it last week, because our culture has misused sex, we are oversexed and under-satisfied. Rejecting God’s order and design and purpose never works out!

God created and designed us for the safe and appropriate expression of sex in the one-flesh union of man and woman in the covenant of marriage. Why does the bible insist on limiting sex to marriage? God isn’t trying to limit our enjoyment of sex, he is trying to increase it. He is trying to keep sex from becoming destructive and painful. Let me quote again from Todd Wilson in *Mere Sexuality*. “We believe that sex is only for marriage, not because Christians are killjoys, but because we have a realistic and exalted view of the power of sex. Sex isn’t a toy or

plaything; it's a sacred and sovereign power – strong enough, in fact, to bring new life into being. When something is powerful – think of a downed power line or a loaded gun – you aren't careless when you handle it. You understand that it can kill or harm you if you aren't careful. Sex is a powerful creative gift, something God gives us for good purposes. But if we misuse it and are careless, it can profoundly harm us." ...Todd Wilson

Sex is powerful, too powerful to be used outside of the exclusive, permanent, one-flesh union of biblical marriage. For everyone that says, "that's all a bunch of outdated, prudish biblical stuff. Have sex with whomever you please and enjoy it. It's no big deal." They are ignoring the power of sex that I'm talking about. I can show you what "sex is no big deal" ultimately looks like. It looks like babies aborted, or babies born but uncared for, unwanted, resented because they interrupted life plans. It looks like pain because you "gave yourself" to someone and they only used you. The "sex is no big deal" view leads to heartache and emotional pain. It leads to betrayal and adultery and scandal. Sex is a big deal, a powerful thing, and divorced from God's design and purpose in marriage it becomes a weapon that can inflict terrible damage. A few years ago there was a campaign to practice safe sex. Wilson wrote, "Here's a news flash: there is no such thing as safe sex. Sex is too powerful ever to be safe." Biblical sexuality recognizes that sex is powerful and sex is good and sex is a blessing but it belongs only in the safe confines of biblical marriage. Only in that one flesh union does the bible say, "the man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame." Genesis 2:25

Okay, so sex only belongs in biblical marriage, but what about single folks? We are going to talk more about sex and singleness and God's plan in a couple of weeks. But if you are single, I would encourage you to trust God and seek to discover all of God's good plans for your life as you walk in sexual purity. In spite of the fact we look at Adam and Eve as though they were incomplete until they found each other, the truth is, completeness is found in Christ. Sex isn't necessary for happiness or wholeness. Consider that marriage is a temporary thing in the economy of God, as is sex itself. Jesus said in heaven we are neither married nor given in marriage but we will be like the angels. We will still have gender, but marriage and sexual expression will be unnecessary as satisfaction and joy will be complete in Christ. Your singleness may be a reminder to us of what God has in store for us in heaven so celebrate it and trust God's plan and purpose for your life.

I said one of the reasons for sex in marriage is for the procreation of children. I know there are couples who struggle with infertility issues. If this is God's plan, why are we having trouble conceiving a child? I don't know nor can I begin to explain God's sovereign plans for you, but I can tell you there is in that one-flesh covenant of biblical marriage a fruitfulness that is a blessing in itself even if you've not had children. Continue to trust in God's timing and plan, and allow the Holy Spirit to continue to work and bear fruit in your life and marriage.

We said the marriage covenant is a portrait of the covenant between Christ and the church and sexual sin and adultery messes up the picture. It distorts the image God intended. So what if you messed up that image? Your marriage failed, you cheated on your spouse, you've been the victim of a spouse's betrayal, you've gone through marriage and divorce, perhaps multiple times. Is there hope for you? Absolutely. There is healing, mercy and grace for you.

The prophet Jeremiah was sent to the potter's house and he watched as the potter made a piece of pottery on the wheel. The bible says, **“But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. Then the word of the Lord came to me, ‘O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?’”** Jeremiah 18:4-6.

You may have distorted or marred the portrait of the relationship between Christ and the church by your sexual sin, your adultery or failure. You marred the image. Like the potter, you messed up the piece of pottery he was creating representing your marriage, but if you will turn from your sin and turn to him, he will reshape and refashion your marriage, your life – he will make you and your marriage over again. It doesn't have to end, not if you place your trust in him.

If you have sinned, seek forgiveness. Take the necessary steps to make things right with God and right with your spouse. If you are married, commit to making your marriage a biblical marriage. Commit to fidelity and faithfulness in the biblical covenant of marriage: an exclusive, permanent, one-flesh union. Seek to honor God in your marriage and to make your marriage a portrait to the world of the relationship between Christ and his church. Husbands and wives, love each other as Christ loved the church and gave himself for us.

If you are single, flee sexual immorality and instead, honor the call of God to chastity and sexual purity. Discover that God's call is not burdensome but full of freedom and grace. Let's surrender our lives to God, and to his call to biblical sexuality and biblical marriage!