

## “Marriage in the Family of God”

### The Family of God

Downtown

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I was a junior in college. I was leading a bible study at the time and went to meet up with some of the guys in the group at a student center type place. They were sitting around with some folks that I didn't know and as I walked up I noticed that one of these people I didn't know was an attractive young lady. As I was sitting down I realized that the book in front of her was a Bible. And it was opened. And she was reading it. And I thought "hmm attractive with an open bible? It feels important that I meet her" And I immediately hopped back up out of my seat and walked over and said "hey I don't think we've met. My name is Adam." And she said, "Hi, my name is Courtney." We chatted for a bit. Over the course of the next few weeks, we ran into each other a few times and would stop and talk.

The first date we ever went on was actually because she asked me out. Now, it's a little more complicated than that and she didn't even admit it at first. It was a sorority event where your friends pick your date and go pick him up and bring him to meet you at the event. But of course, you tell your friends who you want them to bring. And Courtney told her friends to go get me.

We had a great time and from there spent more and more time together. And I'll never forget, we had been dating for 3 months and I knew that we were going to get married. I remember thinking "oh wow, we've been dating three months and I know we are going to get married." It stood out to me because growing up, my mom always claimed that she knew on the night that she met my dad, they would end up getting married. She says she even told her friends and they laughed at her because of how ridiculous it sounded. And I always thought, "how could you know something like that?" But I did. It took me longer to realize it than it took my mom with dad. But I knew after 3 months.

I'm getting very close to the point where I will have spent more of my life with Courtney than without her. I've had the best moments of my life with her. I've had the worst moments of my life with her. The best moments have been better because I was with her. The worst moments have been better because I was with her.

Marriage is something called a '**cultural universal**'. Cultural Universal is the anthropological name for something done, in some form or other, by every human culture around the world. Even cultures that have no interactions with other societies. Some cultural universals are complex and multi-varied. Others are simple. Like joking. Did you know that every culture, everywhere has some form of joking? Built into our human nature is a desire to do or say things that make other people smile. Part of being a human is to enjoy bringing joy to others. How beautiful is that?

Marriage is another cultural universal. Now, the ceremonies, rules, and roles differ to be sure, but it's there. All over the world, all throughout history.

It's a fascinating concept. Cultural universals, like marriage, are not always easy to explain anthropologically. When humans are creating societies and ways of life all over the planet, some with absolutely no contact with other groups, why would something like marriage always pop up? There are some theories, but they're...difficult.

They are not difficult, however, for Christians. We know why all human cultures have jokes. Because we've been created by a joy-filled God and the joy of the Lord is our strength.

And we know why marriage is a cultural universal. Because God has hard-wired us so that when a young person gets to around middle school age their body is going to start doing some very interesting things. Hormones will swirl and generally speaking, the opposite sex will become less gross and more intriguing.

And young men will walk up to young women with their bibles open in student centers and say "I think it's important that I meet you." And young women will secretly scheme first date opportunities with their friends. And a man and a woman will become husband and wife.

And none of that...is what I want to talk about today. Today I don't want to talk about what is similar across cultures when it comes to the concept of marriage, but what is distinct and different. Because the God who has created us and hardwired the concept of marriage into the human experience also clarifies for us why he has done this. And it's my belief that knowing what marriage is supposed to be, is critical for the health of your marriage.

Today I don't want to talk practically about your marriage, for those of you who are married. I want to talk theoretically about marriage. And I think if you'll dial in with me, we will all have things we can take and apply to our marriages as we leave.

Open up your Bibles to Ephesians 5:22-32.

### **Ephesians 5:22-31**

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

We'll talk more about these verses next week. The title of that sermon is "Passive men and the women who resent them." So I'll see every one of you back here next week...

In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

After giving some instructions, Paul starts to clarify the design of marriage. Marriage is the type of relationship where one nourishes and cherishes the other person the same way they would for themselves. Where self-protection and self-interest become other-protection and other-interest.

Paul is going to further his argument of marriage design by going back to the very beginning of marriage:

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

This is a quote from the story of Adam and Eve, the first two humans created by God. The way the Genesis account works is that it is what "happened" and what "happens."

God creates Adam, which in Hebrew means "man". He gives Adam meaningful work to do but then says "It's not good for man to be alone." God made that statement before the fall. The ache of loneliness is the one ache we have that does not arise from sin. Adam had perfect communion with God 24 hours a day yet he still ached for human companionship! (This was because God created us in His image, and God exists eternally as a Trinity in community with his equals.) So God created for Adam a companion, his equal, just of the opposite gender. In that way, they would be like the Trinity. In their essence, the same. But in their persons and roles, different. The woman was created to be his companion, his friend. Several times in the OT the marriage partner is called that: Hebrew: a "*halup*" which means "deep friend."

And so God gives him a friend. A companion. A counterpart. A spouse. This is why we have puberty and pimples, it's why we're so drawn to love stories, this is why when a marriage has been healthy for 40 or 50 years it almost always has beautiful good fruit that it leaves behind. Because the Genesis story is what happened and what happens.

As well, this is a companionship that has a special calling on it. God makes Adam and Eve different from each other in complementary ways. Even their very bodies are designed to complement one another. And one result of this complementary union of two distinctly different creatures is literally life itself. This is why God looks at Adam and Eve and says "Be fruitful and multiply."

Paul's argument has been building. Husbands and wives have unique roles because God designed them for unique purposes. They should learn to care about each other more than themselves because their very union is something bigger than themselves. Their oneness literally keeps this whole thing going. But what he's about to say is arguably the most important part of this passage:

**Ephesians 5:32**

This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

Paul has been painting a very high view of marriage already. But now he notches it up and declares that marriage serves an even deeper purpose because it actually puts on display the union between Christ and the church. God designed marriage to be a leaving breathing advertisement for how Jesus treats his people. So Christian marriages have this profoundly deep calling on their union. Because God designed it in such a way that rightly operating, there will be people that look at a Christian marriage and they see something they can't quite put their finger on. They will be drawn to something, and they may think they are being drawn to a good marriage but in reality, there's something even deeper calling out to them. If you want more on this topic, we've done a lot of work here in the past. There is an entire series called "A Marriage you'd actually Want" on our website.

For today, I want to just point out some of the ways that the picture Paul paints here is markedly different from the ways our culture tends to think about marriage. (Work through this chart)

<b>American Marriage</b>	<b>Christian Marriage</b>
A consumer relationship.	A covenant relationship.
Has limited resources.	Has supernatural resources.
Primarily concerned with happiness.	Primarily concerned with holiness.
An end in itself.	A means to glorify God.

**American marriage functions as a consumer relationship.**

There are two basic types of relationships. Consumer relationship and covenant relationships. I have a consumer relationship with the grocery store Aldi. They offer me decent food at very good prices. Sometimes suspiciously good prices, but I don't ask any questions. My relationship with Aldi is a means to an end. Decent food and good prices. So long as they continue to do that I will stay in a relationship with them. But if I find another store that offers better food at better prices, I will simply tell Aldi that I feel the need to see other people and move on.

Covenant relationships are a different category. A covenant relationship is one where what I gain is not a factor in whether or not I remain. Different relationships go into two categories.

For example, if I told my kids "You know, guys, things have changed for me and this is just not working out. It's not you; it's me. I actually have been hanging out with the neighbor's kids, and I'm kind of happier with them. So, you won't be seeing me much anymore." You instinctively know that I have placed my kids into the wrong category. A father's relationship to his children should not be consumer oriented, but covenant oriented.

In our country, we have increasingly placed marriage into the consumer category, and that's not where it belongs.

I would argue that everyone knows this is actually wrong. But we suppress the truth in our unrighteousness. And I can prove it.

Imagine if you were to attend a wedding of Americans that had completely honest vows. They may say something like this...picture the groom saying, "I James, take thee, Sarah, to be my lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, ... so long as...you will cook the food and do the laundry, and let me play video games at night and you don't gain too much weight and I don't get bored and discontent and who knows what will happen with my mid-life crisis wise but, other than that...till death do us part."

And then she looks at him with glistening eyes and says "if you will make enough money that I only have to work if I want to, and so long as you don't start always wearing sweatpants around the house and keep your smells and hair growth under control...till death do us part." If you heard anything like that you'd quietly walk over to the gift table to take your gift back.

"I don't know what's happening here but this isn't good." You would know something was wrong, even if you didn't have this language of consumer or covenant. You would sense "it seems you've put marriage into the wrong category." And you'd be right.

### **Ephesians 5:31**

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

The words "hold fast" or you might have heard "cleave" literally means "to make covenant."

The two become one flesh. Pastor JD Greear says that divorce should be as radical as amputating an arm or leg. Because in a sense that is what you are doing.

There are times when amputation might be necessary, but a doctor would quickly be out of practice if he or she suggested it too much or too quickly. Sprained ankle? Hmm, let's just take the leg.

A consumer relationship can be easily walked out of. But a covenant has to be killed. Without getting too far off subject, the bible does say there are certain things that can kill the marriage covenant. The death of a spouse kills the covenant. Adultery can kill the covenant. Abandonment kills the covenant. Some scholars say, and I agree, that a spouse can kill the covenant by getting to a place where they are unable to be safely lived with. Physical abuse or illegal activity where you and your kids are in physical danger because of it. You'll notice that these are all extremes.

Expectations will or won't be met, but that doesn't kill the covenant. There is no such thing as irreconcilable differences in a covenant.

Covenant is not about how you feel or what you want. It's not about where you are now. Covenant is about where you will be. It's about future intentions. It doesn't really matter how you feel, where are you going to be? In a covenant, that answer is "with my spouse."

When you see a married couple that has been married 30 40 50 years, do you actually think they woke up every single day and thought "you know what I feel like doing? serving my spouse in love." Covenant is what holds you together. Aside from the extremes, you are free to leave your spouse when Jesus leaves his.

The first 6 months of our marriage, Courtney and I were miserable. we were driving each other crazy, lashing out at each other, so bothered by everything the other person did. So we scheduled a getaway trip. We went to Charleston, sat down at a restaurant, looked at each other, and said "this is awful. It is not working. What do we need to do to fix it?"

The thing that gave us the courage to engage and press forward was the fact that I knew she wasn't going anywhere and she knew I wasn't going anywhere. So we might as well figure out a way to make it work. Without the security of a covenant, then you add to every conflict crippling back of your mind thoughts like "is this actually worth it? Should I just walk away? Is this gonna be the final straw that causes her to walk away?" And you undermine your ability to work through hard things together.

### **American marriage has limited resources.**

What I mean by that is when your spouse sins against you, all you have is what you can muster inside yourself. You have to look within you and decide, do I want to forgive this, again? Or do I not want to? Do I have the capacity or not? And let me tell you, if you are the only tank you have to draw from, that can run out.

But a Christian has an inexhaustible well of supernatural resources to draw from. If you are a Christian, you will never have to forgive your spouse more than Christ has already forgiven you. You have a storehouse of grace that you can pull from because you're just giving what you've already been given. Your faithfulness to your spouse has a deep well to pull from in God's faithfulness to you. You don't look to your spouse and base your behavior off of what they do, you look to God and base your behavior off of what He's done for you. He has never left you, never forsaken you, always pursued you when you turned and ran from Him. His faithfulness is your model and your source.

There is only one true source of the supernatural patience and love and kindness and grace that we will need. We have supernatural resources in Christ that are simply unavailable to those who don't know Him. I'm gonna say it this way and leave it because you are going to know how you need to apply it. In Christ, you now have the resources to deal with the worst part of your spouse.

### **American marriage is primarily concerned with happiness.**

That seems to be the primary question we ask about marriages and even our own. Do they make each other happy? Am I happy? I'm not saying that question is worthless, but if it's the only and primary one in your arsenal to evaluate something as meaningful as marriage, then you are destined for a hollow and immature view.

Getting married to be happy is like buying a car to get air conditioning. A good one will have it, but that's a bad reason to buy a car. There are easier ways to get air conditioning. If all you want is endorphins...there are easier ways.

When the Bible looks at a man and woman united in the covenant of marriage, there is some reverence there. Because those two people have participated in something far greater than their own meandering feelings of happiness. They have created a new family that can't be uncreated. Their union is meant to bless the world, bring shelter for any children brought into the family, sanctify the deep-seated sin in each other, train the next generation to be good humans who love and trust God.

For the Christian, marriage is a history-altering, gospel-proclaiming, sin-defeating, generation-blessing union with glory so bright that at the moment happiness couldn't possibly be the first concern.

Christian marriage is primarily concerned with holiness--with the spiritual good of those in the marriage and those touched by the marriage.

For you who are married, God has given you a gift by giving you someone to see the ugliest unedited sides of you, to catch you in secret sins, to put their finger right on the deepest cracks of your soul. Because He loves you, and He wants you to grow. He's also given you a gift in your spouse, who has unique struggles of their own that rub you in all the wrong ways. Some of you are convinced God handcrafted your spouse to expose every bent place in your soul. Because He loves you, and He wants you to grow into the person He designed you to be. It's where the bending in that happened with our sin nature gets challenged to bend outward toward another.

When happiness is the highest goal, your spouse's little annoyances and weaknesses will eat away at you. Their irritating habits become very hard to deal with. Because they do something that bothers you, and your happiness is your highest aim. So when they violate your highest aim, you can't tolerate it.

But when marriage is about holiness, inconveniences can remain there. They are small things that bother you. There is now space for weakness in your spouse. There is space for them to be a sinner. There is space for them to do things that are annoying. And the thing that happens is you begin to grow in patience and your ability to extending grace. And this is what cares about more than your in the moment happiness. God cares far more about the kind of person you are becoming. He's willing to sacrifice some endorphins for that.

He cares about the stability and flourishing of society. He cares about what your kids will grow up to think about faithfulness. He cares about what generations down from you will think about God due to the legacy you are starting now.

### **American marriage is an end in itself.**

Christian marriage is not ultimately about the people in the marriage. This is Paul's concluding thought, that the mystery of marriage is that it points to something entirely bigger than the marriage itself. Ephesians 5 tells us that your marriage is designed to be a picture of Christ and the church. Your marriage is only as good as it shows the world how Jesus treats his people.

The primary point of your marriage is to showcase the faithful, enduring, permanent love between Christ and His church. Everything takes a backseat to that majestic calling.

One of the honors that come along with my job and role in our church is that I get to perform a good many weddings. I remember when I was ordained, one of the things that felt surreal to me was that I then possessed the power to declare that people were officially married.

In fact, as an ordination gift, one of my friends made me a vest that said "power vest" because I could now stand in front of people and say "by the power vested in me I now pronounce you husband and wife. It had a note that said "congratulations on getting your power vest."

And when I do weddings, I almost always say things exactly like what I've said here today. I talk about how marriage is actually about Jesus and his people, I talk about grace and the resources Christ provides his people, how marriage is meant to reflect the reality of Jesus's unbreakable covenant with us. I always keep it short and sweet and direct. and after these short, gospel-centric wedding sermons we've had so many people come up afterward to say something like, "Wow, that was so beautiful."

There's something about a wedding between two believers, where Christ is lifted high and typically followed by a good party, that just gets to people. It speaks to something they can't quite put their finger on.

And again, the Bible doesn't leave us to wonder. It tells us exactly what that deep longing is for.

We've already talked about how Scripture begins with a marriage, but it also ends with one. The book of Revelation prophesies about the end of time, and in chapter 19 tells of something called the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

**Revelation 19:6-9a**

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said[a] to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."

Christian marriage is that, as wonderful as it is, is not permanent. It's a shadow of something even greater. The most compelling, moving parts of the best weddings and the best marriages are really only showcasing this marriage, this feast, that will happen at the end of time.

God is creating a new relationship between Christ and His people. A new family, bought with blood, whose creation is so joyous that the party lasts literally forever.

This eternal marriage is for all of us who are covered in the blood of Christ. Single, married, divorced, widowed--all of us. We have lots of work ahead of us to shape our marriages into the kind of Christ-exalting, sin-crushing, joy-producing unions they are designed to be. But none of that will happen unless our eyes are fixed on this great prize beyond the horizon of time. This feast is what our marriages are meant to display.

-You may not currently feel very compatible with your spouse. I have good news for you...neither were Christ and a sinful people very compatible.

-You may feel like you are scraping the bottom of your forgiveness barrel. But God's mercies are new every morning for you, so your mercies can be new every morning for your spouse.

-You may not feel all that happy with your current circumstances. Comfort did not abound for Jesus either, while He faced the cross that killed Him to win His bride. You now find yourself in a covenant of sacrificial love, with a purpose deep and meaningful enough to sustain you.

-You may be overwhelmed by the deeply bothersome junk your marriage has brought out of both of you. Christ lovingly smiles on all of that, because He's getting you ready for a feast beyond your wildest imagination.

Fix your eyes there, on the one whom marriage itself points to. Lift your eyes up off your frustrations to these sustaining truths about marriage. While your eyes are there, it becomes a lot easier to love your spouse.