

God's Beautiful Design (5) – Marriage in the NT | *Ephesians 5:22-6:4*

1. The Bible's Assumption Regarding Marriage

Note the assumption behind those verses – husband, wife & children. When you read through the NT you can only come to the conclusion that, as well as there being direct teaching on marriage, there is also a strong & clear underlying assumption about what marriage is. This assumption is there when Jesus says (Matt 5:32); **“But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery...”** The strong & clear underlying assumption is that marriage is between a man & a woman! This same assumption is there in some of the parables Jesus told (The Wedding Banquet & The 10 Virgins). Jesus also performed his first miracle at a wedding in Cana.

It is also there when Romans 7:2 says; **“For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage.”** Marriage is designed to be a lifelong contract between a man & woman. In 1 Corinthians 7 we have a whole chapter dealing with practical issues regarding marriage & singleness with the whole assumption being marriage is between a man & a woman. In Colossians 3:18-21 we read; **“Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting. Husbands love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children lest they become discouraged.”** There is an assumption behind those words, a particular understanding of marriage & family that is held up throughout the NT. In 1 Timothy 3:2 & 12 local churches are instructed that overseers & deacons must be; **“the husband of one wife... managing their children and their own households well.”** Again there is a clear assumption about marriage & family in those verses. In 5:9 of the same letter it says; **“Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband...”** In Titus 1:6 the same standard is held up regarding church leadership as in 1 Timothy & then in 2:4 Paul writes; **“and so train the young woman to love their husbands and children...”** In 1 Peter 3:1-7 we're given more teaching regarding the roles of husbands & wives in marriage.

The whole assumption behind all these examples & others in the NT is that marriage is between a man and a woman. That is what marriage is, the NT allows no other definition onto its pages. We also have the imagery of Bride & Groom in Revelation. So the Bible opens & closes with imagery of marriage that is reflective in God's Beautiful Design.

There is not one mention in all of Scripture of marriage being anything else other than between a man & a woman. (As I quoted last week; *“even where polygamy was practiced, the two-ness of the marital bond still found expression. Solomon's wives were not married to each other. The nature of marriage was still a man & a woman in one-flesh union...”*) So it's not just that the Bible has a lot to say about heterosexual marriage, it's also that it gives no other definition of marriage, no other example of marriage. It

understands it in no other terms & offers us no other alternative! You would think that if God was willing to be flexible on this that there would be at least one or two alternative examples. It would not have been hard for Paul to throw in an alternative example since there were examples of same sex unions in the Roman world the NT was written in.

People can argue; *“the Bible does not prohibit loving, consensual marriage between two people of the same sex”*, but the truth is the Bible does not recognise or define marriage in any other way apart from between a man & a woman. Any other human combination is something else altogether, something other than marriage. Any other arrangement simply cannot be Biblically defined as marriage. So the simple reason the Bible does not specifically condemn a gay marriage is because it does not recognise anything else as marriage apart between a man & woman. And anyway, does the Bible not explicitly make it clear that homosexuality is wrong in Romans 1:26-27 & in other NT passages which we will look at in a few weeks time?

How does God view marriage? How does God talk about marriage? What picture does the whole counsel of God paint of marriage? That is what is important! What is in God’s mind when he talks about marriage through his living & abiding Word? More specifically how did Jesus view marriage & where did he base this understanding of it & therefore where should we base ours? **Let’s turn to Matthew 19:1-12.**

2. Christ’s View On Marriage

God’s design, which Jesus holds up here, includes mother & father & husband & wife. The assumption is the man grows up with his father & his mother until he reaches the age of maturity & then leaves & holds fast to his wife, and they become one flesh beginning a new family unit. (Unless, of course; they are called to be single which Jesus also deals with in these verses.) Obviously tragedy & other happenings in a fallen world can alter this general pattern. However, this in no way undermines God’s original design for what is generally true regarding family & marriage.

When the Pharisees question Jesus about divorce in verse 7 look at where Jesus points with his reasoning. He says **“but from the beginning it was not so.”** I submit that they could have asked Jesus any question regarding marriage & he would have pointed to the same place. Here we see Jesus honouring Scripture, especially the creation account, & drawing his argument & authority from it. He chose to base his theological reasoning on a story that so called liberal or progressive theologians speak of as myth from the ancient world. Obviously a view not shared by Jesus.

Jesus took his hearers back to the beginning of the Bible & got his view & definition for marriage there. The creator made male & female 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?”** And Jesus added; **“So they are no longer two but**

one flesh. What God has joined together, let not man separate.” And when they questioned him further how did Jesus answer? By pointing out **“but from the beginning it was not so.”** That was Jesus’ clear line of reasoning. So when people say; why not polygamy today (if God allowed it in the OT)? We follow Christ’s example & reply **“but from the beginning it was not so”**. When people reason for same sex marriage our reasoning is **“but from the beginning it was not so.”** We point to what Jesus pointed to. We base our definition of marriage on the same truth Jesus based his definition on. We go to the same reference point as our Lord Jesus! We follow him even when it means going against the flow of popular opinion. We follow him even when it means personally denying ourselves & taking up our cross.

Let’s now turn back to the passage we read at the beginning, I believe the creation account, this account of Jesus, & this text we’re going to look at now to be the three most important texts on marriage in the Bible.

Let’s read Ephesians 5:22-24.

3. The Profound Purpose of Marriage

Paul has been talking about unity in the church & now he turns to unity in the home. These two unities are related to each other. Paul firstly & briefly calls on wives to submit to their own husbands. It’s not that woman submit to men it’s that wives submit to their own husbands. This is instruction for a family unit. Paul then gives two reasons for this: the Lordship of Christ & the headship of man. This is not a negative or forced submission but a willing submission. One that parallels not the systems of this world but how the church submits to Christ (v24). The husband is also to submit to Christ & there can only be harmony when both are living under the lordship of Christ. *“Each for the other, both for the Lord”* sums up NT teaching on marriage.

The best model we have for willing submission is found in the Trinity. The Son is submissive to the Father, and the Spirit is submissive to both the Father & the Son. Yet at the same time we insist that the Son & the Spirit are co-equal, co-essential, & equal in power & dignity with the Father. Even though there is distinction between roles in the Trinity; the Father, Son & Spirit rule together not over one another. The wife’s submission is as co-ruler, as joint heir, not as slave or servant. The Trinity, the very nature of our God, shows us how this is possible & there is something about how God has designed marriage that reflects this. Paul also points in these verses to the fact that there is an analogy between the headship of Christ over the church & the headship of a husband over his wife.

So when Paul radically holds up the equality of all in Christ in Galatians 3:28; **“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”**, he is not saying there is no distinctiveness between the two genders he created or else we wouldn’t need teaching like we have here – which clearly indicates there is gender distinction. He is simply underlining our equality in Christ. We are equal but different. Some use Gal 3:28 to claim: *If in Christ there is neither male*

nor female, this implies that conversion to Christ obliterates the distinction between male & female. But that limited view of equality does not fit with the complete NT teaching on male & female & husband & wife. Equality does not mean we are all exactly alike & fulfil the same roles.

When the Bible says the husband is to be the head of the home, & calls the wife to submit to his loving headship in it no way undermines equality or gives him licence to domineer over her. Remember, Adam & Eve were created as co-rulers. So a husband is to consult with his wife, to lean upon her wisdom & intuition & take seriously her concerns & her judgements. In shows leadership to the family! This does not mean a husband always agrees with his wife but that he always takes her seriously... This is how marriage works. Jesus sets the foundation for all levels of Christian leadership in Matthew 20:25-28. Paul now moves on to make the husband's role even clearer & note that this next section is significantly longer.

I often think marriages would work better if we only focused on the verses directed at us rather than those directed at our spouse... **Let's read 25-33.** Let me just ask an honest question before I read: How would any of this work in a same sex marriage? How would it align with this teaching?

I reckon if we men who are married went away & studied only these verses, & with God's help put into practice what we learned, our wives & marriages would flourish in a world where marriage in being undermined in many ways. R.C. Sproul writes;

"No Christian woman would object for a single moment to be in submission to her husband, if her husband were Jesus Christ. Obviously the Bible calls wives to be in subjection to husbands who are not Jesus Christ, but the responsibility that is given to the man here is terrifying: to love their wives like Christ loved the church and gave himself for the church. Would a woman be afraid to submit herself to a man who loved her as much as Jesus loved the church?"

Husbands might think, *"well I'll love her as Christ loved the church, as soon as she learns to submit to me"*. But is that how Christ loved & continues to love the church that is often not submissive to him? Christ died for a church that was in rebellion against him! So there is no way for the husband to dodge this command. These verses have much more to say about a husband's love than a wife's submission.

These verses highlight Christ's priority for the well being of his Bride, the church; & how a husband loves his wife should reflect this. Warren Wiersbe writes; *"If the husband makes Christ's love for the church the pattern for loving his wife, then he will love her sacrificially."* In a husband's mind, his wife should be sanctified – that is set apart as the object of his love. He should be all about doing whatever is needed to bring out her radiance. We read words like nourish & cherish – **"as Christ does the church"**. These words & metaphors teach husbands *how* to love their wives. He wants her to be all she can be. This is so opposite to a domineering husband who views a wife as a servant existing to help him fulfil all his dreams... I was struck by the vision of the wife in Proverbs 31 lately. This is a vision of a wife given the freedom to flourish & when you love someone their flourishing takes priority over your own flourishing.

Like Jesus, in verse 31, Paul points back to the Genesis account as his authority for defining marriage & then says; **“This mystery is profound, and I am saying it refers to Christ and the church.”** There is something about God’s original design for marriage that profoundly teaches us about Christ & the church. God established marriage for many reasons... but here in Ephesians 5, Paul says there is a profound purpose in marriage that points to Christ & his church. Throughout these verses there is a going back & forth between the relationship between husband & wife & that between Christ & his church. This is why the Biblical definition of marriage needs to be upheld – at least by Christian’s. And not just in our theology but by example. John Piper sums all this up well when he writes;

“Husbands & wives, recognise that in marriage you have become one flesh. If you live for your private pleasure at the expense of your spouse, you are living against yourself & destroying your joy. But if you devote yourself with all your heart to the holy joy of your spouse, you will also be living for your own joy & making a marriage after the image of Christ & his church.”

(Note Paul’s summary in verses 33 & what it highlights...)