

## GOD'S DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE

(SUNDAY, APRIL 28, 2013)

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**Scripture Reading:** Genesis 2:15-25; Matthew 19:1-12

### Introduction

I have decided to preach on the subject of marriage today for several reasons. First, it is vital that we are confident in what Scripture declares about marriage. Second, the definition of marriage is being redefined in our own nation and around the world. Marriage has not yet been redefined in the state of Illinois, but as you know the attempts are very strong and could well succeed, especially if God's people just sit around and do nothing. Third, various Christian organizations have challenged pastors to speak directly on this subject. I hope everyone here knows my position and what we believe as a congregation, but I want to honestly say that as a pastor I have spoken directly on this crucial subject.

I almost feel that speaking on the definition of marriage is like preaching a sermon on 2+2. But increasingly we live in a world where what should be clear is now called into question. Sophisticated and emotional arguments increasingly are changing the feelings of many people. Though the issue from the perspective of Scripture is very clear and easy, the pressure to turn from what Scripture declares is extremely powerful. Unless you stand with full conviction on the Word of God, you will be swayed.

In 2 Thessalonians 2, in what is a challenging passage, Paul speaks about the coming of the lawless one. In verse 10, Paul speaks of the unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

**2 Thess. 2:11** And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, **12** that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

I find great application of this passage to many issues today including the subject of the definition of marriage.

I believe God has sent a strong delusion to many who do not love the truth of the gospel and of God's Word.

God's Word gives a beautiful but simple definition for marriage in three parts. It is a definition that is found in Genesis 2. The Lord Jesus Christ affirmed this definition. The Apostle Paul also

shared this same definition and further revealed its deep theological significance. What is God's definition of marriage?

A man shall forsake/leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

I want us to consider three passages where this definition is discussed in Scripture and consider other related matters in light of the foolish attempts to redefine marriage.

You must love God's truth, be assured of its full application and relevance for today, if you are going to stand against tremendous pressure.

### **1) GENESIS 2:15-25**

Genesis 1 and 2 do not give two different accounts of creation. Rather Genesis 2 gives further details regarding the sixth day of creation. Lord willing after we finish the book of Romans we will turn our attention to Genesis 1-11.

Before we look at Genesis 2, I want to highlight a key verse that deals with the creation of man in Genesis 1.

**Gen. 1:27** So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

What an important verse this is. In this verse we have several vital truths concerning men, women, and marriage.

Consider how in God's perfect creation there is unity and diversity.

There is unity – man is created in the image of God.

There is diversity – male and female.

This is so basic but these ideas are under a vicious assault today. There is much more that could be said, but keep in mind the beauty and simplicity of God's creation in terms of unity and diversity. This we see further developed then in Genesis 2.

There is good reason to believe that Genesis 2 gives simply an expanded view of God's work of creation on the sixth day. There is no reason to think that what is described in Genesis 2 took place over many days, weeks, or months.

Let me highlight a few details.

The man, Adam, is created and placed in the garden of Eden and given two purposes – tend and keep or guard the garden. The man is then given the command to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil but from every other tree he may freely eat.

In verse 18 it is not Adam but the LORD God who declares, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”

God determined to give Adam someone not identical but comparable to him. The word helper does not imply a slave or servant. In Scripture God is frequently described as the helper.<sup>1</sup> Adam needed an indispensable companion. God determined to give to Adam one who was comparable or who could correspond to him.

Genesis 2 then shows how Adam would not find this indispensable companion among any of animals that God made and which Adam named. Verse 20 emphasizes that of all the creatures that God brought to Adam, which is not all of creation but a portion of the animals which God made, that there was not found a helper comparable to him.

The LORD then placed Adam into a deep sleep. Adam slept and God took one of his ribs and then closed up the flesh in its place. The NET version points out that what God took is not simply a rib but something from Adam’s side – what we might say is both flesh and bone.<sup>2</sup> From that which came from Adam’s side, God made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

Adam responded appropriately to God’s perfect work in poetic reflection of God’s work.

There are four lines of poetic response in verse 23. This poem is a beautiful response emphasizing unity and diversity. The first two lines speak of unity.

This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

The final two lines speak of diversity.

She shall be called woman, because she was taken out of Man.

Consider the picture presented here in Genesis. God takes something from Adam, forms something new but related, and then brings this new creation back to Adam.

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<sup>1</sup> NET Bible note.

<sup>2</sup> NET Bible.

Continuing in Genesis 2, what I believe is best to see is that God responds to Adam's poem of verse 23 with the response found in verse 24. Here in verse 24 is the three-part definition for marriage.

1) A man shall forsake or leave his father and mother.

Perhaps you have reflected on this phrase before. Isn't it more the wife who leaves her parents? Often in a Biblical culture the young man would continue to live very close to his parents. And yet this text says something very important. It is the man who leaves or forsakes his father and mother.

This word forsake is an important word. Listen to the comments of Gordon Wenham.

Israel is bidden not to forsake the poor and the Levite, or the covenant (Deut 12:19; 14:27; 29:24). On the other hand, God promises not to forsake Israel (Deut 31:8; Josh 1:5). These examples show that forsaking father and mother is to be understood in a relative sense, not an absolute sense.<sup>3</sup>

2) and be joined to his wife.

The word joined is a very strong word now of bonding. The first part of the definition shows a break – a husband forsakes his father and mother. This second part of the definition shows this break leads to a powerful joining. He is joined to his wife.

You should observe here that there is absolutely no room in the first two parts of the definition of marriage for anything but the joining together of man and woman.

Observe also how the first part of the definition focuses on the man. The second part of the definition then includes the wife. The third part of the definition now further emphasizes a perfect unity that is created.

3) They shall become one flesh.

Commentators and others point out that this one flesh can include a number of important things. In light of what is specifically mentioned here in Genesis 2, we should see primarily that one flesh means the restoring of the whole. Adam has something taken from him. God now brings the woman to Adam. In the covenantal union of man and wife there is the restoring of the whole.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1 of Word Biblical Commentary. Accordance/Thomas Nelson electronic ed. (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 70-71.

<sup>4</sup> Comments of Robert Gagnon.

What is marriage? A man forsakes his father and mother and joins to his wife, and together they become one flesh. This is the key definition of marriage found in Scripture which is then repeated importantly in the NT.

## 2) MATTHEW 19:1-6

The account found in Genesis 2 gives the definition for marriage before the fall of man. Because of sin there is the perversion of creation and what God ordains. In the words of Jesus we find that what God originally determined for marriage needs no updating because of sin.

Consider just a few background details as we look at verses 1-6.

When Jesus spoke his words concerning marriage he was not in Galilee any longer but in the region of Judea, east of the Jordan River. Jesus was in territory ruled by Herod Antipas. Who is Herod Antipas? Herod Antipas was the one who put John the Baptist to death after John rebuked Herod for his lawless marriage to Herodias, who had been his brother's wife. The Pharisees who came to test Jesus were not looking for instruction from our Lord. And we can also say that Jesus was not afraid of earthly politicians and other powerful religious interests. Jesus was not afraid to speak about the true definition of marriage.

Verse 2 is easy to skip, but it is important. Jesus healed those who came to him. We see here the love, compassion, and power of Jesus Christ. This reference to healing in the context of this passage also shows Jesus as the Son of God is the Creator. Does not the Creator have the right to speak on marriage? Indeed He does and this is what Matthew clearly shows.

The Pharisees were not dealing with the subject of homosexual marriage, of course, but that is not the only perversion of marriage.

The Pharisees in verse 3 asked Jesus whether it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason. The answer of Jesus is very significant. What are the passages Jesus quotes to the Pharisees? He uses the two passages I earlier highlighted – Genesis 1:27 and 2:24.

Genesis 1:27 emphasizes God's creation of man as male and female. Listen to the NET version.

**Matt. 19:4** He answered, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator *made them male and female,*

I have emphasized from this verse before how these words of Jesus totally undermine the whole idea of the “three million year journey from the treetops of Africa to civilization.”<sup>5</sup> No, from the beginning of creation, not billions of years later, God created man, male and female. There are only two sexes despite all the rubbish you hear today.

Note then verse 5. Jesus confirms that the words of verse 5, which are quoted from Genesis 2:24 are the words of God. As we observed from Genesis 2, Adam speaks a poetic response to the creation of woman in Genesis 2:23 which is followed by the words of God in Genesis 2:24.

Jesus then repeats the only true definition of marriage in verse 5. A man shall leave or forsake his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.

And then observe from verse 6 that Jesus emphasizes the one-flesh unity of husband and wife and that marriage is the joining together of man and woman by God. Not only is the definition of marriage not to be changed but what God has also joined together should not be separated by man.

Do we need to adapt with the times and come up with new ideas of marriage or even civil unions? Not according to Jesus Christ. And yet many men and women including politicians dare to change what God has ordained.

### **3) EPHESIANS 5:22-33**

There is so much in Ephesians 5 concerning marriage that I will not try to unpack all the important commands and truths found here. I want to especially focus on how Paul uses Genesis 2:24 in this passage, which is quoted in verse 31.

In verse 22 Paul begins his discussion on marriage and the respective roles of husbands and wives. Wives are to submit not to all men but to their own husbands as to the Lord Jesus Christ. Very powerfully Paul shows that the obedience and submission of a wife to her husband is to be a picture of the submission and obedience of the church to Jesus Christ.

Husbands are to love their wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.

What we can see so very powerfully is that God’s definition of marriage is based not just on human needs. God’s basis for marriage is not simply that children should have a father and mother, as important as that is. God’s basis and definition of marriage is that it be a picture of

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/sn/prehistoric\\_life/human/human\\_evolution/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/sn/prehistoric_life/human/human_evolution/)

the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church. Marriage then can only be the covenantal union of one man and one woman. That is the only way to fulfill the picture of what marriage is to be.

The duties of husbands and wives in marriage are so very great.

In verses 26 and 27 Paul gives three purposes for Christ loving His Church and giving Himself for her.

- 1) To sanctify her, cleansing her with the washing of water and by the word.
- 2) To present her to Himself a glorious church, not having any spot or wrinkle.
- 3) To make her holy and without blemish.

It is this wonderful purpose of Jesus Christ that means that husbands should love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

Paul in verses 29 then gives a supporting reason for his statement.

No one ever hates his own flesh but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord Jesus Christ does to the church. Verse 30 then is given as an explanation or a supporting reason for why the Lord Jesus Christ nourishes and cherishes His church.

He does so because we are members of His body, we are of his flesh and of His bones.

Do you see how in verse 30, Paul is drawing from the language of Adam in Genesis 2:23? And then Paul quotes the definition of marriage in verse 31 which is again is taken from Genesis 2:24.

Paul uses Genesis 2:24 along with Genesis 2:23 to show that marriage of a man and woman comes from the unity of Jesus Christ and His bride, the church.

How dare anyone try to redefine marriage in any other way but the joining of a man and a woman. And from the authority of the NT in light of the original pattern we can say only one man and one woman.

In verse 32 Paul says this is a great mystery. He is not referring to marriage but the relationship of Jesus Christ and His Church. Mystery does not mean something mysterious but a truth that is made clear by fuller revelation. Paul was given understanding by God to reveal the truth found in Ephesians 5 and to connect it with the institution of marriage from Genesis 2.

## **CONCLUSION**

What is marriage? It is a man forsaking his father and mother, joining in a powerful bond to his wife, so that they become one flesh. It is a living picture of Jesus Christ and His church. It is God who brings together a man and woman as husband and wife. Since God does this work, no man is to seek to break apart such a union nor should any man seek to redefine what such a union is to be.

You must love God's truth, be assured of its full application and relevance for today, if you are going to stand against tremendous pressure.

- 1) Prayer
- 2) Loving but powerful witness
- 3) Contacting your representatives

Final words related to Jesus Christ and His Church.

## **Prayer**

**Hymn: 253 (change from previous hymn)**

### **Benediction – Ephesians 3:20-21**

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.