

Marriage: A Blood Covenant With a Threefold Purpose

September 25, 2011

<<http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?sermonid=925111419403>>

Introduction: This Is Not Something About Which I Want to Speak.

I direct your attention, to begin with, to 2 Timothy 3:15-17.

Sometimes I think living in a time such as we live, it is important that we remember that all of Scripture is God's Word and therefore it is all profitable for us. Saint Paul could say to the elders at Ephesus, as he was leaving them: "I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

And as the time of my departure is at hand, which we should always be confessing—you and I, for we know not when the Lord will come for us—it is important that we have clear consciences and that we discharge that duty. And so as the Lord led me as I was praying to preach on this passage of Scripture—much to my chagrin—the last time I preached out of Malachi two was seven years ago—I preach it, reminding us of this truth, 2 Timothy 3:15-17.

"...and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures" (2 Timothy 3:15).

Remember what he is talking about here. The Holy Scriptures that he is speaking about in his time is the Old Testament. That is the Holy Scriptures they had. Of course, here and there, God adds to the Old Testament Scriptures. He gives us in the New Testament, Scripture as well. Saint Paul's writings were recognized by Saint Peter as Scripture, and he refers to Paul's writings as Scripture.

But keep in mind, again, that we are talking here in verse 15 particularly about the Old Testament. And he says concerning that, he says, first of all, they are: "...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15).

And then in verse 16: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God..." (2 Timothy 3:16).

Literally, God-breathed. Every word that I speak this morning is a God-breathed word. That means I am speaking it. And so when Scripture is referred to as God-breathed, it means that it is the very Word of God. It is his actual word.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God...” (2 Timothy 3:16).

And we might think, therefore, that this is so, because . . . that because of that, the following things are true. It is profitable for doctrine. Doctrine simply means teaching. It is profitable for teaching. It is profitable for reproof. It is profitable for correction, and it is profitable for instruction in righteousness.

And then the phrase “man of God” is a particular reference, I think, in Scripture to a pastor. And he says: “...that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:17).

You know, I know a lot of people who use other people’s material when they preach. I was always frightened to do that, not that I don’t mind picking up an illustration or something from a book and sharing it—trying to give credit where I find it—but the point is that everything that I need as a preacher is in this book, and that has been my conviction from the day that I first began to preach back in 1965, until today, that I need nothing else but to know this book, that the man of God, having this book, is sufficient and complete, and he is thoroughly equipped for every good work.

I. Every True Marriage Is Formed by Making a Covenant.

With that in mind, then, I would like us to look back at Malachi for a moment, Malachi 2.

I want you to notice something here, if we look at the last clause of verse 14 up near the top of the page, the last clause of verse 14. He speaks there of a person who is someone’s companion and wife by covenant. I want to bring out three truths about marriage today and why the modern opposition to same-sex marriage is somewhat hypocritical.

Now, hold on to that, because you know that I am not advocating same-sex marriage, but I am saying that much of the opposition to it is hypocritical

because it fails to deal with the very nature of marriage itself as it is revealed in Scripture. So we want to explore three reasons why God instituted marriage, focusing in particular on Malachi 2. I want you to notice that he refers to marriage as a covenant relationship. Immediately that brings us into some very clear understanding.

I. A. The Marriage Covenant Is in the Presence of God.

A covenant, as the Bible is using it, means that a marriage involves three people and not two. A marriage involves a man and a woman and God. A marriage is a covenant relationship between a man and a woman and God. And if you look back at the passage that Merrill read earlier, Deuteronomy 22, there are some very striking things about the nature of marriage that are revealed in that passage that probably, if I had my choice, I would never preach on. But I don't have a choice because I want to be faithful to God. And that means if God directs me to a passage of Scripture, I have got to preach on it.

I. B. The Marriage Covenant Is a Blood Covenant.

But if you look here at Deuteronomy 22, you notice that marriage is a blood covenant. I want you to think about that for a moment. Marriage is a blood covenant. That has two profound implications. The breaking of a blood covenant brings a blood curse and the only way to get rid of a blood curse is by the shedding of blood. So marriage is a blood covenant. The breaking of a blood covenant brings a blood curse and the only way to remove a blood curse is the shedding of more blood.

And I want to say at the outset. I thank God Almighty that I am a creature of the New Covenant because the Old Covenant is a covenant of condemnation, and it is a covenant of death. But the New Covenant is a covenant that is about justification (2 Corinthians 3:6-9). What is justification? It is so important that we remember when you are caught, and you are wrong, and someone accuses you, and you defend yourself, you are justifying yourself. But the only way to be right with God is to stop justifying yourself and allow God to justify you. That is what we do when we cast ourselves on God's mercy in Jesus Christ. We allow God to justify us.

So instead of my foolish and feeble attempts to declare myself righteous, I sit back and say, “I can say nothing.”

As Charles Haddon Spurgeon, perhaps the greatest preacher of the 19th century, said, “When somebody says something bad about you and you learn about it, remember one thing. What they said about you actually is less than what you deserve. You are worse than what people say about you.” And that is the basic point. You see, the Church has gotten away from its double message: the message of the law and the message of the gospel. Without the message of the law, there is no gospel preaching because what we then have is Jesus, some kind of super salesman, who came along to make life better for us. But if we understand the message of the law, if we understand the thunders from Mount Sinai, if we understand that the letter of the law kills us and condemns us and leaves us stripped and undone and naked, but God has provided another mountain besides Mount Sinai and that is Mount Calvary, where our sins are paid for, where our sins are atoned for, where the curse has been absorbed by the Son of God as he hung upon a cursed tree, then we understand these things. So marriage is a blood covenant.

And, again, we see in Deuteronomy 22 the ideal. The ideal is what? It isn't widowhood or being divorced. God does permit divorced people to remarry under certain circumstances, and God permits widows to remarry under certain circumstances. By the way, we say under certain circumstances because the Word of God absolutely prohibits a believer from every being married to an unbeliever. If you are married to an unbeliever, you must ask God's forgiveness and claim his blessing and go on with it. But I am talking about sinning with malice aforethought. I am talking about deliberately violating the Word of God.

So there are conditions having to do with remarriage or marriage to start with. We must marry only in the Lord.

So as we look at the inception of marriage under the Old Testament, we discover that it involves, as all blood covenants do, the shedding of blood. And we discover that virginity was a very special and treasured thing in the law of God. And it is special and treasured because it is part of the shedding of the blood in this blood covenant of marriage. So important it is, that the parents of the young woman preserve the evidence that she was a virgin on her wedding night, so that if her husband proves to be a scoundrel and accuses her of not being what she said she was—and this is not the case of

someone who is honest and up front before marriage, but this is someone presenting herself for marriage, and she is not really that—then the parents produce the evidence of the blood covenant with the garment or the sheet that was ... that absorbed the blood in the cutting of the covenant.

The Hebrew word, by the way, for making a covenant is literally, in Hebrew, “to cut a covenant.” We cut a covenant. And so in the marriage act there are two things. There is the couple committing themselves to live together after God’s ordinance, and there is the shedding of the blood, the private act, the cutting of the covenant. Both things are important.

I. C. Marriage Is a Family Institution, Rather than Church or State.

I think there is something else that is interesting about marriage that I would point out. Nowhere do we find that the state has any role in marriage in Scripture. Where is that in the Bible? And nowhere do we find that the Church has any role in marriage. Where is that in the Bible?

So what about Jesus? Jesus was there for the party. Jesus did not marry the couple at Cana of Galilee. Who then performs the marriage according to Scripture? It is the man and the woman performing the marriage. But this isn’t private. We read, for example, that after Sarah’s death, Isaac her son mourned her death and then Abraham arranged for his servant to obtain a bride from out of the land of Canaan, and it simply says that Rebekah went in and joined to Isaac, and they went into his mother’s tent. They became husband and wife. But they didn’t sneak into the tent. And this is important. A valid marriage involves the blessing of the parents. And a valid marriage involves the entering into of a covenant in front of the families because when you marry someone, you marry that person’s family.

You know, I look back to the Hartness-Thornwell Memorial Presbyterian Church at Thornwell Orphanage in Clinton, South Carolina, where on July 6th, 1968, my wife and I were married. Little did I know that I would be taking care of her mother with Alzheimer’s disease in our home and that she would die in one of our bedrooms. Little did Sandy know when she entered into that blood covenant with me on July 6th, 1968, that she would be taking care of my father and my mother, and that my mother would die while living in our home, though in the hospital after eating supper here on a Wednesday night.

When we marry, we marry a family, and that is the important thing about marriage. We stand with our families, and our families bless the union, and we make this commitment before God, and then we party. And that is what Jesus did. Jesus joined the wedding party at Cana of Galilee, and they ran out of wine. And so he took those jars that the Jews used for purification, water jars, and he turned them into wine. And when the stewards of the feast tasted the water that had been turned into wine, he was amazed. He said, “You know, it is the custom to put out the expensive wine first, and when men have well drunk, then to put out the rot gut stuff.” You know, you put out something from California or from France, and then after people have been belting down a few glasses of Merlot, then you put out the Ripple.

The wedding steward said to the groom, he said, “You have saved the best to last.”

By the way, they are two Greek words. There is a Greek word for grape juice. That is not the word that is used. And there is a Greek word that is used of fermented wine. And that is what is used.

Now, I am simply saying that Jesus blessed that couple’s marriage by his presence and by the first miracle that he did, when he gave them a wedding present of over 100 gallons of nice wine, really good wine.

Now the point is that marriage involves the parents. We see that so clearly in Deuteronomy 22. It is the parents that protect the good name of the young lady. It is the father who takes the responsibility for his daughter’s reputation in Deuteronomy 22, and it is the father who is zealous, along with his wife, to preserve the evidence that she was a virgin.

But it is interesting that that man would be punished for his false accusation in some kind of public scourging, as well as paying a fine, but also then what the Old Testament granted, which was permission for divorce under certain circumstances, when the man has brought this charge against his wife, and it is false, he loses that privilege.

I. D. The Breaking of a Blood Covenant Evokes a Judgment of Death.

Now look at verse 20 of Deuteronomy 22.

“But if the thing is true, and evidences of virginity are not found for the young woman, then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father’s house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done a disgraceful thing in Israel, to play the harlot in her father’s house. So you shall put away the evil from among you” (Deuteronomy 22:20-21).

Now notice verse 22: “If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die” (Deuteronomy 22:22).

And here is the thing I want you to understand, for every advocate of the death penalty: the Bible does not require a just government to use the death penalty. It neither forbids it, nor does it command it as an absolute thing under the New Testament. But what the Old Testament law tells us very clearly is this, that God regards sexual immorality as tantamount to first-degree murder. I want to say that. “That is ridiculous,” you may think. It is tantamount to first-degree murder. Why? The same penalty that God enjoined on the children of Israel in the covenant at Mount Sinai for first-degree murder is the penalty for sexual immorality. In fact, if you go through the Bible you discover this. There is only one sexual sin that does not call down the death penalty on it. And what is that? It is an unmarried man and an unmarried woman engaging in physical relations. For that, there is no death penalty. For that, it is life long penalty of marriage without the privilege of divorce.

But all other sexual things, sexual sins, require the death penalty. And I just want to say that. If you are an advocate of the death penalty—and I am not condemning you, if you are an advocate of the death penalty, nor am I a praising you, if you are an advocate to the death penalty. I am simply saying this: don’t forget as you cry out for the death penalty for other people, that you are calling down God’s judgment on yourself as well.

I have to say to you as a person who became a Christian in 1964, that when I was a non-Christian, I did more than one kind of thing that was a death penalty offense under the Old Testament. I wouldn’t be preaching to you here today, if we were following the law of God in the Old Testament in terms of its penalties. I would not be here today. I would be executed. So we need to understand something: the Old Testament is the letter that kills, 2 Corinthians 3:6. But the Spirit in the New Testament is the Spirit who gives life. The Old Testament is the ministry of death. (2 Corinthians 3:7). The

New Testament is the ministry of life. The Old Testament is the ministry of condemnation. The New Testament is ministry of justification. Read 2 Corinthians 3, the whole chapter, this afternoon. That brings that to bear.

But we see several things here in Deuteronomy 22, before we go back to Malachi. We see that marriage is a blood covenant that involves the shedding of blood as the very nature of inaugurating the first marriage. Secondly, we see that marriage is a covenant relationship. It is a covenant relationship, and that means that God is involved in it. And, thirdly, there are sanctions when a marriage is broken. There are sanctions here. There are penalties here, when a marriage is broken. And so we see that. We see that in the case of adultery, in verse 23. We see that in the case of the young woman who claims to be a virgin, but she is not. Both are, in the eyes of God, death penalty offenses.

I say, again, and I am not saying it tongue-in-cheek. These penalties that were given to Israel as a commonwealth teach us how God regards sin. Never forget that. They teach us how God regards sin.

We live in a highly, sexually charged culture. Sex—we sell our children breakfast—they sell our children breakfast food with sex. And they sell us pills at night with sex. We are in a sexually charged culture. We need to understand that God regards these things with deadly seriousness.

And why am I preaching on it? Because I believe that God directed me to this passage of Scripture, as I was preparing my sermon. And I think it shows another truth, and that is this: we are all at heart Legalists. We just want the Legalism to be those bad people. We want to feel good about ourselves. But when you really come to grips with the law of God, you understand something. You understand that you stand with the drug dealer and the prostitute and the pimp and the politician as liable to hell and on your way to hell, and your only hope is Jesus' blood and righteousness.

So we see something here: marriage is a covenant relationship. Marriage is a blood covenant, inaugurated by the shedding of blood, and there are severe penalties when someone breaks a blood covenant. Going back to Malachi 2, we see that covenant thing reiterated: "Your wife by covenant," the last clause there in verse 14, "your wife by covenant."

And then notice what he says in verse 15: “But did he not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth” (Malachi 2:15).

Why does God regard breaking the marriage covenant as dealing treacherously? You understand it is a blood covenant. It is inaugurated by the shedding of blood. Therefore, the breaking of it is the breaking of a blood covenant, and it demands the shedding of blood to atone for it. The blood of Jesus was shed for our sins.

To deal treacherously, then, is to bring violence to bear. When we break apart what God has joined together, we are engaged in violent action—violent action that is so serious in the eyes of God that he puts it on the par with first degree murder because both involve the death penalty.

“...let none of you deal treacherously with the wife of his youth” (Malachi 2:15).

Notice again how he expresses it and think in verse 16 back to Deuteronomy 22. Again, in Deuteronomy 22: remember the parents. When the young man hates his new wife, and he accuses her falsely of not having been a virgin when they married, the parents produce a garment. And the blood of that garment is redemptive blood. It spares her execution. Look at that again in light of verse 16: “‘For the LORD God of Israel says that he hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘Therefore, take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously’” (Malachi 2:16).

So, again, you get all of this imagery back from Deuteronomy 22, and it is woven here in Malachi 2. And it is: breaking of a blood covenant is a violent act that brings down a judgment, and it covers one’s garment with violence.

II. There Are Three Divine Purposes for Marriage.

II. A. Marriage Is for Companionship.

Now we find in verse 15 one of the three reasons for marriage. And I want us to look at that third one in a moment. If you look back at Genesis for a moment, the very beginning, when God creates man and woman, and when

he creates them to be married, notice what is said here. And we find here in Genesis 2, and we read here in verse 18 these words: “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’” (Genesis 2:18).

And so God creates a woman for man. Remember, when does life begin? Life began only one time on our planet, when God breathed into Adam, the breath of life, and Adam became a living soul. That living cell from Adam in the form of a rib, God took surgically without pain while Adam was asleep and formed of Adam’s rib the woman. So we have living tissue. Life only began one time, and that living tissue is passed down through the generations. The life you carry in your physical body today goes back to the act of God, breathing the breath of life into your ancestor, Adam.

Do I believe that that is exactly how it happened? And my answer is: “Absolutely, I believe that.” My major was philosophy. I took a lot of science. I have never found anything in all of my studies that has ever caused me to say that the Bible is not absolutely true.

Now faith is a choice. But unbelief is also a choice. God created man and from man, he created woman. And God institutes marriage for one reason there. It is stated in Genesis chapter two, for companionship. So there is a fundamental reason for marriage.

We will look at a second reason for marriage. Let’s turn way over into the New Testament to 1 Corinthians 7, second reason for marriage. Here it is. “It is not good for a person to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). God creates marriage so that we would have someone.

You know, this year I kept thinking of a Beatles’ song that I remembered back in the 60s, because my wife still needs me and she still feeds me and I am 64. Companionship ... I can tell you this: as I age and as my wife ages—she is on Social Security now, and I am not because it is set up to keep you from enjoying the fruit of your labor until you are too old to enjoy it. But anyhow I have to wait because I make too much money and don’t take that too seriously. But I paid in to Social Security ever since 1961, the spring of 1961, when I went to work for Shell Oil Company’s gas station in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina over 50 years ago—as my wife and I age, I am very grateful for the companionship of a marriage, a friend who is with me,

somebody who cares about me, somebody who still needs me and somebody who still feeds me, even though I am 64.

II. B. Marriage Is a Tool that God Uses to Help us in our Struggle with Sin.

Here is a second reason for marriage, 1 Corinthians 7: “Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband” (1 Corinthians 7:1-3).

And so notice here there is a second reason for marriage, and it has to do, as he says, very plainly in verse two, because of sexual immorality. God instituted marriage so that we might be able better to observe the Seventh Commandment which is “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18).

And so he says here that marriage is instituted for that reason. Now, here is a test of whether you are ready for marriage or not. When you marry, you give up your rights. King Self abdicates, and it allows the wife to be the one who tells you what to do. No, it really does. It also allows the husband. Notice there is a kind of equality here. It is not absolute equality: Ephesians 5 makes it plain that the husband submits to what he knows his wife’s needs are. And the wife is to submit to what she knows her husband’s desires are—two different things. So that submission, mutual submission, is expressed differently in man, in terms of a loving head like Jesus is of the Church, than it is with a woman.

But notice in verse four: “The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does” (1 Corinthians 7:4).

So in this second reason for marriage, when you say, “I do,” you give up the right to say, “I won’t.” And I say that: when you say, “I do,” you give up the right to say, “I won’t.”

He says that if you are a woman, you don’t have the say so over your own body. Your husband does. But wait a minute! This isn’t some male

chauvinist pig rubbing it in because look at the next statement. He says: “And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does” (1 Corinthians 7:4).

There is an egalitarian demand here. Now then notice what he says here and, again, this is reinforcing the second reason for marriage, verse five: “Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time” (1 Corinthians 7:5).

Notice that consent. That is mutual consent. You both agree on it. Notice that it is limited in time. It is for a time. It is for a season. And notice how it is limited: “... that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer” (1 Corinthians 7:5).

The word fasting is found in the vast majority of Greek manuscripts. There were a few manuscripts that scribes regarded as corrupt, and they put them on the shelves, and one of them was found at Saint Catherine’s Monastery—where I happened to be renting a camel to go up Mount Sinai, several years ago, but—at Mount Saint Catherine’s Monastery, one of these manuscripts was found, *Codex Sinaiticus*. It was an old manuscript that had never been used, and that is why it wasn’t worn out. The vast majority of Greek manuscripts have the word fasting there. But, of course, fat monks don’t like to fast, so someone thought, well, I had better just leave that fasting out (that is said tongue-in-cheek): “... that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer” (1 Corinthians 7:5).

So here is the deal. You decide to have a prayer retreat. You decide that for three days you are going to get away from home. You are going to throw the cell phone in the drawer and pull the battery out so it can’t be traced, and you are going to travel off by yourself to spend time in prayer and fasting. You are going to skip breakfast. You are going to skip lunch. You are going to skip supper, and you are going to skip physical relations with your spouse. And you are going to devote yourself to seeking the Lord. And then, when that is over, you can eat some food again, and you can come back home and enjoy your relationship with your spouse. And notice he adds this in verse five. He says: “... and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:5).

So a marriage, while not everyone’s duty—he makes it plain in the next verse: “But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment” (1 Corinthians 7:6) -- marriage is something that God uses to protect us from

sexual sin. And he goes on and says in verse seven: “I am not saying that everybody is supposed to marry,” verse seven. He said, “I wish everybody were like me, but there are particular gifts of the Holy Spirit and no one gift does everyone have.” And so he says: “For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that” (1 Corinthians 7:7).

II. C. Marriage Is Divinely Instituted to Produce Godly Children.

Now let's turn back to Malachi to see, Malachi 2, the third reason for marriage. We have seen from Deuteronomy 22 that marriage is a blood covenant, and like all blood covenants, when it is broken, it involves a blood curse. And like all blood covenants, when there is a blood curse, blood must be shed to remove that curse. We have seen just how seriously God regards marriage and sexual relations: adultery, death penalty—homosexual acts, death penalty. Accusing your wife of not being a virgin when, in fact, she was: you are going to get whipped, and you will be paying a fine. But if she said she was a virgin, and she wasn't, she is going to be stoned to death at the threshold of her father's house. Very serious!

Now, why does God get involved in the marriage relationship? Verse 15: “But did he not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one?” (Malachi 2:15)

Notice here is the third reason for marriage: “He seeks godly offspring” (Malachi 2:15).

Wow, that is the third reason for marriage. And that is why I find most opposition to gay marriage to be hypocritical because this is the third reason for marriage. Marriage is about having babies. Marriage is not just about having babies; it is about raising children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. That is what it is about. And that is hard work. And lo and behold, I have lived in my brief life through the greatest cultural revolution that the Western world has seen. What have I seen in my lifetime?

I have seen that World War II ended with great prosperity that came to the United States, but along with that prosperity, we got fat and sassy. The “Greatest Generation” was the greatest betrayer generation of Christian civilization. It is a fact. The “Greatest Generation” is the generation that took prayer and Bible reading out of our schools. The “Greatest Generation” is

the generation that removed the Christian foundation for our legal system and that is the Ten Commandments.

Remember that our US Constitution recognizes the Ten Commandments in it because the president has 10 days to sign a bill, “Sundays excepted” (Constitution of the United States, Article 1, Section 7, Clause 2). Why not the Jewish Sabbath excepted? Why not the Muslim Friday excepted?

You know, the President has told us about the great Muslim contribution to America. I think it was the Barbary pirates whom he must have been thinking of, and Thomas Jefferson’s copy of the Quran, which was provided so he could understand the irrational people we were dealing with in the Mediterranean Sea.

So here is the deal: we also, in the 60s, removed a basic purpose—I didn’t say **the** purpose—a basic purpose of marriage, which is procreation. We reduced it to recreation. And if the purpose of marriage is simply recreation and companionship, then, you know, it is very hypocritical to oppose gay marriage. Well, is it? Well, in a sense, I guess.

The Bible is absolutely unambiguously clear that there is only one sex act that has the blessing of God. That is between a man and a woman, after they have entered into the covenant of marriage. All other sex acts are under the condemnation of God. But here we see a fundamental purpose for marriage. And like a stool with three legs on it—we have a four-legged stool here—but a three-legged stool is stable. What are the three pillars or the three legs of the stool of marriage?

Companionship,
The prevention of sexual immorality, and
To bring godly children into the world.

It is not just to reproduce. Monkeys can reproduce. Dogs can reproduce. Cats can reproduce. But only creatures created in the image of God can raise children to know and love the Lord. And that is what is involved in it. God expects you, when you marry, to bring children into the world. He doesn’t leave it up to your choice.

It is my body, my choice.
Where is that in the Bible?

When you marry, you marry for those three reasons. And unless there is some extraordinary reason, God expects you to bring children in the world, but not simply to bring them in the world and abandon them at somebody else's doorstep. I want you to see here that the family, as it is the family, that is the basis for marriage, not the Church, not the State, so it is the family, not the State and not the Church, that has responsibility for bringing children in the world and nurturing them.

Do I have responsibility for the children of this church? Of course, but I don't have fundamental and primary responsibility. That is your responsibility. It is your responsibility for which you will answer to God, to take children and raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

You see, this passage of Scripture tells us something very profound. It says the purpose of marriage is to bring godly people into the world. It is to take children and see they are converted.

III. Success in the Purposes of Marriage Depends on God's Grace.

III. A. We Must Pray with Humility.

Now, again, I realize that only the Holy Spirit can produce the new birth, and conversion is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and that repentance is the gift of God and so is faith, but God has given you an enormous tool to that end, and that is your knees, as you get on your knees and get on your face before God. As you forget your rags of self-righteousness, and you cast yourself on God's mercy in Christ and plead with God to touch and change the hearts of your children, God delights to hear and answer those prayers.

You know, when our children were young, and we now have 15 descendants—five children and 10 grandchildren so far—but here is the deal: when my children were young, people all thought that our children were wonderful. They were well behaved. They were polite children. I mean, they were full of energy, but they were obedient children. And then, when they started using deodorant—I don't know what that chemical is—but then the genealogy of their daddy, more than the genealogy of their mother kicked in, and some of them became little hellions. You know, it is just amazing!

And I think of this. As a pastor—and I served as pastor of a Presbyterian Church in the late 1960s, so I have been doing this a long time and listening to a lot of people—I am always amazed at people whose children have not yet reached the age of 20 going on about how to raise children. I want to tell you, you are a fool, if you think that you are going to be successful by this technique or that technique. I am telling you. I am going to tell you one technique, and the only technique I know: it is on your knees because all is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down.

And I am going to tell you—as much as you try to be a good example to your kids and pray with your children and teach them Bible stories and all these other things—you know what your children know? They listen through the door. Did you know that? Your children eavesdrop on you. They hear your yammering away and fussing with each other. They hear you when you cuss each other behind the bedroom door.

Yeah, they hear that stuff, and they chalk it up. They are just hypocrites. You are just hypocrites. Your children see your hypocrisy. You are a hypocrite. I am a hypocrite.

That is a good kind of therapy: “I am a hypocrite. You are a hypocrite.” And so, therefore, you are driven to your knees: “Oh, God, please don’t let my children be like me.” I mean, really, once you become self-aware, you begin to pray that prayer.

“Lord, I was a terrible child.” I really was. I was a nice little kid. People thought I was going to be a preacher when I was a little kid. They were bragging on me, this, that and the other. My mother told me I was going to be a preacher. And then I became an Atheist. Seriously, I believed myself to be an Atheist. I mean, don’t most Atheists believe themselves to be Atheists, but none of them really are. But I believed myself to be an Atheist and I sowed my wild oats. And occasionally my Atheism gave out, and I prayed for crop failures.

But anyhow, here is the deal: parenting is about humility before God and casting yourself on God’s mercy in Christ. And do you know what? The older I get, the older my children get, now that I have got children in their 40s. Wow. And I watch them with their children. And I start thinking about it. I say, “You know, Lord, the sins of the father are visited on the children to the third and fourth generation.” Wow. “But, Lord, I don’t hate you. I love

you.” But I see those patterns and I have come back to one thing. Yes, you should follow biblical admonitions about how to raise children, but it is about humility. All the promises of God are secure to you in Jesus Christ, not because you have been good and faithful.

But do you see the purpose of marriage, this third pillar? And if we forget the third pillar, then here we have a problem. Here is where America is today, and I am not trying to make anybody feel uncomfortable. As I say, I deserve to go to hell. I have broken God’s commandments. I have incurred his wrath for my sins, but here is where it is. When I was a kid, raised in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, which was among all the places in South Carolina, the loosest, because it was a resort town. It was 6000 people when we moved there. We had prayer in the public schools. We had Bible reading and Bible study in the public schools. And I only knew one child in the entire 12 years that I was in the public schools of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina—I only knew one child whose parents were divorced.

“Are you kidding me?” No, I am not kidding you. That is the truth. I am not saying that every child there that I did ... I am not say that that is the case of every child that was in those ... in that school, those 12 years I was there. I am saying that it was a matter that was viewed as something you don’t talk about.

Again, I am not trying to make anyone feel bad. But I have got to get you to the Cross. And the only way to get you to the Cross is to take you to Mount Sinai first. And so what I want you to understand is that we are very hypocritical at this point as a nation, opposing gay marriage, though I think we absolutely have to oppose gay marriage. But we are hypocritical, when we are soft on adultery, soft on fornication and easy on divorce with no fault. Why? Because marriage is a blood covenant. The breaking of a blood covenant brings a blood curse, and the only way to get rid of a blood curse is the shedding of blood.

III. B. God Has Provided the Solution to our Failures.

Now I want to tell you why this is good news. This is good news because there is blood available, the blood of Jesus. And all you need to be right with God is the blood of Jesus. I don’t care what you have done. I don’t care how much you have messed up. I don’t care how many commandments of God

you have broken and how many times you have broken them. The blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:8).

But, you see, the problem with preachers is they don't really preach the law because they don't want people mad at them. And then they really don't preach the gospel because they don't have a gospel that addresses itself to man's deadly need, which is the contamination of the guilt of sin.

Now I want you to notice something else here. Verse 16: "For the LORD God of Israel says that he hates divorce" (Malachi 2:16).

Why does God hate divorce? Well, he hates divorce because divorce involves what? A violent act that breaks a blood covenant. Notice he "covers ones garment with violence." But he also hates divorce because he loves people. God loves people. He loves you. He doesn't want you to suffer. He doesn't want you to suffer. He doesn't want you to go through the hell of divorce. And listen, make no mistake about it: as I have sat with hundreds of people who have gone through these things, as I have held the hands of people and had them weep with me, I am telling you that God hates divorce because he loves people. He doesn't want you to suffer.

And if you have been divorced, he wants to heal you, and you need healing, and you will never get healed until you acknowledge how you got where you are.

You see, here is the dilemma for me as a pastor. I have a medicine that can cure whatever is wrong with you. But you are not willing to take that medicine until you see that you are really sick and the nature of your sickness. And once you see it, then you can flee to Jesus. Once you acknowledge it, then you can be cleansed. Once you see your need of him, he will cleanse you.

III. C. Guard Your Heart.

And I will say that God hates divorce because he loves children. It always impacts children. Believe me. I have seen it in my own family. And so God then says something here not once, but twice. Look at what he says. He says in verse 16: "Therefore take heed to your spirit" (Malachi 2:16).

Wow. Look back at verse 15: “But did He not make them one, Having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit” (Malachi 2:15).

Verse 15 says, “Take heed to your spirit.” Verse 16 says, “Take heed to your spirit.” Why do you have to take heed to your spirit? Because you can fall in love today. I am not joking with you. Doris Day was a liar. She sang that popular song in the 50s: “When I fall in love, it will be forever.”

Well, that is nonsense. I remember when I fell in love. It was in February of 67, in a college fellowship group, and I looked down, and I saw the other end of the hymnbook. I really had not noticed her until that moment. It had not registered with me that I had sat next to a girl. And part of the reason is I am always thinking. I am always pondering something in my head, and so that is why my wife doesn't like me to drive because she said, “You start thinking and you slow down.” And my wife likes to drive very fast. And so cruise control has been a boon.

But I was absorbed in thought, pondering something and running things through my memory bank and sorting little facts in their order. And then all of a sudden, I am singing, standing up, and we are singing out of a hymnbook, and I look near at hand. I looked, and it was a woman's hand. So I followed the hand up to the face. “I saw her face, now I'm a believer.”

Later, I touched her “arms and my hands grew strong like a pair of birds that burst with song. My eyes looked down at her lovely face.” (allusions to love songs) Anyhow, I am not going there.

“Take heed to your spirit.” Why? Because the magic of falling in love never lasts. I love my wife. I can even say I am in love with her most of the time. But it requires effort on my part to be in love with my wife, as it requires effort on her part to be in love with me because it is that magic, it is that cultivation of romance that grows out of a commitment to love.

Back in 1981, Merrill, you and I were smuggling Bibles into China, right? That was a long time ago. It is coming up on 30 years. It has been over 30 years. Is that right? Was it 1981? Wow. We are old, Merrill. And there was a fellow traveling with us, a Catholic priest by the name of Mike Manning. Mike Manning had a TV broadcast from out of California, and he would interview famous people sometimes who were Christians. He interviewed

Ricardo Montalbán. You remember “Fantasy Island.” And he asked. He said, “Mr. Montalbán, you have been married for x number years to your wife. It is over 40 years.” He said, “What is the secret of the longevity of your marriage, particularly in Hollywood?”

And he says, “Every day, I choose to love my wife.” And that is how the priest said that to me. It sounds just like Ricardo Montalbán. “Every day I choose to love my wife.”

See, that is the love that the Bible is talking about. Now, here is the reason why you choose. You choose to love your wife every day because you can’t raise godly kids without doing that. And that is part of taking heed to your spirit. Do you see what happens when you don’t?

I first became a police chaplain in 1973 in Wichita, Kansas. I learned something. When you put a man and a woman in a patrol car where they are at risk and in danger constantly and throughout the day, they are pulled together. And let me tell you how “good people” commit adultery. It is not said tongue-in-cheek. It is “good people.” That is people like you. Okay? Moral people, people who want to pay attention to marriage vows. Here is how it works. It works like this.

The wife has gotten a new hairdo, and the husband doesn’t notice it. I am not asking for a show of hands here. I don’t want to start something. But the husband didn’t notice the hairdo or the new clothes or whatever it was or the new make up or whatever, but she goes to work, and a guy at work notices it: “Wow! You look terrific. Have you lost 20 pounds?”

Well, that really goes over well, you know.

“Are you really what your driver’s license says, 50? I would have sworn you were 35.”

You know, remember the flatterer spreads a net for your feet (Proverbs 29:5). But what happens is there are these little things that happen in the home and a person’s being treated indifferently. But then at work somebody is treating you special.

And maybe you are a guy and a woman says, “Oh, wow, your wife is the luckiest woman.”

“Really? Really? You think my wife is lucky? You think I am a good catch?” You know? Wow! Let’s see. You know, and then you go blind and take your glasses off. You think, “I am!” You are so good... really?

You know, and, see, because we are all insecure. And what happens is it begins in little ways. And let me tell you, the fundamental motivation of a man in an affair initially is not sex; it is protection. Men by nature are protective and so when a woman begins to talk about her husband and the trouble she is having and how he doesn’t appreciate her and how he is unkind and this, that and the other. He is just a clod just like all men, and that kind of thing, what happens is his protective instinct reaches out, and he tries to protect. And it isn’t long before it has led to the full-fledged deal.

So what is he saying? If you understand the three purposes of marriage—companionship, avoiding sexual immorality and raising godly children—that takes work. That takes sacrifice. And you understand you have got to control yourself. And what do you control? You will never control your actions until you learn to control your heart.

One of the great blessings of counseling several hundred people who have committed adultery, and the blessing is that I have vicariously experienced their pain and suffering, and it scared me to death. I know the path they are on, and I know as soon as the thought arises in my head—and, of course, the thought has arisen in my head. Hmm. And it is not just sexual in nature. It is like, oh, you know, “She is such a spiritual person. We should pray together regularly.”

Beware of prayer partners. And I am so aware of the pain and the torment and the hell that is unleashed on earth in people’s lives with suffering that—I am not boasting here because, God forbid, I don’t want to be a fool and boast, but I am so terrified of adultery that by God’s grace I attempt to always nip it in the bud when the thought comes flying through the head, as Satan, you know, loves to fire those fiery darts at you—not to entertain it. When the wrong DVD gets in the player, we can always push the eject button in the name of Jesus and not let it lodge there.

III. D. The Church Is Here for you; we Are all Part of Sinners
Anonymous.

So here is the thought. I am going to give you an invitation. You may want to come forward during the singing of this last hymn, and it has nothing to do with your marriage or getting ready to get married or anything else. You just have a need for somebody to pray with you. We will be here. We will pray with you. And you don't have to come down here to be prayed for. You can be prayed for right where you are, because we will pray in a general way. But if you are here today, and you are convicted, I don't want you going out of here ashamed. Shame is of the devil.

How do you get rid of shame? You just come to Jesus and you say to him—and you can do it right where you are. You don't have to come down the aisle. Just say—“Lord, you know, I am convicted. I have really messed up in my life, and I am asking you for the sake of Jesus that you would forgive me. Just forgive me. Please, Lord.”

Cast yourself on God's mercy in Christ. There is nothing you have done God can't forgive you for. That is why Jesus suffered violence, and his garments were ripped off him in a violent act, when he took the curse that I deserve and you deserve. Won't you come to him?

Let's pray.