

## SESSION 7: COMMON ISSUES ADDRESSED, PART 1

### ***BIBLICAL PARADIGM FOR MARRIAGE***

As Biblical Counselors, we must hold to two key beliefs in regards to the Bible:

1. The Bible is accurate, true, and authoritative about everything that it addresses, yet it does not address everything.
2. The Bible is sufficient for life, yet not exhaustive in what it addresses or how it addresses those things.

While true, this does not make the Bible insufficient or ineffective or untrue or unimportant. What the Bible *does* provide us with is a view of life and the world that are grounded in and flow from the nature, character, mind, and heart of God.

As we explore and delve into marriage and family matters over the next couple of weeks, keep in mind that we, as Biblical Counselors and disciples, are “instruments in the Redeemer’s hands.” Our role and function are to be engaged in redemptive relationship with each counselee, consistently bringing them to Jesus Christ, His Word, and His will. The result will be authentic transformation of mind, heart, and life – including marriages and families.

#### The Nature and Purpose of Marriage

From the earliest moments of our life, we begin forming our ideas about God, ourselves, and others from the people in our lives. For most of us, that means our family of origin – and, primarily, our parents.

Societally, at the base of every family is any relationship built on mutual benefit.

Biblically, at the base of every family is the relationship defined in Scripture as marriage.

In today's society, we have come to define families far differently than in past generations. We have father-mother families, single parent families, and now

same-sex parent families. Each of these patterns for family are more and more acceptable as being equal in quality and value.

Families were created and established by God to be loving, caring, nurturing, and safe communities for all involved. Families were not designed to be uncaring, unsafe, or dangerous. They were not intended to be strife-ridden and quarrelsome (Genesis 13:8).

While we all come from different types of family structures, we need to answer the question: "How does God define a family?"

The basic Biblical model for the family consists of one man, one woman (his wife), and their children (biological or adopted), if there are any.

### **Key Passages**

**Genesis 1:27-** male and female he created them.

**Genesis 2: 18-23** The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion for him who corresponds to him."

So the man named all the animals, the birds of the air, and the living creatures of the field, but for Adam no companion who corresponded to him was found.

Then the Lord God made a woman from the part he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. Then the man said,

"This one at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
this one will be called 'woman,'  
for she was taken out of man."

And in **Genesis 2:24**, Adam – later quoted by Jesus in Matthew 19 and Paul in Ephesians 5 – says, "**That is why a man leaves his father and mother and unites with his wife, and they become one flesh [a new family].**"

**Genesis 2:1-3** The heavens and the earth were completed with everything that was in them.

These words of Scripture clearly state what God's definition of a family is at its core. We see that while Scripture has much to say about parents and children,

the “it was very good” was declared by God *before* any children were in the picture. A healthy, God-honoring marriage constitutes the basis of the family—whether or not children are part of the picture.

The extended family may consist of grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and cousins. While all of these extended family members help to support and encourage strong, healthy families, the core of the family is the marriage of one man and one woman.

### The Godly Marriage

These words are probably quite familiar to everyone here today:

“Dearly Beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God and in the presence of these witnesses, to join this man and this woman in holy matrimony, which is an honorable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying to us the mystical union which is between Christ and His Church.”

Following this is the exchange of vows. Both are asked, “Do you take this woman/man to be your wife/husband, to live together in holy matrimony, to love, to honor, to comfort, and to keep her/him in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, for as long as you both shall live?”

Interestingly enough, we pay little attention to the small words in these familiar phrases, but they are quite significant in helping us understand marriage Biblically.

Let's “string some pearls”:

**Isaiah 54:5**

**Isaiah 62:5**

**Hosea 2:16**

**Hosea 2:19-20**

**John 3:27-30**

**Ephesians 1:22-23**

**Ephesians 5:22-24**

**Matthew 22:23-30**

**Revelation 19:7**

God established marriage as a picture to the world of His relationship with His people (Isaiah 54:5; Revelation 19:7).

Idolatry and spiritism = harlotry, spiritual adultery: Exodus 34:14-15; Leviticus 20:5-6; Numbers 25:1; Ezekiel 16; Matthew 12:39; Matthew 16:4, et.al.

In creating humankind in His own image to be in safe, caring, loving, nurturing, intimate relationship, He established marriage as the vehicle (Genesis 2:18).

God has defined and described marriage (Genesis 2:23-24; Matthew 19:4-6) as:

- Heterosexual
- Monogamous
- Life-long
- Committed
- Intimate
- Interdependent
- Faithful

Aside from a mental/intentional and an emotional/devotional unity, an organic unity appears also as a basic element of the marriage union.

When we move through the Old Testament into the New Testament, we see that the characterization of a Biblically consistent marriage is distilled down and that there are features to it which, when viewed through the lens of the anthology of what we have laid out so far, the picture becomes clearer and more refined.

- Marriage is and always has been a picture of God's relationship with His people—always has; always will.
- People don't **have** a marriage, they are **in** a marriage.
- When two believers join together in marriage (“holy matrimony”), God entrusts a marriage relationship to two spiritual siblings—a brother and sister in Christ—to co-steward as a picture of G\Christ and the Church.
- They are husband and wife for a season; they are brother and sister in Christ now and forevermore. The core relationship that is to be nurtured and lived out is their relationship in and through Christ.
- The marriage relationship is to be the ultimate example of “one anothering” relationship: self-sacrificial love that gives with no expectation of return. (John 13:34-35; Philippians 2:3-8)
- This covenant union is to remain intact and fruitful until one of the spouses dies. To violate the covenant is to commit an act that is worthy of one's execution.

## THE BIBLE'S ROLE

Contrary to Facebook posts and modern Folk Theology, the Bible is not a marriage manual. Instead, the Bible is an ongoing picture of the nature of the marriage relationship, rooted and described in a myriad of ways as an expression of the divine/human marriage between God and His people (Example, Ezekiel 16).

It provides the foundation and the framework for the marriages that God has entrusted to multitudes of us to steward. A careful reading of the Scriptures will show marriage to be both a mystery and a mirror.

We need to keep in mind and teach those we counsel that marriage belongs to God and the Church, not to the people *in* the marriage

There is a *huge* difference between a marriage of two Christians and a truly Christian Marriage.

## BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR MARRIAGE

**Question:** What is God's design for marriage and what makes a marriage "Christian"? (Ephesians 5:21-33; John 13:1-17)

- A marriage is Christian when it is rooted in Christ and is built upon exclusiveness and intimacy.
- Marriage begins when a man and a woman leave their parents and pledge exclusive loving loyalty to one another.
- Marriage establishes a relationship that is more intimate than any other human experience.

### **Key Verses**

Genesis 2:24

Matthew 19:5

Mark 10:7-8

Ephesians 5:21-33 [vs. 31]

John 13:1-17

1 Peter 3:1-7

1. There are five verses of Scripture that speak to the foundation of marriage (in general) and of Christian Marriage (in particular):
  - Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7-8; Ephesians 5:31.
2. God makes the same statement about marriage four times. ***For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh***
  - Once in the Old Testament; three times in the New Testament.
  - This statement contains God's marital purpose for pre-Rebellion sinless mankind and for post-Rebellion, sinful mankind. God's design for marriage directs husbands and wives to leave their fathers and mothers.
  - What this *does not mean* is to abandon or to completely forsake (Exodus 20:12; Mark 7:8-13; I Timothy 5:8).
  - To leave one's parents means that one's relationship to one's parents must radically change.

- Each spouse is to be more concerned about the other spouse's ideas, opinions, and practices than either's parents'.
  - Each spouse is to not be slavishly dependent on their parents for affection, approval, assistance, and counsel.
  - It means that each spouse must internally forgive their parents and eliminate any bad attitudes towards their parents, or they will be emotionally tied to them regardless of how far away they might move.
  - It means that they must stop trying to change their spouse simply because the parents don't like him/her the way he/she is.
  - It means that the husband and wife relationship is the priority human relationship.
  - If parents, the goal should be to prepare children to leave, not to stay. The parents' life must not be wrapped around the children or enmeshed with those of the children – it is not only unbiblical, it is unhealthy.
    - Parents ought to be always preparing for the day when the children leave by cultivating common interests *with each other*, cultivating an ever-deepening friendship *with each other*.
  - When the children have married, parents must not try to “run” their lives or to create an exact replica of their own marriage in the marriage of the new union.
    - Allow the young husband to be the head of the household, making decisions for himself, looking to his wife as his primary responsibility, helper, and companion.
    - Encourage the daughter to depend upon her husband, not Mom or Dad, for guidance, help, companionship, and affection.
3. God's design for marriage directs husbands and wives to cleave to (be glued to) one another (cf. 2 Samuel 23:9-10).
- In our day, many young couples seem to marry with the thought that if their marriage doesn't work out they can always get a divorce.
    - When they get married they vow to be faithful until death but in the backs of their minds seems to be the thought, “unless our problems become too great or I stop loving you the way I do now.”

- God's opinion is that marriage is permanent and lifelong, with no temporary aspect about it at all.
4. Marriage is designed by God as a "Covenant of Companionship" (Malachi 2:14; Proverbs 2:17; cf. Ezekiel 16:8).
- The language in Scripture for making a covenant is literally "cutting covenant". We read in Genesis 15:18 that God on that day cut a covenant with Abraham.
  - To marry someone is to cut a covenant with them.
  - It is both promising the other, "I commit to being your companion for the rest of our lives, no matter what."
  - The main element that differentiates Covenant from every other form of contract or other commitment is that death is the only legitimate terminator of the agreement – hence, "'til death do us part."
  - Each accepts full responsibility for keeping their part of the covenant and for being companion enough to ease the way for the other to do the same.
  - Christian Marriage looks similar to becoming a Christian: abandonment and forsaking of one's former way of life (attitudes, actions, agenda, priorities, and selfishness).
  - When marriage difficulties arise, as a covenant partner, it is spiritually and emotionally dangerous to ask the question, "Did I marry the wrong person?"
5. God's design for marriage includes the two becoming "one flesh."
- At its most rudimentary level, this is referring to sexual relations/physical union (1 Corinthians 6:16).
    - Within the bounds of marriage sexual relations are holy, good, and beautiful; if entered into apart from the "leaving and cleaving," they are degrading, corrupting, and sinful (Hebrews 13:4).
  - At a more sophisticated level, this is referring to the completely faithful emotional and physical commitment, and complete sharing of all one person is and has with one other to the exclusion of all others for the remainder of one's life.

- All each person does is to be for the betterment of the other first (Ephesians 5:21-33; Philippians 2:3-4)
- As one flesh, the couple now manifests this concept in practical, tangible, observable ways that demonstrate total unity and intimacy.
- This does not equal identicalness and lack of individuality; the motives and goals of their hearts are the same while their gifts, talents, abilities, inabilities differ.
- Sin rooted in the desire to be worshiped is the primary cause of relational breakdown (Genesis 3).
  - This manifest in a number of ways:
  - Pride
  - Selfishness
  - Stubbornness
  - Ingratitude
  - Unforgiveness
  - Bitterness
  - Self-protectiveness
  - Unwholesome speech
  - Neglect
  - Abandonment
  - Impatience
  - Harshness
  - Cruelty

6. The Gospel is the empowering for good and the remedy for ill.

- Not only do the individuals in a marriage need Jesus Christ; the marriage itself does as well.
  - The Gospel is the message of reconciliation, the reuniting of that which was torn apart by sin (cf. Genesis 2:25; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19; Colossians 1:21-22, Ephesians 2:14-16; Galatians 2:28; et.al.).

- When a person is converted and becomes Christian, the Holy Spirit takes up residence, empowering them to become more and more like Christ as time goes on, and ripens in them the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).
7. For a marriage to be Christian, husband and wife are to keep in mind that they are also brother and sister in Christ.
- As brother and sister in Christ, live with her as such, fulfilling the mandates of Galatians 6:1-2 and Philippians 2:3-4.
    - Pray with and for each other
  - Provide a safe environment for the other person to walk in repentance.
  - A heart that leans toward forgiveness is our mandate as believers (Ephesians 4:32), and is essential in a relationship that exposes sin more quickly and more readily than any other.
    - When a pious partner impales his or her spouse on the law, on "should's", the companionship and partnership aspects of marriage quickly break down.
    - A healthy prayer life results from a healthy marriage (1 Peter 3:7) as much as it undergirds it (Philippians 4:6).
    - Often told to improve our prayer life to improve our marriage, Peter admonishes husbands that, if they want their prayers to be heard and answered, they are to live with their wife in a "way of true knowing."

*"Any situation that calls me to confront my selfishness has enormous spiritual value...I slowly began to understand that the real purpose of marriage may not be happiness as much as it is holiness. Not that God has anything against happiness, or that happiness and holiness are by nature mutually exclusive, but looking at marriage through the lens of holiness began to put it into an entirely new perspective for me."<sup>1</sup>*

*"I found there was a tremendous amount of immaturity within me that my marriage directly confronted...If the purpose of marriage*

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000; pg. 22-23

*was simply to enjoy an infatuation and make me 'happy,' then I'd have to get a 'new' marriage every two or three years. But if I really wanted to see God transform me from the inside out, I'd need to concentrate on changing myself rather than on changing my spouse."*<sup>2</sup>

8. The summary statement for how men and women are to live with one another in marriage is found in Ephesians 5:33: "Nevertheless, each one of you must also love his own wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."
- These mandates are necessary because:
    - They are contrary to our natural tendency;
    - They are the deepest needs of each spouse;
    - They reflect within the marriage the roles each spouse represents in Christ's relationship with His Bride, the Church.

### Divorce and Remarriage

We are all familiar with the quote from Malachi 2 where God says, "I hate divorce."

Have we paid attention to the rest of the sentence, the rest of the paragraph, the complete pericope these three words are found in?

When we look at the context, we see there is more going on than these words standing alone would seem to express.

### The Bible on Divorce

**Malachi 2:13-16:** "This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and with groaning, **because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand**. Yet you say, 'For what reason?' Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pg. 23

companion and your wife by covenant. But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? **Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth.** For I hate divorce," says the Lord, the God of Israel, "**and him who covers his garment with wrong,**" says the Lord of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."

In this portion of Malachi, God is making clear why he refuses their offerings, no matter how much they beg and plead and cry. He accentuates their unfaithfulness through idolatry by charging them with being covenant breakers to the point that they are "abandoning" their wives, who are their "companions by covenant."

This section is *not* about divorce: it is about betrayal and covenant-breaking, God's attitude toward those things, and their consequences.

When we put this together with what we have already discussed about God's purpose and design for marriage, and when we look at how the Scriptures discuss divorce and remarriage, we get quite a clear picture of how to think about and talk about these matters with those who come to us for Biblical counsel.

- In Matthew 19:3-9, Jesus makes it clear that divorce is an accommodation God makes in response to the sin that violates God's original purpose for the intimate unity and permanence of the marriage covenant (Genesis 2:24).
- Jesus also makes clear that God's law allowed divorce *only* because of "hardness of heart" (Matthew 19:8).
- Divorce was a grace provision for the faithful partner due to the sexual sin or abandonment by the sinning partner, so that the faithful partner was no longer bound to the marriage (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:12-15).
- That means that the believer ought never consider divorce except in specific circumstances, and even in those circumstances it ought only be pursued reluctantly because there is no other viable recourse.

- The only New Testament grounds for divorce are sexual sin or desertion by an unbeliever.
  - The first is found in Jesus' use of the Greek word *porneia* (Matthew 5:32; 19:9). This is a general term that encompasses *all* sexual sin.
  - When one partner violates the unity and intimacy of a marriage by sexual sin—and forsakes his or her covenant obligation—the faithful partner is placed in the difficult and unjust position of dealing with the aftermath of their spouse's breaking of the covenant.
  - As believers, we are charged with following Christ's prescription of confrontation and admonishment (Matthew 18:15-17) within the Church when one of our number sins. The process is progressive, always with an eye toward bringing the one who has sinned to the place of repentance so they may be restored.
  - As regards sin in the marriage relationship, after all prescribed means have been pursued, without success, to bring the sinning partner to repentance, the Bible permits release for the faithful partner through divorce (Matthew 5:32; 1 Corinthians 7:15).
  - The second reason found in the New Testament for permitting a divorce is in cases where an unbelieving spouse no longer desires to remain married to his or her believing spouse (1 Corinthians 7:12-15).
  - Also, if the unbeliever leaves the marital relationship permanently but is not willing to file for divorce, then the believer is in an impossible situation of having legal and moral obligations that he or she cannot fulfill.
  - Because “the brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases” (1 Corinthians 7:15) and is therefore no longer obligated to remain married, the believer may file for divorce without fearing that they are sinning against God.
- Divorce in the Scripture is permitted only because of man's sin.

## The Bible on Remarriage

Remarriage is permitted for the faithful partner only when the divorce was on Biblical grounds. In fact, the purpose for a Biblical divorce is to make clear that the faithful partner is free to remarry, but only in the Lord (Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39).

- Those who divorce on any other grounds have sinned against God, their partners, and the Boy of Christ (remember that marriage belongs to God and His people, not to those who are “in” the marriage).
- If they then marry someone else, it is an act of “adultery” (Mark 10:11-12).
  - This is why the Holy Spirit, through Paul, says that a believing woman who sinfully divorces should “remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband” (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).
  - If she repents of her sin of unbiblical divorce, her “fruit in keeping with repentance” would be to seek reconciliation with her former husband (Matthew 5:23-24).
  - God declares this to also be true for a man who divorces unbiblically (1 Corinthians 7:11).
  - The only condition that God provides for either of these to remarry is if the former spouse remarries, proves to be an unbeliever, or dies, in which cases reconciliation would no longer be possible.

One final important point: God gives a very clear warning to anyone who is considering marriage to a divorced person: If the divorce was not Biblically warranted and there is still a responsibility and/or possibility for that person to reconcile, the person who marries the divorced person is considered an adulterer (Mark 10:12) and invites God's righteous judgment for that.