

Broomfield



# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## The Purpose of Marriage

### *Biblical Marriage, Part 2*

In our day, there is a lot of misunderstanding when it comes to marriage. And practically speaking, one of the most misunderstood aspects of marriage on the part of the church today revolves around God's purpose for marriage. There are numerous broad views on marriage.

Some hold that fellowship<sup>1</sup> is the primary purpose of marriage. They believe that the Biblical answer for loneliness is the marriage relationship — not surprisingly; this is the stance of most singles. Sadly, those in this camp fail to recognize that lonely single people make lonely married people — loneliness is a heart problem not a relationship problem.

Others suggest that procreation<sup>2</sup> is the primary purpose of marriage. Most in this category are known primarily for their stance on birth control. They argue that if procreation is God's ultimate plan for marriage, then birth control strikes a blow against God's fundamental plan for the man/woman relationship.

Still others hold that pleasure<sup>3</sup> is the ultimate purpose of marriage. These Christian “hedonists” say that God has created all things to enjoy.<sup>4</sup> This is where most Christians are today! And it explains why the divorce rate in the church is near fifty percent — because often when the fun, love, and joy is gone from the marriage so is the marriage.

Finally there are those who believe that assistance<sup>5</sup> is the primary purpose of marriage. Those who advocate this position stress the business aspect of marriage or the helping side of the man/woman relationship. Marriage is an institution that should benefit both parties involved. This is why many sign contracts and make agreements before entering into the marriage relationship.

This raises two fundamental questions: Which, if any, of these views is the correct view of marriage? And does the Bible really tell us what God's purpose for marriage is?

Paul answers both of these questions for us in his treatment of marriage in Ephesians 5:15-33.

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Genesis 2

<sup>2</sup> Compare Genesis 1

<sup>3</sup> Compare 1 Corinthians 7

<sup>4</sup> Compare 1 Timothy 4:4

<sup>5</sup> Compare Genesis 2:18 and Ecclesiastics 4:9-12

## Christ and the Church

Ephesians 5:32, “This is a great mystery: **but I speak concerning Christ and the church.**”

The relationship between Christian husbands and wives is intimately related to the sacred relationship between Christ and His church. Notice the points Paul has already made in this passage.

- Verses 22-24: Christ and His church are used as the illustration of the woman's relationship to her husband.
- Verse 25: Christ's love for His church serves as the example to the Husband of what his love must be for his wife.
- Verse 29: Once again, it is Christ's love and the church that is the example.
- Verse 32: Paul climaxes his discussion of marriage in this passage with our text.

Paul uses the Christ/church relationship in this passage to illustrate the elements of a Biblical marriage. In fact, out of twelve verses, Paul references the Christ/Church relationship nine times, specifically mentioning Christ five times!

Now, it could be that Paul is simply using one of many examples to portray the relationship that a man and woman are to have as a married couple. Yet, the wording in this verse will not allow us to hold this view.

First Paul begins by stating that this is a great mystery.

Ephesians 5:32, “**This is a great mystery**<sup>6</sup>: but I speak concerning Christ and the church”

Paul is saying, “Everything I have said about the husband and wife relationship- the oneness described- is MYSTERIOUS because it is a picture of the Gospel. It is a picture of Christ and His church!”

One of the fundamental descriptions of the body of Christ is that of a bride. The Bible proclaims loudly that the Church is the Bride of Christ. Christ likens His role to be that of the Groom with the implication that the church is His bride.<sup>7</sup> And it is this picture that continues even into the next age.

Revelation 19:6-8, “And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.”

The church is the bride of Christ. And thus, it should not surprise us to read that the Divine plan behind the institution of marriage —God's purpose for marriage — is the picturing of Christ's relationship to His Church. This is the force of Paul's use of “mystery” in this passage.

## Mystery

The term mystery used in our passage represents a category of revelation that has been kept secret or clouded for a period of time but, through grace, has finally been disclosed or more fully explained to God's people. This term is used elsewhere in Scripture.

Ephesians 1:9, “Having made known unto us **the mystery of his will**, according to his good pleasure

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<sup>6</sup> μυστηριον musterion -

<sup>7</sup> Compare Matthew 9:15 and Matthew 25:1

which he hath purposed in himself.”

Ephesians 3:4-6, “Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the **mystery of Christ**) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.”

Ephesians 3:9-10, “And to make all men see what is the fellowship of **the mystery**, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,”

Ephesians 6:19, “And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the **mystery of the gospel**,”

The term *mystery* signifies an aspect of the truth of redemption that God has previously hidden from men but now has more fully revealed in Christ. And this is the case when it comes to the man/woman relationship. Marriage is a GREAT<sup>8</sup> (expresses magnitude rather than intensity) mystery. The purpose of marriage goes beyond our comprehension, and yet is now, finally, revealed. In other words until the writing of this passage, the people of God throughout all ages thought of marriage in a multiple of ways i.e., fellowship, family, fun, etc. And yet, here God has finally reveals the whole picture. In its most essential form marriage serves as a magnificent picture of Christ. This is the purpose that was unknown to the saints of the Old Covenant but is now revealed. This is what is identified in theology as the redemptive principle.

## Redemptive Principle

Let me explain this principle in more detail because it is so important especially when it comes to marriage.

In Genesis 3 we read of man’s fall and the fact that God did not immediately destroy man and all of creation as He had promised, a question is immediately raised, Why? Why didn't God destroy the earth and man and start over?

In fact, far from destruction we read passages like these:

Psalm 145:9, 15, 16, “The Lord is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works... The eyes of all look to Thee and Thou dost give them their food in due time... Thou dost open Thy hand, and dost satisfy the desire of every living thing.”

Matthew 5:45b, “God causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

Luke 6:35, “[God] Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.”

Acts 14:16, 17, “And in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with good and gladness.”

In view of God's promise of death to Adam, why is God merciful to the wicked? Why did the sun rise this morning if God hates the unrighteous and has vowed to punish them? Why do good things happen to such

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<sup>8</sup> μέγας megas

wretched people like us?

The answer to these questions is because of His eternal purpose in Christ — The Redemptive Principle!

Romans 2:4-5, “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”

This passage was written to those who had concluded that because they had received blessing from the Lord (i.e. the word of God, the rising of the sun, etc...) God must not be angry with them!

This is the redemptive principle. God is kind to all so that the Gospel might be brought to some.

2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

Again, the sun rose this morning so that life might continue on this earth, and God's people might come to Him.

## **Wheat and Tares**

The clearest example of the Redemptive Principle is Matthew 13:28-30. In the parable of the tares, the master of a farm whose field had been sabotaged with tares by an enemy is asked by his servants whether they should root up the tares. Christ's answer describes God's Kingdom.

Matthew 13:29-30, “But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.”

**BOTH** the wheat and the tares receive the same treatment and care. The sun rises on both. Both receive the same water/fertilizer. Both are protected from things that would destroy them. **BUT** clearly the care that is given is provided to preserve and maintain the wheat and not the tares!

See, everything God has done, does, and is going to do in this world is for the purpose of bringing Glory to Himself by accomplishing His plan of redemption. Thus at the very moment that Christ hung on the cross to redeem His people, He continued to uphold the world by the word of His power.<sup>9</sup> On the cross, Christ sustained all, even those who were killing Him, to redeem some!

T. H. L. Parker said this about the redemptive principle:

“The creation is the stage on which are enacted God's dealings with mankind... [And] from the beginning God has ordered the course of events toward Jesus Christ and his incarnation. From the Biblical point of view world history and personal life stories possess significance only in the light of the incarnation. The squalid little story of lust in Judah's dealings with Tamar (Genesis 38) falls into place in the genealogy of the Messiah (Matthew 1). Caesar Augustus was on the throne in Rome for the sake of the unknown baby in its manger.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Compare Hebrews 1:3

<sup>10</sup> T. H. L. Parker, *Providence of God, Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, page 891

This is what the redemptive principle is all about. When it comes to this world and everything in it, God is working toward a greater end — The Gospel!

Thus when we turn our focus to marriage and discover a passage that describes the **ULTIMATE PURPOSE** of marriage it is no surprise to read that that **PURPOSE** likewise is the Gospel. Marriage serves the Redemptive Principle!

When we read that God's design for marriage in this age is **ONE** — The Heralding of the Gospel of Christ. This is what marriage is all about! And thus the husband's goal in marriage is the reflection of Christ's love for His church. The wife's goal in marriage is the reflection of the body of Christ's respect/reverence of Christ. This is the ultimate purpose of marriage — **PROCLAIMING AND ENJOYING THE CHRIST/CHURCH RELATIONSHIP!**

## **Conduit for the Gospel**

When we look at the Scripture, we discover that there are a variety of ways in which a marriage witnesses of Christ. First, marriage is a conduit for the gospel.<sup>11</sup>

In Genesis 1:28 God gives the command to the man and woman to be “fruitful and multiply.” The purpose for this fruitfulness is further explained in Genesis 17.

Genesis 17:7, “And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.”

Marriage is one way God extends His kingdom. And thus, all who are married are commanded to teach their children.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7, “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”

On account of God's purpose for marriage — the heralding of the Gospel of Christ — marriages are to be “fruitful” and “multiply” that the Gospel might extend to the next generation. Thus, marriage serves the redemptive principle in that it extends God's kingdom.

This raises an obvious question: What about couples that are childless? Can their marriage serve its ultimate purpose?

The answer is yes! Marriages of those who are childless can serve by witnessing and reflecting the Christ/Church relationship. This is the ultimate purpose of marriage, not procreation. Thus, children are but one way marriage does this. There are others.

## **A Catalyst**

Marriage is a catalyst in our enjoying the fruits of the gospel.<sup>12</sup>

Genesis 2:18, “**And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.**”

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<sup>11</sup> Compare Genesis 1:28 and 17:1-7, Acts 2:38, and Deuteronomy 6:4

<sup>12</sup> Compare Genesis 2:18

God created Eve. In the establishment of the man/woman relationship, Biblical fellowship was also established! Marriage serves the redemptive principle in that it provides an arena in which the fellowship of the kingdom is enjoyed! As the man and woman fellowship in marriage, they picture the fellowship that is enjoyed between Christ and His Bride.

## **An Aid**

Marriage is an aid in our labors for the gospel.<sup>13</sup>

Genesis 2:18, “And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; **I will make him an help meet for him.**”

In the beginning God gave Adam the task of doing work in God’s kingdom, this work is nothing less than the work of the gospel. And then God created Eve to help Adam in the proclamation of the gospel. And it is from this truth that we learn that “two are better than one” (Ecclesiastes 4:9).

When Christ sent the disciples forth, he sent them out two-by-two. So God created the marriage relationship in which two are to labor for the kingdom. Once again we see that marriage serves the redemptive principle.

## **A Hindrance**

Just as marriage can be an aid to the gospel, marriages which fail to reflect the redemptive principle can be a hindrance to the work of the gospel.

1 Peter 3:7, “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.”

This is an amazing passage and quite misunderstood today. When we understand that marriage serves the ultimate purpose of the gospel/kingdom we likewise must profess that when a man mistreats his wife he attacks the gospel presentation for which his marriage was ordained. This hinders the work of the kingdom because his prayers are hindered.

This has so many implications for the marriage relationship. In any case the man needs to understand that when he fails to treat his wife as Christ does the church this is a strike against God’s fundamental plan for the man/woman relationship — the gospel. And this carries with it dire consequences for the man.

Brothers and sisters, marriage was designed by God to witness the love that Christ has for His church, and to reflect the reverence that the Bride of Christ — the Church — should have for Christ. This is the ultimate purpose of marriage as described in Ephesians 5:32.

## **The Goal for Your Marriage**

This brings us to the very difficult question: What is your goal for marriage?

Men, what is your goal? Do you want your wife to be a better nursemaid, lover, domestic engineer?

Wives, do you want your husband to be a better friend, comforter, supporter?

Married's, what is your goal? Is it better communication, intimacy, financial security, or peace?

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<sup>13</sup> Compare Genesis 2:18 and Ecclesiastics 4:9-12

Singles who plan on marriage, what is your goal? Companionship? Togetherness?

Singles that plan on staying single, what is your goal? Financial security, peace and quiet?

Every goal that we could ever fathom — no matter how Biblical — is futile if we miss this one point our chief end as it relates to the glory of God in our marriages must be the proclamation and demonstration of the relationship between Christ and the Church!

Now in view of this truth the question is NOT, “Does my marriage preach the gospel?” BUT, “What gospel does my marriage preach?”

According to God's plan, marriage IS a proclamation of the gospel — that's a given. And so the issue is NOT will I or won't I, BUT what kind of witness am I.

Husbands and wives: What gospel do our children see? What gospel does our family see? When the world looks at our marriages, what gospel is proclaimed? Does it at all reflect the good news of Christ's sacrificial love? OR does your marriage preach a gospel of works righteousness with little or no grace?

### **Honeymoon Horse**

A man and a woman got married and were driving to their honeymoon destination in a horse-drawn carriage when the horse stopped in the middle of the road. The man got out of the carriage, looked into the eyes of the horse and said, “That's one!”

They drove on a little further and the horse stopped in the middle of the road once again. Once again, the man got out of the carriage, looked into the eyes of the horse and said, “That's two!”

Further on down the road, the horse stopped for a third time, and so the man said, “That's three!” and pulled out a gun and shot the horse.

The wife, shocked at what she had just witnessed, said, “How could you have done that? Have you lost your mind?”

The man then looked into the eyes of his wife and said, “That's one!”

Is this your marriage?

Husbands is the love for you wife limited to only three transgressions, or is it unconditional? Does your love for your wife preach of the sacrificial love of Christ when He died on the cross for your sin? Or is your love a self-love that views your wife as someone who is to fulfill your every desire? Can the world/your children observe your care for your wife? How you talk about her, how you treat her, how you respond to her weaknesses and sins and see the care and love that God has for His bride?

Wives is your respect for your husband as the church's ought to be for Christ? If you saw another Christian refer to Christ as you refer to your husband and talk to Christ as you talk to your husband and witness of Christ as you witness of your husband would you have cause for rebuke and correction?

Proverbs 31:10-12, “Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.”

Wives is this what your children see when they observe how you respond to your husband?

Our marriages will either be a place where grace or condemnation abounds — of which only one is an accurate proclamation of the gospel!

Let our marriages be a place where grace abounds! Let our marriages be a place where weaknesses are met with help! Let our marriages be one where sin is covered by love! Let our marriages be one where struggles are bathed in Prayer! Let our marriages be one where the fellowship is rich. Let our marriages be one where mutual submission quickly gives way to the other's needs.

Let our marriages be a place of grace — and not law which sinfully says “you did this, so I will do that.” “You got this, so I get that.”

Let our marriages at all times grow in their witness to the relationship that exists between Christ and His Bride! This, and only this, will fulfill the end for which God has ordained marriage!

Those who are single this morning, begin now preparing yourself for such a marriage. Begin praying that God will bring a spouse who likewise is committed to just such a marriage.

## **The Prerequisites of Marriage**

I want to remind you of the prerequisites that serve God's purpose for marriage. There is not a man or woman among us who by themselves can fulfill the call of Ephesians 5:32. We all need the enabling power granted by God.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:15-21 that salvation, a spirit filled life and mutual submission are the three prerequisites to a Biblical marriage. If you are lacking in any of these you will short-circuit any attempt you might make at a Biblical marriage.

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### **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on October 19, 2003. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.