

# Destroying Pop-Christian Views of Marital Bliss - 1

By

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**Bible Text:** Ephesians 5:22-33; Romans 8:28

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## **Grace Community Church**

P.O. Box 10608

San Antonio, TX 78210

**Website:** [www.gccsatx.com](http://www.gccsatx.com)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/gcc](http://www.sermonaudio.com/gcc)

In the book of Romans chapter eight verse 28 the Bible says:

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren.<sup>1</sup>

Although I know that there is an entire congregation here and that when the Word goes forth it goes forth to all, but my principle endeavor this afternoon is to speak to two people who are very dear to me who are going to make one of the greatest decision of their lives today.

Sometimes in preaching the gospel we want to say, "Who is competent for these things?" But standing here today I ask myself the same question. "Who is competent to speak to you regarding the greatest of all endeavors for man to take a wife?"

I have found that through my life it is quite easy to become a missionary. It is quite easy to follow the gospel call, relatively speaking. It is quite easy to be spiritual to even the most remote people group. What is the most difficult task I have found, is to be the man that I ought to be with the woman that must mean more to me than all other things on this earth put together, including ministry and preaching.

I remember years ago a young person came to me and they said, "I want to be a missionary in China."

And I said, "Why?"

And they said, "Well, I love the Chinese. I love the Chinese. I just think of the Chinese all the time."

And I looked at them and I said, "Do you know why you love the Chinese?"

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:28-29

And they said, “No, why.”

I said, “Because you don’t know any Chinese.”

The point is, is this, not that the Chinese people are not wonderful people. It is just that it is so easy to love someone who is so far away and so difficult to love someone, even the person most dear to you, because they are so close.

Sometimes we hear we desperately need God in preaching and in the ministry and that is very, very true. But I have not needed God so much in the ministry as I have needed him in marriage.

We actually missed our cue. I didn’t come out when I was supposed to come out and they had to send someone over here to say, “Brother Paul, it is time to walk to the front,” simply because I was spending the last few moments not jesting, but trying to just pour more truth and more truth into this young man’s mind because it is only the power of God, the grace of God, the sovereignty of God and the truth of God that is going to enable you to become what you ought to become towards this woman. And until you become what you ought to become towards this woman, there is no need to talk about anything else.

Great preachers are a dime a dozen. Missionaries who do astounding feats...but a man who can truly love a daughter of God has attained a very high status in the kingdom.

As I look through biographies of men that others applaud and seek to be like I am astounded at how many of them—even most of them—drop the ball with regard to their wives. And I think that a man who has done such a thing should never...a biography should never be written of him, because the only thing that really matters is you become a man of God around the person who knows you most and the person in your life that is most special to God.

I found out after just a few weeks of marriage that I was not as spiritual as I thought I was as a single man, that I was not as selfless, I was not as kind, I was not many of the things that I believed myself to be because it was marriage that truly tested the caliber of my character. And I found myself wanting and I found myself needing grace like never before in my life. And until this day my wife and I will celebrate our anniversary in two days and until this day I need more grace now than I needed then simply because I am wiser to my need.

Now this passage I have chosen is probably...in my life I have passages that I call foundational passages and this is one of them. And I believe that it is the most important passage in the Bible regarding marriage and I have never really heard it written up in a book or read it in a book or heard it in a sermon, but to me it is the most important thing.

Now to take a step back for a moment you will notice I am doing most of the talking to...it is for this reason. Ten years down the road the quality of your marriage will have

been determined by you and not your wife. And when God goes to observe this marriage and if God is ever to call anyone as we would say in a common tongue, call anyone on the carpet with regard to this thing that you are entering into, it will be you, son. She will become, she will become what you make her to be.

Now he says that we know that God causes all things to work together. It is amazing to me that we talk about the sovereignty of God only in terms of salvation and election and such. But the most important thing to me about the sovereignty of God is every aspect of my life is under his sovereign control. I know that to his specially beloved people they can all say that there is not a maverick molecule in the universe. And you are here today both of you at the ordination of God, at his calling, at his election.

Now although we can say many romantic and emotional and beautiful things about marriage, I want you to understand that although those things are very important and very beautiful, things of which poets long to write, the basis of marriage is something...is a medicine much deeper. It is a much stronger column than mere feelings.

I have been called of God to preach the gospel. We all have such a theology that if I were to turn from that calling to do any other thing it would pronounce judgment upon my head because the callings of God are irrevocable.

What has made my marriage last? It is not just that my wife is beautiful or that there is some feeling or sentiment between us. It is this. I have been called of God, his sovereignty election. I have been called of God to lay down my life for his daughter, a specific daughter. That is his sovereign calling.

So many times young people will come to me and they will say, you know, a young man will say, "I desire to marry this girl."

And I will say, "Why?"

And he will say, "Well, I love to be with her and she is beautiful and when I am with her we feel so good and it just meets so many needs in my life and there is just when she is around, my life is so much more endearing."

And I will always ask him this question, "Well, then, what you are telling me is you want to marry this girl because she meets all your selfish self centered needs and desires?"

The young man will always say, "No, that is not what I mean."

And I'll always say, "But that is what you said. You want to be with her because she is beautiful. Young man, what happens when she is no longer beautiful? What happens when someone more beautiful comes across your path?"

Or, "We can really talk and that is why we want to be together?"

What happens when you can't really talk?

"We feel so good together."

What happens when those feelings for a season are gone?

You see, your marriage must be based upon this one thing. God has called me to lay down my life for this woman. If she responds in kind praise the Lord. If she does not respond in kind, praise the Lord because I am not in this for me. And in a sense I am not even in this for her. But I am in this for God.

The world will tell us that...that marriage is a 50-50 relationship. And then years ago Christians came along and said, "No. It is not a 50-50 relationship, it is 100%-100% relationship."

I disagree with both. Marriage is 100%-0% relationship. You give 100% of everything you are to this woman even if she returns nothing of the sort back to you because you have been called of God to lay down your life for her.

There is another sense, sister, that you have been called to do the same. You can also make this man into something that at this moment he is not. You can make him hard and bitter, tired and tired or you can make him something that we would all want him to be. But the tools of your trade are not a hammer and they are most certainly not a tongue. They are reflecting the beauty of Christ, the humble submissiveness of Christ, of knowing this, that if you fight for you God will not fight for thee. If you give yourself as a handmaiden to God and respond as God would have you respond, then God will fight for you and change this man.

Now some things that are very, very important here. Most people will say, "What is the purpose of marriage?"

Well, the world would say, "The purpose of marriage is that, well, she meets my needs."

And we know that is wrong.

But, then again, Christians will come along and say, "Well, the purpose of marriage is that she meets mine and I meet hers and we meet each others..." And although there is some truth in that, that is not the full foundation or even the principle column of marriage.

Some would say, "Well, the purpose of marriage is that we reflect the beauty of the relationship between Jesus Christ and his Church." Yes, that is true, but you are going to fail at that.

What is the real purpose of marriage? The real purpose of marriage is the same purpose shared by every other thing that occurs on this planet. The real purpose of marriage is that you both be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

You know, everything that could go wrong for a lot of people trying to come to this marriage, this wedding, it went wrong. And do you want to know why? It is a prophecy. It is a microcosm of what your marriage is to be. Do you want a perfect marriage? Then you want what God does not want. All these things happened so that you would realize that God doesn't want a perfect little wedding. He wants to try you and test you so that you will be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

Now when we speak about the image of Jesus Christ and being conformed to that image, what do we speak about? Do we speak about his justice even though he is just? No. Do we speak about his wrath even though he can be wrathful? No. When we sing the great hymns of Zion, what, principally, are the characteristics of God that come forth? They are this. They are mercy, grace and unconditional love. Anyone found in Scripture...when the moment the name Jesus occurs they hear it, they read it. The three things that are most pronounced about him are mercy, grace and unconditional love. Those are the things that you sing about. But they are the things you are most likely not to reflect in your life. Because although he is unconditional, we are conditional.

We are conditional. And that is the one thing that God will seek to destroy in both of you, conditions, conditions. He has sovereignly give you a woman that is strong in all the areas where she must be strong so that you are not tempted beyond what you can bear. He has given you a husband who will be strong in all the areas where he must be strong so that you are not tempted beyond what you can bear, sister. But God has also given you a woman and he himself orchestrated her weaknesses and they will be weaknesses in her life that will most rub you the wrong way. And he has given you a man who has weaknesses orchestrated, ordained. In his mysterious sovereignty he has given you a man who is weak in the areas where maybe you will want him to be most strong.

Basically, this. He has given to you each other and neither of you meet all the conditions. And the purpose of that is not to give you bliss on earth, but to make your love unconditional, that you will love her and care for her when she does not meet the condition. And you will love him and care for him when he does not meet the conditions. And the reason for that is this. You are not in it for the individual. You are not in it for each other. You are in it for the glory of God and becoming every thing, everything that he would want you to be.

And he could have given you an easier woman. Sister, trust me. He could have given you an easier man. He did not give you someone compatible with you because he loves you too much. Because he is so much better than you are his gifts are so much greater than the ones you would even give yourself. You would want a life of ease and perfect compatibility. He is not going to give you that because that never produces godliness, true piety or conformity to the image of Jesus Christ.

I don't have to be a prophet or the son of a prophet to tell you that there are going to be beautiful times and there are going to be times that are very trying. And I don't have to be the prophet or the son of a prophet to tell you that if you live through it you are going to look back on your old age and you are going to bless God more for the times of tension than the times of compatibility because you are going to see that it was through that you were conformed to the image of Christ and gained for yourself a greater weight of eternal glory.

And I know that you are so given to wanting to be what God wants you to be in the ministry. I could lose my ministry tomorrow and I don't know how many tears I would shed. But if I lost my wife, my wife would be over.

If you ever exalt even ministry above her, know this from me. That it was not your piety that caused you to do it. It was your idolatry, your desire to be something among men and even a desire to be something before God can be nothing but selfish idolatry.

My wife just recently read to me a story about a woman on the mission field who had to spend a great deal of suffering to learn that although that God has greater plans for us than we do, his plans often look smaller than ours. We want to win the world. He wants to conform us to the image of his Son. You become both of you the greatest missionaries the world has ever known. But you don't reflect what a marriage biblically should reflect. Know this: an abject failure, a failure.

And so the great purpose...you see, now you have a solid rock to stand upon because what is going to happen? Is this moment holy? Well, holiness starts when this is over. At least the lessons will begin. And, you see, you stand on a solid rock, a rock that the world knows not of. What do they know? They get married not having a clue what they are getting themselves into. And then when reality sets in the doubts begin. "I must have married the wrong person. I must have...what have I done? This just isn't right. It isn't working out like I thought. Nothing is going...and...well, let's put an end to it now and start again."

But the Christian looks and says, "All of this is from God."

You may take her as a bride thinking that you will become a Batman and Robin team on the mission field. Physical maladies could set in so that your flesh would even say, "She is an anchor around my neck that keeps me from doing the ministry that I would like to do." And yet you do not realize that the anchor was placed there by God because he has greater plans for you than just to plant churches. He wants to make you like his Son. To the wind with absolutely everything else.

Now I want to go quickly through—as though I could do this quickly. I want to go...Ephesians 5:22. "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord."<sup>2</sup> In all common consideration, barring extreme things your battle will be won, the desires of your heart for this man will be met not by prodding, manipulating or by a tongue that is

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<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 5:22

quicker than his, not by trying to lead him so that he will become the spiritual leader, but it is with a gentle and quiet spirit.

You know, when I come in from work or a bad day at the mission and everything happening and I go to that haven that ought to be my home and my boys are hanging off the lamps in the kitchen and nothing has been done and everything is chaos and I walk in and I call my wife to attention without the slightest inclination of what has gone on that day. And I say, “You know, where is the food? Why isn’t the house in order? What is going on?”

If she turns in kind and responds back to me with a sharp tongue or with a justification, an argument written all over her face then the gloves go off. Let the war begin. But if she turns around and looks at me and says, “Sorry, husband, there have been some things that have happened today, needs of ministry, a sister needed me here or this has gone on here or the boys were into this today and I thought it best to follow that train.” If she answers me as Christ would have her I always go, “Just one moment.” And then I go out to my woodshed and I have got a big pole of hickory. And I proceed in beating myself half to death with that thing.

It is her kindness, her Christ likeness that causes heaping coals to be poured on my head.

Now when it talks about submission, remember this is not as the Gentiles do. Our king is not Nero. He is not Caesar. And it is not Rome he rules over. H came in to Jerusalem as our king riding on the foal of a donkey. He is gentle, humble, meek. He doesn’t rule as a Caesar. He rules as the Christ and his kingdom has nothing to do with the kingdoms we know about on this earth.

How gentle has he been with you? Even when he causes heaping coals to be poured on my head.

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How gentle has he been with you? Even when he has corrected you he has left you with hope knowing that you were dearly loved. As a matter of fact, your ability to discern the voice of God and the voice of Satan is this. Whenever Satan points out something wrong he leaves you destitute of hope. And whenever God points out something wrong he leaves you with joy at the possibility of becoming everything he desires you to be.

Regardless of what 21<sup>st</sup> century fundamentalism may teach us about us the first time we look at the face of Christ and being astounded at the frown and disappointment on his face because we have all done so bad, regardless of such false teaching, that is not the way it is going to be. The first time the bride of Christ looks in the face of Christ they are just going to see overwhelming love.

In her worst failure when she looks around and looks at you, she should not see disappointment because love covers a multitude of sins.

You rule, you lead for her. You live for her. No more good buddies, no more good friends. She is everything now. And there is real sense in which you love God through loving here. And yes she is to help you in the ministry. She is not just a helper. As a matter of fact she is going to be the thing that determines just how spiritual you are on that day when you stand before him.

I would dare say this, that God would never from this moment on have to glance at you, would never have to study your life from this moment on until the day you stand before him, would never have to take one look at you. He would just have to look at your wife. And by looking at her wife and her sanctification he will be able to determine just what kind of man you are.

He goes on and he says the husband is head. He is. He is. Now he can like many men or even most men not be the head. He can throw away his manhood and stay a boy all his life. But before God he is your head. And if you honor him God will honor you. And as he is to love you unconditionally, you are to honor him unconditionally. He is never going to deserve everything you are supposed to give him in the same way that you are not ever going to deserve everything he is supposed to give you. But that is not the point, is it?

Now he says, "Husband is the head." A head leads. But I have seen...if I were to point out one of the greatest failures in my life it has been to study the Scripture to gain great conviction to preach great truths to many men. But if I am a head, I am a head primarily for my wife. And what does that mean? I am to study, I am to study the Scriptures and to determine the convictions by which I will lead my life and my household. Everything in that household should be determined through the study of Scripture led by me with most certainly the input of your wife. But determining thus saith the Lord for your household because until you have done that you cannot say, "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord." Some generic...that becomes nothing more than a generic, meaningless cliché unless you are serving the Lord according to the convictions found by studying the Scripture.

Your leadership has authority only to the degree that you lead according to Scripture. You do not have authority because of some special anointing. You do not have an authority because of some special calling. You have an authority to the degree that you lead according to the Scriptures.

And now he says this. He says, "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body."<sup>3</sup> I always here men talk about their headship. Very rarely do I hear men speak about being the savior of their wives.

You know that there is one God and one mediator between God and men, but there is a real sense in which you have been called upon to be her savior. As we know, salvation is not punctiliar. It is not this thing that happens one moment in time and then we are left to ourselves. But God saves, is saving and will save us.

In the same way, it is a process of you giving your life. As Christ gave his life for the Church, you are giving your life so that she will become sanctified. She will grow in the Lord and not through legalism, not through a Roman leadership in the name of Christ, not through prodding, manipulating, brow beating, but through being that very thing that you are calling her to be. You are bidding her to come on. And when possibly she cannot walk as fast as you can, you do not shrug your shoulders and wonder what God has done to you. You simply turn around with joy and relish the opportunity of walking to Christ even at a slower pace as long as you can walk there with her. You are to be a savior.

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<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 5:23

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”<sup>4</sup> Nowhere am I commanded to give myself up for any other thing, for her.

Let me give you both something. It is a harsh illustration, but it is adequate. I love both my boys very, very much. I can't believe what it is like to have children. It is absolutely astounding. But if my boys and my wife and I were in a boat together and that boat were to begin to sink and I was the only one who could swim out of the four and I had to make a decision on whom I would save, I would save my wife. As a matter of fact, especially women, have you ever heard someone say, “There is no love like a mother's love?”

That is not biblical. The Bible says there is no love like a father's love, to start off with. Secondly, the most important person in your life is to be your wife. Even after children come. Many times children are loved by their parents simply because they are starved of the love they should be receiving from their spouse.

She is not to be so needy of love that when children come she begins to almost feed upon them and draw from them the very thing she ought to be drawing from you. And, furthermore, your children will be the happiest children in the world if they know that you love this woman more than anyone else on the face of the earth because they are going to look at daddy and say, “Daddy is not going anywhere. This family is a rock. Look how much dad loves mom.”

You say, “Brother Paul, how can I attain to all this?”

You will have to ask another man because that's why I, like yourself, am in desperate need of grace.

And he says, “Love your wives as Christ loved the Church.” He gave himself to sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word that he might present to himself the Church in all her glory.

Now, “having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives.”<sup>5</sup>

Now I want you to think about something. I hear many men complaining about their wives, complaining, complaining and complaining. And they do not realize that it will be those complaints on the day of judgment that God uses to accuse them. Because, you see, Jesus Christ saved a bride that did not deserve to be saved. And he continues to work with the bride whose failures are greater than her successes. And yet he keeps working. He who began a good work will finish it. And throughout the life of the true believer we see the faithfulness of that believer's God in that Christ hath accomplished what he set forth to accomplish, has conformed him to his image. If you complain about your bride, it is your own fault because you were to be praying and fasting and loving and leading so

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<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 5:25

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 5:27-28

that she would become not just like you, but that she would become like Christ as you are becoming like Christ.

Marriage is so different than what I thought. And this is the last thing I am going to leave you with. I want to share with you my mistake.

Many times men that are in the ministry get married having the idea, like I said, now not just Batman. It's Batman and Robin, the dynamic duo and we are going to set forth to just run and to minister and to do all these things. That's not marriage. That's not marriage.

She is very different from you. She desires things that may not seem as spiritual as you would think. I don't know. Women like curtains, table cloths, flowers, a house, a home. I suppose it is to keep us all from being barbarians. And sometimes you may look at her and think, "What on...why does...this is just so unspiritual..."

No. She is complementing you. The world does not...an old missionary told me one time in Peru. He said, "Paul, you are zealous. You are dedicated. You live like a monk. But these Peruvian men do not need to see how a monk lives. They need to see how a man lives before God and how a man loves a woman and how a man loves his children and how a man cares for needs and grants desires and wants that he can't even understand."

The other day in a conference with interns I was asked to explain the passage about anyone who leaves father and mother and brothers and sisters and farms...what it meant that they would receive 100 fold even in this life and in the next and persecution. "What does that mean, brother Paul?"

And I said, "Well, I feel like I am a living representation of that passage."

Throughout my life in serving the Lord he has given me so many tiny good things that had absolutely nothing to do with the spiritual. He met desires of my heart that most people would have looked over. He cares not just about missions, not just about living radically for Jesus, not just about all these things. He cares about her.

The story. My wife and I came out of the mission field. This is right after...it was about the first or second time home as a married couple. And before we left my wife said, "When we get to the States could I get some of those country crafts?"

I didn't know what she was talking about. She said they are ducks and cows and little things. And I said, "Well, sure. I mean, you know, how much can that cost?"

So we went to Gatlinburg and I realized you could buy a really nice hog for what it cost to buy some of that stuff.

And so she walked in the store and she walked out. She didn't say anything. She didn't complain. She didn't frown, just walked out, kind of laughed.

Well, the next week in western Tennessee I was asked to preach and the pastor had kind of a spare room, he and his wife, and it was kind of filled with boxes, kind of like a warehouse or something. I don't know. She said that they had just remodeled the parsonage and she said...also, two big boxes sitting there and she said [?] there is a bunch of stuff in there I just don't want anymore and if you would like to have them you can.

My wife sat there very sophisticated on the edge of the bed until that door closed and we were left alone in that room and she ripped that box apart like a wildcat. And she started crying.

And I thought, "What's in the box?"

Both huge boxes were filled with country crafts.

Now, young man, let me tell you something. The only thing you might care about is missions, suffering for Jesus and planting churches. But the God you serve, he walks so far behind you because sometimes he is just not quite as spiritual as you are. He cares about giving country crafts and curtains to your wife. And I would really heartily recommend—a man who has been beaten by God's staff quite frequently I have—I would very, very recommend that you learn quickly to care about what God cares about because it doesn't matter at the end of your life that somebody writes a biography about you if God's testimony about you, if God's testimony about you is not a happy one.

Let's pray.

*Father, I come before you, Lord, and I ask you to use this, to use this, Lord. Oh, God, it is so...you are so big and smart and wise and you know all things. Honor yourself by sustaining this couple with your own right hand. Change them. Use them. Most of all, Lord, make them like yourself. May they prosper with your prospering. For how can they go out and how will they be different unless the Lord of glory goes with them? In Jesus' name. Amen.*

God bless you.