

BIBLICAL MARRIAGE SESSION 1: *THE PRIORITY OF UNITY*

Introduction

A. Overview.

B. Hope for those tempted with hopelessness. For those who are struggling in marriage, you can take great hope.

1. God's Word is sufficient to address all of our problems (Rom. 15:4; 2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

2. God's grace is sufficient for all our needs (Phil. 4:19; 2 Cor. 12:9). The believer's sin is solvable (Rom. 5:20). God's Spirit can produce growth and change.

C. This class is for you and not just for your spouse. Profiting from this class is dependent upon being a doer of the word and not a hearer only (Jas. 1:22-25; Mt. 7:24-27). It is easy to listen, nod, and go on without change. Strike while the iron is hot. Sit down and prayerfully go through these outlines with your spouse during the week.

I. The Foundation of Biblical Marriage

A. Marriage is for the magnifying of God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31; Eph. 5:31-32). It sets before the world a model of Christ and the church, which displays the grace of God and defines marriage by the self-denying work of the cross. Many themes, such as sin, grace, forgiveness, God's wrath, unity, and love are central to understanding biblical marriage.

B. Marriage is a temporary calling (Mt. 22:30; Mk. 12:25). It is one way to serve Christ and exalt his praise, but it is not guaranteed in this life, whether due to sickness, death, or celibacy (1 Cor. 7). As with all God's gifts, we must always hold it loosely. Christ in the gospel of grace is our greatest gift (2 Cor. 9:15).

C. Marriage is a wonderful gift (Heb. 13:4; 1 Tim. 4:3; Prov. 5:18, 19).

D. Marriage must not become a self-serving idol.

1. Love for Christ must surpass love for any spouse (Lk. 14:26; 18:29-30; 1 Cor. 7:29). You love your spouse best by loving Christ most.

2. Whenever your spouse replaces Jesus, you forsake the fountain of living waters in exchange for a broken cistern (Jer. 2:13).

3. This is a source of marital strife. When you put your spouse in the place of Christ and expect them to supply what only the Lord can supply, then you will be hyper-sensitive to fluctuations of their love and become easily provoked when your spouse does not meet your expectations. If your endless supply of satisfying waters flows from Christ, then you will rejoice when Christ uses your spouse to express His love to you – without putting your spouse in Christ's place. When your spouse hurts or disappoints you, and Christ is the object of your joy, then your source of happiness remains uninterrupted.

E. The condition of your marriage to Christ will directly influence the outworking of your marriage to your spouse.

1. If your relationship with Christ is not strong, your marriage will not be strong. It is a beautiful, Christ-magnifying display when both spouses are living faithful to their Lord.
2. Even if your spouse is unwilling to pursue Christ to the same degree as yourself, you can live an abundantly blessed life (full of love, joy, and peace) and bring glory to God, if your marriage to Christ is preeminent.

II. God's Design for Marriage.

- A. Primary: Companionship (Gen. 2:18, 24; Prov. 2:17; Mal. 2:14).
- B. Secondary
 1. Procreation (Gen. 2:27-28).
 2. Propagation of covenant seed in the Church (Mal. 2:15; Ps. 127:3-5).
 3. Preventing lust and fornication (1 Cor. 7:2, 9).
- C. "Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife; for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the church with an holy seed; and for prevention of uncleanness." (*Westminster Confession* 24.2)

III. The *First Priority* of Marriage: Unity, Oneness, Togetherness.

- A. This is true of the supreme model of marriage – Christ and His bride, the Church (Eph. 5:30-32).
- B. It is specifically prescribed in Scripture (1 Pet. 3:7; Mal. 2:15-16; Eph. 5:22-33)
- C. It is illustrated physically in the consummating act of marriage (Gen. 2:24-25; Matt. 19:5-6).

IV. Cultivating Unity.

- A. Unity → Trust → Openness.
 1. Wholehearted *trust* is the foundation of unity in every relationship
 - a. the believer's relationship with Christ – trust (i.e., faith) in Him.
 - b. common Christian friendships (e.g., David and Jonathan in 1 Sam. 18:1-4/19:1ff).
 - c. in marriage itself (Prov. 31:11).
 2. Trust is guarded in marriage by *openness* and *honesty*.
- B. Loving your spouse is required of both husbands (Eph. 5:25, 28, 33; Col. 3:19) and wives (Tit. 2:4).
 1. Love does not assume evil or impute motives (1 Cor. 13:5, 7). If you assume anything, assume the best. Otherwise, ask. Countless problems could be avoided by simply recognizing that you did not know what your spouse was thinking or feeling (!), despite your persuasion to the contrary.
 2. Love is not something you fall into. Love is a commitment to give one's life for another. Why are some people googy-eyed about the prospects of marriage? Is it so that they will be cherished, respected, and have the exclusive affection and attention of someone, or is it to give up their life in the service of someone else? Do we choose a spouse on the

basis of who makes us feel good about ourselves or on the basis of godliness and a like-minded pursuit of God's glory together?

C. Lust is consumed with *getting*. Love is a commitment to *giving*, sometimes irrespective of feelings or emotions. Lust says, "I want for myself." Love says, "I will sacrifice for my spouse." To mortify lust we must dethrone self. We are to find our joy in bringing joy to our spouse.

1. Notice the relationship of love and giving in Scripture (e.g., Eph. 5:2, 25; Gal. 2:20; Jn. 3:16). Make it a habit to be constantly looking to "give" of yourself to one another (time, listening, words, gifts, physically, emotion, thought, serving, etc.).

2. Love does not seek one's own (1 Cor. 13:5). We should not love in order to be loved back. Imagine the marriage where each spouse is devoted 100% to doing everything in their power to bring joy to the other and 0% to watching out for themselves. That is the kind of self-denial to which God is calling you (Phil. 2:20-21). If both have this as a goal, it is heaven on earth.

3. It is also a majestic display of the glory of Christ and his gospel. Christ withheld nothing. He gave all for his Bride (Phil. 2:4ff). The Church is called upon to withhold nothing. We are to give all for our Heavenly Husband (2 Cor. 5:15; Rom. 14:8).

D. If the essence of love is "giving" to others, then we need to learn how to express love effectively. In other words, it is essential that you know how others like to receive love – not how you enjoy expressing it most yourself.

1. This is another form of self-denial and finding your joy by producing joy in the object of your love.

2. This is also an aspect of "knowing" your spouse.

3. Love can be expressed in *thousands* of ways, not all of which are equally meaningful to everyone. For example it can include:

a. Serving, helping, doing projects/tasks, etc.

b. Physical contact, snuggles, holding hands, etc.

c. Giving cards, gifts, surprises, notes, etc.

d. Verbal expression of appreciation, admiration, etc.

e. Spending time together, going places, just sitting, etc.

f. Loyalty and faithfulness.

g. Many others.

V. Maintaining Unity.

A. Offenses will come whenever any two sinners are involved (Jas. 3:2; 4:1).

1. Two major threats to unity and the pursuit of love are selfishness (me first) and pride (me best).

2. The root problem in taking offense often stems from misplacing our ultimate source of joy. (See section I above.)

3. The motivation for biblically resolving conflicts cannot be self-serving (e.g., desire for personal peace, to get something we want, etc.). We must do what is right for the right reasons, namely, seeking God's glory and the good of our spouse.

B. Biblical Conflict Resolution.

1. Absolutely every single “spat”, fight, disagreement, etc. must be biblically resolved to maintain oneness (Eph. 4:26-27). Sweeping a matter under the rug is never permitted. It is these kind of unresolved, back-logged conflicts that build up over time and destroy marriages.
2. There has to be a commitment to:
 - a. tell your spouse what they have done before and during a fight that was sinful and hurtful to you (Matt. 18:15)
 - b. admit to your spouse your own offense and sin – even before they tell you, if possible (Matt. 5:23-24; Jas. 5:16).
 - c. humility (1 Pet. 5:5-6; Jas. 4:6); self-denial (Lk. 9:23-24; Eph. 5:33) and a greater commitment to a godly marriage than to your “rights” and feelings.
3. It must always end with not only confession but granting biblical *forgiveness* to one another (1 Cor. 13:5; 1 Pet. 4:8). That means promising to bury the issue and to not bring up the forgiven sin to others, your spouse or even to rehearse the offense in your own head.
 - a. We are to forgive in the way God forgives (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13)
 - b. God forgives by “forgetting” (Isa. 43:25; 44:22; 38:17; Ps. 103:12; 51:9; etc.).

C. Overview of Dealing with a Sinful Offense

1. The recipient of the offense: being sinned against.
 - a. Process to pursue: Mt. 18:15-20.
 - b. Attitude in which to pursue it: Gal. 6:1.
2. The Perpetrator of the offense: sinning against.
 - a. Process to pursue: Mt. 5:23-24.
 - b. Attitude in which to pursue it: 1 Pet. 5:5.

(Matt. 18:15-20) →→→→→→→→ X ↔ ↔ X ←←←←←←←← (Matt. 5:23-24)

D. Patterns of Reconciliation.

1. If you can overlook an offense in love, do so (1 Pet. 4:8; Prov. 10:12). The more you love your spouse, the more easily you will be able to bear patiently with him/her.
2. If the offense is of such a nature that you cannot overlook it, then gently confront your spouse with his/her sin (Mt. 18:15ff).
3. The person being confronted should humbly receive the admonition, and if it is true, repent of it and be reconciled to their spouse.

VI. Serving Christ in Unity as “Co-heirs.” (1 Pet. 3:7)

A. The husband must *know* and *understand* his wife (1 Pet. 3:7).

1. A wise husband will learn to know his wife well enough to utilize her fully as a help-meet – counsel, insight and gifts/abilities (Prov. 18:22).
2. This entails knowing what it means for her to be a “weaker vessel” and caring for her accordingly (1 Pet. 3:7). It means understanding her physical, emotional and spiritual limitations and sensibilities.

3. A godly husband will be devoted to giving honor to her (1 Pet. 3:7; Prov. 31:28). This involves supporting, encouraging, defending and praising her in front of others and privately.
 4. He must cherish her by not being rude – an attribute of love (1 Cor. 13:5).
 5. It is the husband's job to "cheer up" his wife (Deut. 24:5). Concentrate on being sensitive to her many needs.
- B. A wife must *respect* and *honor* her husband (Eph. 5:22, 33).
1. A wise "help-meet" will strengthen, defend and assist her husband in his areas of weakness (Abigail: 1 Sam. 25:3ff; an imperfect but good example). Prudence will crown her decision-making (Prov. 19:14).
 2. She will know and fulfill his wishes when able (1 Pet. 3:1-6; Tit. 2:5).
 3. A virtuous wife is industrious and productive for her husband (Prov. 31).
 4. She will honor him by going to him for spiritual instruction, counsel and help (1 Cor. 14: 35).
 5. A godly woman will honor her husband by assisting him in lovingly raising their children in the ways of the Lord (Prov. 6:20-21; Col. 3:21; Eph. 6:4). She will be able to extend her family's ministry to teaching other ladies to do the same (Titus 2:3-5).
- C. Harmony: What are our complementary strengths and weaknesses?
1. Spiritually (sins/graces/gifts, etc.).
 2. Emotionally (levels/frequency of various emotions).
 3. Physically (health/strength/energy/activity).
 4. Interests (academic/recreational/hobby, etc.).
 5. Gifts/Abilities.
 6. Personality bent (temperament, task vs. people oriented, etc.).

VII. The Bond of Unity: Vows

- A. Marriage is a covenant relationship.
1. The Bible uses the terminology "your wife by covenant" (Mal. 3:14).
 2. It is sinful for a believer to be unequally yoked to an unbeliever (2 Cor. 6:14).
 - a. Being unequally yoked is a biblical picture of being bound or tied to another by covenant.
 - b. The description of marriage in the beginning was "cleaving" and becoming one flesh (Gen. 2:24).
 3. God is ultimately joining the two in marriage together (Mt. 19:6).
- B. The ones involved in the taking of vows.
1. Your marriage vow is first and foremost to God Himself (Deut. 23:21).
 2. Your vow is secondly a pledge to one another (Mal. 2:14).
 3. Those attending are responsible witnesses to your vows, who by their attendance are committing themselves to hold you to your promise (Josh. 24:22).
- C. The Seriousness of taking vows.
1. Do not take them quickly or hastily (Eccl. 5:2).

2. Do not take them thoughtlessly (Eccl. 5:2).
3. Once a lawful vow is taken there is no return – no matter how much you regret it (Ps. 76:11; Eccl. 5:4, 6; Ps. 15:4b).
4. It is better not to vow, then to vow and not pay it (Eccl. 5:5).

Conclusion

- A. Please go over the outline and look up the passages of Scripture with your spouse. Discuss particular instances in your relationship where these principles should have been applied and other instances in which they were successfully implemented.
- B. Identify the specific areas which need to be changed. Formulate a concrete plan of how you are going to apply these biblical principles to the specifics of your situation. For example, if there is a back log of conflicts which have not been biblically resolved, start by addressing those.
- C. Water all of your study and discussions with much prayer together. “Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it . . .” (Ps. 127:1).

BIBLICAL MARRIAGE
Greenville Presbyterian Church