

Marriage God's Showcase of Covenant Keeping Grace

by John Piper

Marriage is a showcase of God's covenant-keeping grace, displaying the magnificent meaning of Christ and the church.

Duration: 48:57

Scripture: Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:6, Mark 10:6-9, Romans 3:23-24, Ephesians 5:31-32, Colossians 2:13-14, Colossians 3:12-14

Topics: "Covenant Theology", "Marriage And Grace"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of marriage as a display of God's covenant-keeping grace, highlighting the need for forgiveness, endurance, and vertical dependence on God's grace to strengthen relationships. It explores the significance of understanding the wrath of God, the forgiveness and justification found in Christ, and the vertical experience of grace being extended horizontally in marriage. The focus is on living out the gospel in marriage, showcasing Christ and the church through forgiveness, forbearance, and faithfulness amidst challenges.

Transcript

Father, I don't feel adequate or sufficient in these weeks to put myself forward as a model husband or father, and so I feel very, very vulnerably dependent upon your Word. And I ask that you would help me to be faithful to it and not to color it with any of my deficiencies either personally or concerning marriage. I pray that you would speak out of your Word clearly and that you would speak in power.

O God, grant that the marriages that exist and the marriages that are to be among the people in our church would be made strong and clean and humble and Christ-exalting and God-centered and Bible-saturated and gospel-rooted for the sake of the nations. I pray that every couple would dream of how their lives might count individually and together for the advancement of the gospel and the spreading of a passion for your supremacy in all things, for the joy of all peoples. So God, grant that these messages would have an effect in more ways than we can imagine.

Would you do it, Lord? Take these five loaves and two fish, as it were, and feed and strengthen and empower for a ministry in ways that I've not yet thought to ask. Guard us from Satan and sin. In Jesus' name, Amen.

So what we've seen now in the last two weeks is that the most foundational thing we can say about marriage is that it's the doing of God and the most ultimate thing we can say about marriage is that it's the display of God. Those two points were made by Moses in Genesis 2 and they are made even more clearly by Jesus and by Paul. Jesus more clearly than anybody else makes the point that marriage is the doing of God and Paul more clearly than anybody else makes the point that marriage is the display of God.

Let me read the key verses just by way of summary. Concerning Jesus and marriage being the doing of God, here Mark 10, 6 to 9. From the beginning of creation, and then he quotes Genesis 1, 27, God made them male and female. And then he quotes Genesis 2, 24, therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.

So, he says, they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate. What therefore God has joined together.

Marriage is not the work of a preacher, it's not the work of a justice of the peace, it's not primarily the work of a husband or a wife, it is primarily and most fundamentally the doing of God. What God has joined together, let no man separate. Now, a word from Paul concerning the other half that we've been focusing on, namely that marriage most ultimately is the display of God.

You remember in Ephesians 5, 31 and 32, Paul quotes Genesis 2, 24 just like Jesus does, then he draws out of it this, therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh, and then he says, this mystery is profound and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. In other words, the covenant involved in leaving your mother and father, cleaving now in a new covenant relationship with your spouse and forming one new reality, one flesh, that covenanting creation of a marriage means Christ and the church. It's the display of Christ's covenant forming and keeping.

That's what marriage most ultimately is. So before Noel got on the plane to go to Little Rock yesterday and come back tonight at 830, I said, anything you want me to say in this sermon? And she said, I wrote it down, you cannot say often enough that marriage is a model of Christ and the church. Why? Why? I think she's right.

It is of paramount importance to say it over and over and over again. Marriage is about the display of Christ and the church. You can't say that too often.

There are three reasons why you cannot say it too often and I'm building on these with these messages. Number one, saying this, believing it, acting on it, lifts marriage from the sordid sitcom images of the world and gives it the magnificent meaning God meant it to have. Marriage in this culture is so debased that people can hardly conceive of what I'm talking about.

So to say it over and over again just might awaken our own hearts and others that it is not what it is portrayed to be in the culture. It is magnificently significant. Namely, it is about something ultimate, the display of the Creator of the universe through whom all things were made and His covenant making and keeping with His bride, the church, who is imperfect and thus had to be bought with His blood.

That's the first reason she's right. You cannot say too often marriage is about the display of Christ and the church. Here's the second reason why I think she's right.

This saying gives marriage a solid basis in grace since Christ, who it's displaying, since Christ obtained and sustains His covenant relationship with His bride, the church, by grace alone. So if we're going to

display Christ and the church and He formed the relationship, sustains the relationship by grace alone, then grace has to permeate and uphold our relationships. So saying this doesn't just give us a duty, it gives us a foundation, namely, on grace.

Marriage survives and thrives by grace. Thirdly, saying over and over again that marriage is a display of Christ and the church, shows that the husband's headship and the wife's submission are crucial and crucified. That is, headship and submission, because Christ is the head of the church and the church submits to Him, headship and submission are woven into the fabric of the meaning of marriage.

And they are crucified, meaning they derive their meaning, headship and submission, derive their flavor from the fact that Christ exerted His headship by dying for His wife, not lording it over her as a slave master. The whole drift of the New Testament is, I rescue you from slavery into family. I don't create oppressive slave relationships.

Therefore, saying over and over again marriage is about Christ and the church doesn't eliminate headship, it creates headship, but it crucifies headship and submission so that they draw down their way of doing it from a crucified Savior who loved us and gave Himself for us. Now, I'm way ahead of myself. We're out three weeks or so when we're talking about headship.

We're not going there tonight. Where we're landing is on reason number two. You want to think about it.

The first two messages were driven by reason number one, lifting marriage up out of the sitcom junk so that it has a magnificent meaning, a magnificent goal. I know that we don't feel that way usually. I mean, just making meals and making a living and sweeping the floor and fixing the broken faucet.

How can this be what you say it is? Dream a dream. Ask for a miracle to happen. We must not settle for the world's vision of the humdrum meaning of marriage when the Bible holds up for us something so magnificent as to say, this mystery is profound.

I take it to mean Christ and the church. Don't sweep that under the rug. Don't say it can't be lived, it can't have meaning, it can't really be fleshed out.

Don't give up on that. So the first two messages were designed to try to say that. Now, reason number two for why Noel was right, you can't say this too often, is that it gives marriage a basis in grace.

That's where we are in this service. Marriage, I'm going to argue, is God's showcase of covenant-keeping grace. God's showcase of covenant-keeping grace.

So that's my main point. Since Christ's new covenant with His church was created and sustained by grace, marriage lives by grace and thus displays grace. We showcase grace by resting in it individually, resting in it, and then bending it out horizontally.

It's coming down vertically from Christ to us, bought by His blood. We're receiving it, resting in it, satisfying our souls by it, not getting our satisfaction from our wives or husbands. Then we are bending it outwards so that it flows through us to them in a horizontal experience of grace.

In other words, in marriage you live hour by hour in glad dependence on God's forgiveness. God's justification and the promise of future grace. Future five minutes out, future five years out, future five thousand years out.

And living hour by hour in glad dependence on God's forgiveness, God's justification, God's promise of future grace, we bend it outward toward our spouse, hour by hour, as an extension of God's forgiveness and God's justification and God's promised grace. That's today's point. Now, I am aware that all Christians, single, married, are called to do that.

I know that. Jesus said very clearly, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds, your horizontal deeds, and give glory to you, Father, in heaven. This is not just marriage.

I'm aware of that. All of life is meant to be lived by God's children to showcase God's glory and the glory of His grace in particular, married or single. However, marriage is designed, like many other things in the world, as a unique display of God's covenant grace.

It's unlike all other human relationships. It's bound by covenant. It's as close as a relationship can be.

There isn't anything closer. And it's for a lifetime. And there are unique roles of headship and submission in the dynamic of its choreography, which is not my point now.

That will come later. Today, I'm just considering husband and wife as Christians, living by grace, bending it out horizontally in the unique challenges and the unique possibilities of this relationship that's unlike all others. So don't hear me saying it's the only place this happens on the planet.

It's not. It's just uniquely demanding here. Man and a woman must learn to apply grace received to each other before they will ever get headship and submission right.

This is why the order is going like this. We'll go there later. This you have to get or that you will destroy.

And it will destroy you. We as individuals before God live on His blood-bought grace and the mediation of His fellowship and the promise of His everlasting blessing. It satisfies our soul.

If she dies, I stand. If she lives, I stand. If she leaves, I stand.

I have a Savior. I have a treasure. I am whole.

That's where we have to go first or we will use each other. Let's put it in last week's terms. Naked and not ashamed.

Genesis 2.25. When a husband and a wife experience vertically the glorious, forgiving, justifying, grace-promising blessing of God and then bend it outwardly in a kind of horizontal forgiveness, horizontal justification, and horizontal grace extension, it is possible for two people who have many habits of which they should be ashamed to be naked and not ashamed. This is why the gospel is so crucial. There's not a perfect spouse on the planet.

Every single one of us does things every day or thinks things every day or feels things every day of which we should be ashamed. And it is possible that very night to be naked and not ashamed without being a hypocrite. That's what this sermon is about.

So, here we go. We're in Colossians. All that's introduction.

Colossians. Let's begin with the wrath of God. Chapter 3, verse 6. On account of these, the wrath of God is coming.

The wrath of God is coming. The wrath of God is coming on this world and on people. To which I can imagine someone saying, the last thing I want to hear about in my troubled marriage is the wrath of God.

You missed it. That's not what I mean. I've got enough problems as it is.

Which is like a frustrated fisherman on the western coast of Indonesia on December 26th, early in the morning, 2004, saying, the last thing I want to hear about in my troubled fishing business is it's enough. Get it? You better want to hear about this. You think you don't know to hear about this? Don't want or need to hear about this? Here's the main reason why you need to hear about the wrath of God for your marriage.

If you don't hear about the wrath of God, believe it, feel it, and fear it, you will drag the gospel down to small humdrum relational improvement stuff it was never intended to be. The gospel is magnificent. It is global.

It is universal. It is historic. It is eternal.

It has to do with big things like it stops tsunamis. Get in their tracks. You never ever dreamed of a tsunami like the wrath of God.

Infinite, omnipotent anger you don't want to tangle with on the judgment day. And God doesn't want you to tangle with it either. Which is why He put forward His Son of the fullness of time, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law that we might be adopted, forgiven, justified, and an everlasting joyful place with Him.

That's why you need to know about the wrath of God. It will lift marriage up into the large hearted issues that matter. Remember, the biggest issues in your life are eternal issues.

Not to feel the negative issues that need to be solved is to take the so-called positive and drag it down to things it was never intended to do and it malfunctions when you do that. You wonder, why isn't the gospel helping me more? Because you've transformed the gospel into a self-help routine. It isn't.

It's a rescue operation from the wrath of God and more. When you have really tasted what it is like to see and to feel the infinitely horrible wrath of God, you know one of the practical effects it has? Your wrath towards her looks really overcomable if that wrath got overcome. Anger is the biggest issue in marriage.

Sexual infidelity kills a lot of marriages. Anger kills way more. Seething, long-term disappointment and frustration that explodes irrationally.

You know, where in the world did that come from? It came from ten years of frustration. That's where it came from? You know the wrath of God and you didn't deserve it. Ten thousand fold you didn't deserve it.

You think she doesn't deserve it? He doesn't deserve it? Do you? You see the dynamic here? You see the deep change that can be wrought in a soul when the gospel doesn't just... Here it just goes... And governs you. It rules you. It changes you.

So we start with the wrath. Now let's go to chapter 2 verse 13 and 14 and watch it be removed. Colossians 2 verse 13 and 14.

We are in the vertical dimension here. We're in every wife and husband experiencing their personal crisis with God. I'm a sinner.

He's angry with me. His wrath is coming upon me. What can I do? That's a ten thousand times bigger issue than the strife in this marriage.

So here's what God did. Colossians 2 verse 13 and 14. And you who were dead in your trespasses in the uncircumcision of your flesh.

God made alive together with Christ. How did he do that? On what basis? What objective basis could he do that for us rebels? Here's how. Having forgiven us all our trespasses.

Think of it. That's a big word. All the ones past.

All the ones you'll do tonight. All the ones tomorrow until you die and are perfected. Having forgiven us all our trespasses.

How? By canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. The law says you're a sinner. Cursed is everyone who does not abide in the law to do all of its commands.

Nobody has done that. We're all under a curse. That record stands against us.

And he cancelled it. Start to breathe, dead heart. My dead heart now is breathing.

Start to breathe, dead heart. Record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. Now here it is.

This he set aside nailing it to the cross. Would that God would bring it for the sake of you and everything else. When did it happen? When did that happen? It happened 2,000 years ago.

It didn't happen when you got saved. It happened 2,000 years ago. It happened before you.

It happened outside of you. It happened on behalf of you. It was totally objective, not subjective.

Your salvation, the forgiveness of your sins was purchased totally independent of your existence. You didn't exist before 100 years ago. This happened 2,000 years ago.

Nailing it to the cross. Your sins. This isn't something you do.

This isn't something you earn. This is something you receive. And there's only one receiving word.

It's called faith. You mean, Father God, you'll give that to me? You give this verse to me if I would receive it? That's why I did it. I didn't do it for nothing.

You will have it. You will rest in it. You will cherish it.

I'll give it to you. I hope that you see the most wonderful and astonishing thing here. God took the record of your husband's sins and wife's sins and premarital sins that made you a debtor to wrath.

You know, don't you, that sins are not primarily offenses against people. Sins are primarily offenses against God. Which is why wrath is an issue.

So God took those. He took the record. All those are written down.

God's still writing them all down. He writes them all down. So that he can glorify his son's death.

Because he takes them, this piece of paper, holds it as many times as he has to, and puts it in the palm of his son's hand and drives a spike through it and him. That's what he did for you. If you say, I'm not forgiven, you're saying that hand is not worth it.

That spike didn't do its job. God blew it at Calvary. He didn't blow it.

You can reject it, but he didn't blow it. What a picture. Just a Bible picture.

I mean, if I made this picture up, you might say, well, nice picture, but the Bible made this picture up. God spoke to us to say, when you see my son's hands stretched out and nails in his hands, remember, there's a big record, a record of your sins. And I'm canceling them and nailing them to my son's hands, so that inasmuch as my son is infinitely valuable, your sins are covered and gone.

Who sins there? The husband sins. Who sins there? The wife's sins. My sins and Noel's sins.

Let's be real concrete here now. Make this work. My sins and her sins are nailed through Jesus' flesh.

Whose hands? Jesus' hands. There's a name for this. It's called substitution.

If you want to get really fancy, it's called penal substitution. He bore my penalty as my substitute, my medium. And if we reach back into Romans and draw out all of our understanding of justification, we can say more.

Because justification goes beyond forgiveness. Not only are we forgiven, like this verse 13 and 14 says in Colossians 2, but justification is the act by which God declares us righteous. God requires two things of us as sinners.

One is that we be punished. And the other is that we be perfect. I cannot provide for my own punishment.

I cannot provide my own righteousness, my own perfection. God knows that. And therefore, He puts forth His Son to do two things.

To bear my punishment and perform my righteousness perfectly. And by faith, this husband and this wife look away from ourselves and from each other and receive not only the slate being wiped clean, but a righteousness being counted as ours, which is His and is perfect. Colossians chapter 3, verses 12 and 13, now describes how these two people, a husband and a wife, having come into the glorious experience of being counted righteous and forgiven for all their sins, so that now the promise of future grace is flowing uninhibited, those two people begin to bend that vertical experience out to each other.

Now that's described in chapter 3, verses 12 and 13. Put on then as God's chosen ones, holy, loved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bearing with or forbearing or enduring. I'm going to preach about that next week.

Bearing with one another if one has a complaint against one another, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Where are we going to go next week? I'm not done, I'm just going to point out something here. Isn't it amazing that in verse 13 it says, bear with, endure, forbear one another, which implies this problem never goes away.

And the next says, forgiving one another. Now when you forgive and make up, lots of things go away. But guess what? Lots of things don't go away.

Forbearance and forgiveness, next week. The main thing to see here is, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. So you also must forbear as the Lord bears with you.

Right now, this very moment, Jesus is forbearing with you, right? Anybody want to stand up and say, I'm perfect tonight. I haven't had a bad thought since I came in this room. I am 100% totally sold out to Jesus and He really is excited about me, the way I am.

No candidates. I don't want you to make a fool of yourself. And He's loving you.

He's sustaining you. He's giving you life. He's got plans for you that exceed anything you ever dreamed tonight, today.

Listen to this. Christ expects things of you that exceed what you achieve infinitely far. Where you are in what you should be and where Christ calls you to be are separated by an infinite chasm.

And the distance between what you want your spouse to be and where she is, by comparison, is neglected. But you won't ever feel that. You'll never stand amazed at that until the gap, the magnificence of Christ and His infinite worthiness of a life I do not live, unless you feel that.

So many of the keys of marriage are in getting our hearts up into the global, great, universal, eternal realities of Christ so that what we deal with here gets into its proper perspective. Now, what I've said so far is true whether you're married to a believer or an unbeliever. Meaning, my vertical experience of forgiveness and justification and grace should be bent out horizontally to my spouse, believer or unbeliever.

Make the measure of your grace, that is the grace you experience, make the measure of the grace you experience from God, the measure of the grace that you offer to your spouse, believer or unbeliever. If you're married to a believer, it gets really interesting, stunningly. Because not only is my sin nailed to the cross, her sin is nailed to the cross.

Not only has God spoken over me, you in Christ are perfect. God has spoken over her, you in Christ are perfect. Therefore, when I am drawing down the grace of justification for myself, I bend it out towards her and say, you are flawless.

Do you think that's possible for a flawed? If it isn't, I don't understand. It's a miracle, I admit, it doesn't lie with any natural man. To be able to count your spouse righteous, count them when you know they're not.

I'm saying this only works with a believer. There are other dynamics about how you love and sacrifice and die for an unbeliever. This is unique.

When you know by profession of faith, giving her the benefit of the doubt as you ought, for him, they're in Christ, you count them. Now, at this point, and I'm almost done, the question arises, my, my, my, if we would go through this room and ask a question, the number of practical application questions at this point would be thousands. So, what's a preacher to do? What we need is not just preachers.

We need to hear the call that I'm issuing to be rooted in the gospel, and we need deep spiritual wisdom rooted in the gospel from long years of painful and faithful experience. There's no way I could meet every

need by having a little application section of the sermon. We need the Holy Spirit.

We need prayer. We need to meditate on the word for ourselves. We need to read the inside of others.

We need the counsel of wise friends who are seasoned with suffering. We need the church to support us when everything falls apart. So, I have no illusions that what I say here will meet every need that you can think of right now by way of application.

But it might help to close like this. Give you some reasons why I'm focusing where I focus. Reasons why I focus on living by vertical dependence, faith, delight in forgiveness, justification, promises of future grace, and bending them out so that marriage becomes a display of covenant grace as we bend it out horizontally to our spouse.

Why am I focusing there? Well, because both experience and the Bible drive me there. I'm not focusing there because I don't think marriage should be unhappy in all forgiveness and all endurance. That's not the reason for focusing here.

In fact, if you're tracking with me, you're already thinking, okay, if it's to model Christ in the church, don't we sometimes please Christ? Colossians 1.10, pleasing Him. And isn't He a wonderful source of pleasure to us? I mean, it's not all endurance. That's right.

That's right. But I stress forgiveness and forbearance for three reasons, and I'm done. One, because there's going to be conflict based on sin and strangeness in this other person.

And here's the problem. You will not agree on what is sin and what is strangeness. You think this should be repented of.

And he thinks it's not a moral issue. It's just who I am. You'll never agree on that until the day you die.

Now what? That's the first reason. There's going to be conflict. If I don't provide you with means by which to thrive in that moment that makes you want to pull your hair out, then I failed you as a pastor.

There's a second reason I think it's so important. The hard, rugged work of enduring and forgiving is what makes it possible for affections to flourish where they seem to have died. It's a biggie for me, because there's so many couples who feel there's no future here.

It's just no future. I could never love this person again. That's like saying virgins never have babies, red seas never divide, the sun never stops in the sky, two loaves, five loaves and two fish can't feed 5,000.

It's unbelief in the mighty power of God who says, nothing is too hard for me. There's just no evidence that it's going to happen. But if you keep covenant, it will happen.

And the third reason is because God gets glory when two very different and imperfect people forge a life of faithfulness in the furnace of affliction. God gets much glory when two very imperfect people forge a life of faithfulness in the furnace of marital affliction. Those are my three reasons for why I'm focusing where I'm focusing this time.

Next time, we're going to go and talk about something Noel and I have discovered. I'll give you a little catchphrase. I think this sermon is going to come to be known, the one next time, God willing, is going to come to be known as the compost pile sermon.

That little attraction to bring you back. I'd just hate it if you only heard half of the story about marriage. Which is where we are.

I mean, we're not even halfway, but don't go away, please. Till then, husbands and wives, drive into your consciences the huge truths of the gospel. God has forgiven you by canceling the record of debts that stood against you with its legal demands.

This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. Drive that into your consciences until it becomes the largest treasure of your life. And then, again, in fresh ways, to bend it out horizontally to you.

Father in heaven, I just long myself to experience the gospel more deeply, to find my satisfactions most fully and more and more fully in your love for me and your promise to be with me and the future grace that is promised to me so that I can be there for Noelle in ways that would delight her, bless her, and strengthen her and not use her. So God work this in us and work it in all the marriages and future marriages of this church.

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