

Staying Married Is Not About Staying in Love, Part 1

by John Piper

The sermon teaches that the essence of marriage lies in covenant keeping rather than romantic feelings, reflecting God's design and glory.

Duration: 41:24

Scripture: Genesis 2:24, Isaiah 54:10, Matthew 19:4-5, Mark 10:8-9, Luke 22:20, Ephesians 5:31-32

Topics: "Covenant Marriage", "Gods Design"

Description

This sermon delves into the profound reality of marriage as a reflection of God's covenant with His people, emphasizing the divine origin and purpose of marriage. It highlights the gap between the biblical view of marriage and the world's view, pointing to the need for a deeper understanding of marriage as a sacred covenant rooted in God's design. The ultimate purpose of marriage is to display the covenant relationship between Christ and the Church, showcasing God's faithfulness and love. The message stresses the importance of covenant-keeping in marriage and the need for a deeper revelation of God's design for marriage.

Transcript

I want to praise you again, Lord Jesus, for the new covenant that you sealed with your blood in purchasing a bride for yourself. And I pray now that as I attempt to unpack part of this glorious reality called marriage, you would help me. And I pray that you'd help me not just for the sake of Holmes being solid, stable, lasting, happy, but for the sake of the glory of Jesus Christ, who is the pattern for marriage to come.

And not only help me, Lord, but help those who hear, those who are listening and watching, the North Campus and the South Campus. I pray that they would believe, be strengthened, be helped, be given fiber to last in a new day of hope. So draw near now, I pray, and accomplish these and many more things that I can't even think to ask.

In Jesus' name, amen. Between more lengthy sermon series, I am inserting a few subjects that it seems to me are urgent. Marriage is always urgent.

There never was, never has been a generation whose view of marriage is high enough. The chasm between the biblical vision of marriage and the human vision is now and has always been gargantuan.

Some cultures in history respect the importance and permanence of marriage more than others.

Some, like our own, have such a low and casual and take-it-or-leave-it attitude towards marriage as to make the biblical vision almost unintelligible when it's articulated. That was the case in Jesus' day as well. Nothing new, really, about our day in that regard.

When Jesus gave a glimpse of marriage and the disciples saw it and God's will for it, they said, if such is the case of a man with a wife, it is better not to marry. That's how indescribable and unbelievable and unattainable Jesus' vision for marriage is. In other words, Christ's vision of the meaning of marriage was so enormously different from that of His disciples that they could not imagine that it was a good thing.

And such a vision is good news, but not if you don't have ears to hear. So if that was the case then, in that sober, Jewish, stable world in which they lived, how much more will the magnificence of marriage in the mind of God seem unintelligible in a world that we live in, where the main idol is self, and its main doctrine is autonomy, and its central act of worship is being entertained, and its two main shrines are the television and the cinema, and its most sacred genuflection is the uninhibited act of sexual intercourse. Such a culture will find the glory of marriage in the mind of Jesus virtually unintelligible.

Jesus would very likely say to us today, when we had heard and He had finished opening the mystery for us, the same thing He said to His disciples in Matthew 19, 11, Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. Let the one who is able to receive it, receive it. So I start with the assumption that our own sin and selfishness and cultural bondage makes it almost impossible for us today to feel the wonder of God's purpose for marriage between a man and a woman.

I start with the assumption that in this room, in these rooms, we are so wired by selfishness and sin and cultural adaptation that the glory of marriage is scarcely perceivable by our minds or our hearts today. And I only mention all of this because I hope that in this message, and I intend to continue it next week, might be used by God if He were merciful. To change us.

We live in a world that can amazingly conceive and wonder of wonders, defend two men and two women entering a relationship, and then with a wild inconceivability calling it, by the sacred name, marriage. Given the fact that we live in such an inconceivable culture, the time may well be short before we collapse into barbarism, anarchy, and debauchery. I have little hope for American culture and great hope for the Church of Jesus Christ.

The greatness and the glory of marriage is beyond all of our ability to think or feel without divine revelation and without the illumination and the awakening of the Holy Spirit. The world cannot know what marriage is without learning it from God. The natural man does not have the capacities to see or receive or feel the wonder of what God has designed for marriage to be.

And I pray that this marriage might be used by God to help set you free from small, worldly, culturally contaminated, self-centered, Christ-ignoring, God-neglecting, romance-intoxicated, unbiblical views of marriage. So what shall we say on the basis of these verses in Genesis 2? Two things. The most foundational thing that can be said about marriage on the basis of this text, indeed, the most foundational thing that can be said on the basis of the whole Bible about marriage, is that it is God's doing.

And the most ultimate thing that we can say from the Bible about marriage is that it is for God's glory. Those two things are the two points of the message. Most foundationally, marriage is the doing of God.

Most ultimately, marriage is the display of God. That's what marriage is. It is God's doing and God's display of Himself.

That's what marriage is. The world does not know this, and they scoff at it. Which is why it is treated as take it or leave it, and in the news every day is promoted with glee the latest divorce of some famous person onto their second, third, or fourth so-called marriage.

So, point number one. The most foundational thing that can be said about marriage is that it is God's doing. And there are four ways in this text that we see this.

Number one. Marriage is God's doing because it was His design in creation of man as male and female. It was His design in creation of man as male and female.

Now, the most obvious place for that is not in the text, so I'll read it and then we'll come to the text. Genesis 1, verses 27 and 28. God created man in His own image.

In the image of God, He created him, male and female, He created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. So, from the very beginning, the design in the creation of man, male and female, was a union that produces a world filled with God-reflecting radical disciples of God in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New.

That's the design of human being. Now, in our text, it follows from the flow of the thought from verses 18 and following. Verse 18 of Genesis 2. God, not man, decrees that solitude is a bad thing for man.

God Himself then sets out to complete the work of the design of creation revealed back in chapter 1 in creating woman. That is, creating marriage here. It is not good that a man should be alone.

I will make a helper suitable or fit, tailor-made, perfectly designed for him. So don't miss the central point of that verse, namely, God Himself intends to do it and does it. The design of solving solitude is God's idea.

So, He parades all the animals before Adam that He had created in order to show Adam this kind of being is not the idea. This kind of being is not the helper I have in mind. This kind of being is not the completion I have in mind.

I don't care how much you like dogs, they're not the point. Verse 21, So the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon man, and while he slept took one of his ribs, closed up its place with flesh, and the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man He made into a woman. So God made her in order to say this is the point, not the animals.

God had to parade the animals and say they're not of the right essence, they're not of the right nature, they're not of your very nature. They're not like you in the image of God. That had already been stated back in chapter 1, verse 27.

God made them, male and female, in His image. He made them. And now He's saying in order to bring that to pass, He doesn't turn an animal into a woman.

He takes man and makes man woman. He takes of the essence of this man and makes one like Himself only, so gloriously different. This text terminates with words, They, this is the end of verse 24, They shall become one flesh.

And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. In other words, everything in this text is moving towards marriage. One flesh, naked, not ashamed.

That's marriage. That's not general culture. So all that was leading here from verse 18 is terminating on the creation of marriage.

So, point number one, marriage is God's doing in that it is His design in creating us male and female. Number two, marriage is God's doing because He personally took the dignity of being the first father to give away the bride. Verse 22, And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man, He made into a woman.

And brought her to the man. He didn't hide her and say, find her. He took her, perhaps in His arm, I don't know how God did this, He's God.

And He brought her to the man. He had fathered her in the most profound sense. He had fathered this woman.

And now His daughter is being given to a man. And He gives her. Just leave her out there for something to happen.

And so the majesty and beauty of marriage shines off of God assuming the dignity Himself of presenting His daughter that He specially made for this man to her Himself. That's point number two. Point number three, marriage is God's doing not only because God created them with this design and God brought her to Him.

But God spoke the design of marriage into existence. So the emphasis is falling here now, the emphasis is falling here on God speaking the design of marriage more fully than just His action reveals. Verse 24, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh.

Who's talking in verse 24? The writer of Genesis is talking in verse 24. Who's that? Jesus believes it was Moses. Three texts written down here.

What does Jesus believe about Moses' writing of Scripture? Jesus believes that when Moses wrote Scripture, God spoke. Now let me show you that so that I can go back to my point that verse 24 is the voice of God designing marriage. Matthew 19 verses 4 and 5. You can go there or just listen.

Matthew 19 verses 4 and 5 goes like this. Jesus answered, Have you not read that He, God, who created them from the beginning made them male and female and said, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. It could not be clearer.

Jesus said, God said, verse 24. It's one of the strongest arguments for the inspiration of the Bible for me. But all I want you to see now is that when verse 24 dictates the design, leave your mother and father, hold fast to a woman and form a new household and become with her one flesh, that's God's voice opening the design of marriage Himself.

So my third point under this first one is that marriage is God's doing in that He spoke its design into existence. A man shall leave his father and his mother, hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. Now the fourth and last point on this first heading.

God is the doer of marriage because in the becoming of one flesh, a man and a woman are experiencing a union that God Himself performs. And this is the most weighty and perhaps the most crucial of all. Verse 24, God's words of institution of marriage.

God had in making the woman, it says, taken out a rib and He closed up the flesh and then He made this woman and this man one flesh. From flesh to one flesh. Now, to see the magnitude of what's going on here in terms of our marriages today, we have to see the connection between Genesis 2.24 and Mark 10.8 and 9. Mark 10 is the words of Jesus, verses 8 and 9. Jesus quotes Genesis 2.24. For Jesus, this verse was the most fundamental verse about marriage in all of the Bible.

This is Jesus' foundation stone for the beginning of all of His teachings about marriage. Verse 8, Mark 10. The two shall become one flesh.

So, Jesus says, they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man. That's huge.

Do you feel the weight of that? Engaged couples, married. When a couple speaks their vows and consummates their vows with sexual union, it is not man, woman, pastor, parent who's the main actor. God is.

God joins a husband and a wife in one flesh. God does that. God does that.

From which Jesus draws the awesome conclusion, what God has joined, no man may separate. The world does not know this, which is one of the reasons why marriage is treated so casually. Christians often act like they don't know it, which is one of the reasons marriage in the church is not seen as the wonder that it is.

Marriage is God's doing because it is a one flesh union that God himself performs. They shall become one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined in one flesh, let not man separate.

So let me summarize the four arguments for my first head. The glory of marriage begins, just begins to be seen, by taking heed to the biblical truth, the most foundational truth, namely that it is God's doing. God's doing in His design in creation as male and female.

God's doing in His personally giving His daughter to the first man. God's doing in speaking the design of marriage more fully into being in verse 24. And God's doing in Himself performing the union that creates the one flesh on earth and in heaven.

So, a glimpse into the magnificence of marriage from seeing it as God's doing. Marriage is from Him and through Him. Now, we turn to the most ultimate thing you can say about marriage.

It is to Him. It is for His glory. Marriage exists as the doing of God and as the display of God.

There is no other institution like it. Nothing even comes close to this design as a display of God, His love, His Son, His covenant. Nothing comes close.

Genesis 2.24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. So, what kind of relationship is it? What is it? How are these two people held together? Can they walk away from this? Can they go from spouse to spouse? Is this relationship rooted in romance? Is this relationship rooted in sexual desire? Is it rooted in need for companionship? Is it

rooted in cultural convenience? What is this thing called one flesh that God has created? In verse 24, the words, hold fast to his wife, and the words, they shall become one flesh, point to something far deeper and more permanent than occasional adultery or serial marriages. What these words point to is marriage as a sacred covenant, rooted in covenant commitments that stand against every storm as long as we both shall live.

That's only implicit here, but it is explicit in Ephesians 5. And seeing the connection between Genesis 2.24 and Ephesians 5.31 and 32 is the most revealing thing about marriage in the Bible. So I invite you, in fact, to go with me to make the connection in Ephesians 5.31 and 32. This is Paul's letter to the Ephesians in the New Testament.

He quotes Genesis 2.24 and then he says, the most glorious, the most wonderful, the most staggering thing that could possibly be said about marriage. Verse 31, Ephesians 5. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. And then in verse 32, he gives the all-important interpretation of those words.

He says, this mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church. In other words, when God planned man as male and female, moving from family to family into a new one flesh union, He patterned it on Christ, His Son, and His Bride, the Church. It didn't go the other way around.

God didn't create male and female, design marriage, and then think, now, you know, it would be illuminating for the understanding of the Church if I designed my Son and His relationship to His redeemed people after that. It's totally wrong. God had His Son slain before the foundation of the world, as it were, grace flowing through Him into the elect already before there was an Adam and an Eve, and as He designed this amazing humanity, He designed marriage after His Son and His Son's relationship to His Wife, the Church.

I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church. That's the meaning of Genesis 2.24. The most ultimate thing that can be said about marriage is that it exists for God's glory, that it exists to display God, and now we see how marriage is patterned after Christ's covenant relationship to the Church, and therefore the highest meaning and the most ultimate purpose of marriage is to put the covenant relationship between Christ and His Church on display in the world. Is it not tragic how few people know this? The reason all marriages exist, Christian or non-Christian, is to display the Son of God in His dying love for sinners like us, paying a dowry at the cost of His life for a rebellious wife, never leaving her or forsaking her, washing her all their life long with the Word and the blood, bringing her finally perfected to the Lamb's supper.

Nobody knows this, it seems. The magnificence of husband and wife is to say, that's true, that's true, and it's like this. Christ knew that He would have to pay the dowry with His own blood for His redeemed bride.

He called that relationship the New Covenant. Luke 22.20, this cup, holding up the cup that represents His blood at the Last Supper, this cup is poured out for you. It is the New Covenant in My blood.

So as He's purchasing His bride, He's saying, I am establishing a New Covenant, a New Covenant. Remember the fighter verse from last week? That was a description of the New Covenant. I will make with them an everlasting covenant.

I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of Me in their hearts, so that they will not turn away from Me. You know that you are a New Covenant participant if you do not turn away from

your love for the Lord.

The most ultimate thing that can be said about marriage is that it exists for the glory of God. Christ obtained the church by His blood, formed a New Covenant with her, an unbreakable marriage. That's what we display to the world.

Do you not see then how tragic it is when we do not tell the truth about marriage to the world? It's patterned on Christ's covenant, so the highest meaning is the display of that covenant and His covenant love and faithfulness. Hence the title of the message. Staying married is not about staying in love.

It's about covenant keeping. I hope that... I don't expect this message to be a quick fix in this church or in our culture. I have small hopes for sermons.

The reason I stay 27 years in a place is because I hope that the building blocks eventually have an effect. So 26 times 42 maybe over these years. I hope that week in and week out the Word of God changes people.

Sometimes it happens cataclysmically in a life, in a night, in a moment. More often, a little bit here, a little bit there, a little bit here, people wake up three years later, new people, new people, new vision of their marriage, new vision of their work. So I don't have any big expectations for this message in any of these seven services.

I just hope that this seed will land in a 6-year-old heart, 9, 11, 16, 22, 33, 44, 61, 80-year-old heart with a new deep sense. It's about covenant keeping. I'm not a dog in heat.

I'm a covenant keeper. I just hope that fiber will be made a little stronger in our children, a little stronger in teenagers, a little stronger in wives and husbands that we are not blown around by the billboards, the Internet, the movies, the television. We've got roots in reality, in Genesis, in creation.

We don't blow. We stand. All hell breaks loose against this marriage.

We stand. Little by little, there are many wimps in the world, men and women. I'm in the business of putting fiber into the backbone of wimps.

But stand in the face of their desires. Stand in the face of their passions and say, You are not my God. God is my God.

Covenant is my life. God will never leave His wife. There were some separations in the Old Testament.

I can handle that in the church. Can get that bad. He never divorced her.

He wooed her back every time. He kept covenant. Marriage is on display here.

That's the most ultimate meaning of it. God is on display in marriage. Now at this point in my preparation, I had a huge point to make about and they were both naked and were not ashamed.

But I'm done. So we will be back. God willing.

Next week. Because I see in that verse 25 amazing implications. Some of you are going to walk out of these services saying, I need a little more help than that.

I need a little more practical counsel than that. We'll be back. They were both naked.

And they were not ashamed. What's that about? Why did the whole story of creation end on that? I bet you're going to come back. Because we get lured by words like naked.

Which is one of our huge problems. It's in the text. See you next week.

Father in heaven, we're laughing at the end and that's good. It's been heavy and weighty and a serious message. And I just want to lay a foundation this time.

That it's not about staying in love mainly, it's about covenant keeping mainly. So would you elevate the glories of marriage in our church and in this culture and make us good displayers of your doing. And especially of Jesus Christ whose blood is the reason the divorced folks sitting in these services right now can have clean consciences.

If they would. I commend God, all of us in our sin, to your mercy. We have no other hope but the blood of Jesus.

Covering all of our sin, sexual sin, marital sin, and every other kind. This is our only hope. In Jesus name I pray.

Amen. Amen.

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