

Staying Married Is Not About Staying in Love, Part 1

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[Genesis 2:18–25](#)

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." 19 Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." 24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Between our more substantial sermon series I am taking up a few subjects that seem to me to be urgent. Marriage is always urgent. There 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, and has always been, gargantuan. Some cultures in history respect the importance and the permanence of marriage more than others. Some, like our own, have such low, casual, take-it-or-leave-it attitudes toward marriage as to make the biblical vision seem ludicrous to most people.

Jesus' Vision of Marriage

That was the case in Jesus' day as well, and ours is vastly worse. When Jesus gave a glimpse of the magnificent view of marriage that God willed for his people, the disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry" ([Matthew 19:10](#)). In other words, Christ's vision of the meaning of marriage was so enormously different from the disciples, they could not even imagine it to be a good thing. That such a vision could be good news was simply outside their categories.

If that was the case back then with the sober, Jewish world in which they lived, how much more will the magnificence of marriage in the mind of God seem unintelligible to the world 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 he had finished opening the mystery for us, the same thing he said in his day: "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. . . . Let the one who is able to receive this receive it" ([Matthew 19:11-12](#)).

The Biblical Vision of Marriage

So I start with the assumption that our own sin and selfishness and cultural bondage makes it almost impossible to feel the wonder of God's purpose for marriage between a man and a woman. The fact that we

live in a society that can even *conceive of*—let alone *defend*—two men or two women entering a relationship and with wild inconceivability calling it *marriage*, shows that the collapse of our culture into debauchery and barbarism and anarchy is probably not far away.

I mention all this in the hopes that it might possibly wake you up to consider a vision of marriage higher and deeper and stronger and more glorious than anything this culture—or perhaps you yourself—ever imagined. The greatness and glory of marriage is beyond our ability to think or feel without divine revelation and without the illumining and awakening work 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. I pray that this message 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.

Marriage Is the Display of God

The most foundational thing to see from the Bible about marriage is that it is God's doing. And the most ultimate thing to see from the Bible about marriage is that it is for God's glory. Those are the two points I have to make. Most foundationally, marriage is the *doing* of God. Most ultimately, marriage is the *display* of God. Let's allow the Bible to impress these things on us one at a time.

1. Marriage Is God's Doing

First, most foundationally, marriage is God's doing. At least four ways to see this explicitly or implicitly are here in our text.

a) Marriage Was God's Design

Marriage is God's doing because it was his design in the creation of man as male and female. Of course, this was plain earlier in [Genesis 1:27-28](#), “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.’”

But it is also clear here in the flow of thought in [Genesis 2:18-25](#). In verse 18, it is God, not man, who decrees that man's solitude is not good, and it is God himself who sets out to complete one of the central designs of creation, namely, woman and man in marriage. “It is not good that the man should be alone; *I will make him a helper fit for him.*” Don't miss that central and all important statement: God himself will make a being perfectly suited for him—a wife.

Then he parades the animals before him so that he might see that there is no creature that qualifies. This creature must be made uniquely from man so that she will be of his essence as a human created in God's image as [Genesis 1:27](#) said. So we read in verses 21-22, “So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman.” God made her.

This text terminates in verses 24b-25 with the words, “They shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” In other words, it is all moving toward marriage. So the first thing to say about marriage being God's doing is that marriage was his design in creating man male and female.

b) God Gave Away the First Bride

Marriage is God's doing because he personally took the dignity of being the first Father to give away the bride. [Genesis 2:22](#), "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 make Adam seek. He made her; then he brought her. In a profound sense, he had fathered her. And now, though she was his by virtue of creation, he gave her to the man in this absolutely new kind of relationship called *marriage*, unlike every other relationship in the world.

c) God Spoke the Design of Marriage into Existence

Marriage is God's doing because God not only created the woman with this design and brought her to the man like a Father brings his daughter to her husband, but also because God spoke the design of marriage into existence. He did this in 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 is talking in verse 24? The writer of Genesis is talking. And what did Jesus believe about the writer of Genesis? He believed it was Moses ([Luke 24:44](#)) and that Moses was inspired by God so that what Moses said, God said. Listen carefully to [Matthew 19:4-5](#): "[Jesus] answered, 'Have you not read that he [God] who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said [Note: *God* said!], 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?" Jesus said that [Genesis 2:24](#) is the word of *God*. Therefore, marriage is God's doing because he spoke the earliest design of it into existence—"A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

d) God Performs the One-Flesh Union

Which leads us to the fourth way that marriage is God's doing: Becoming one flesh, which is at the heart of what marriage is, is a union that God himself performs.

Verse 24 is God's words of institution for marriage. But just as it was God who took the woman from the flesh of man ([Genesis 2:21](#)), it is God who in each marriage ordains and performs a uniting called *one flesh* that is not in man's power to destroy. This is implicit here in [Genesis 2:24](#), but Jesus makes it explicit in [Mark 10:8-9](#). He quotes [Genesis 2:24](#) then adds a comment that explodes like thunder with the glory of marriage. "'The two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. *What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.*"

When a couple speaks their vows and consummates their vows with sexual union, it is not man or woman or pastor or parent who is the main actor. God is. God joins a husband and a wife into a one-flesh union. *God* does that. *God* does that! The world does not know this. Which is one of the reasons why marriage is treated so casually. And 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 it is. Marriage is God's doing because it is a one-flesh union that God himself performs.

So, in sum, the most foundational thing we can say about marriage is that it is God's doing. It was his doing:

1. because it was his design in creation;
2. because he personally gave away the first bride in marriage;
3. because he spoke the design of marriage into existence: leave parents, cleave to your wife, become one flesh;
4. and because this one-flesh union is established by God himself in each marriage.

A glimpse into the magnificence of marriage comes from seeing in God's word that God himself is the great doer. Marriage is his doing. It is *from* him and *through* him. That is the most *foundational* thing we can say about marriage. And now we will see that it is *to* him.

2. Marriage Is for God's Glory

The most *ultimate* thing to see in the Bible about marriage is that it exists for God's glory. Most foundationally, marriage is the *doing* of God. Most ultimately, marriage is the *display* of God. It is designed by God to display his glory in a way that no other event or institution is.

The way to see this most clearly is to connect [Genesis 2:24](#) with its use in [Ephesians 5:31-32](#). In [Genesis 2:24](#), God says, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." What kind of relationship is this? How are these two people held together? Can they walk away from this relationship? Can they go from spouse to spouse? Is this relationship rooted in romance? Sexual desire? Need for companionship? Cultural convenience? What is this? What holds it together?

The Mystery of Marriage Revealed

The words "*hold fast* to his wife" and the words "they shall *become one flesh*" point to something far deeper and more permanent than serial marriages and occasional adultery. What these words point to is marriage as a sacred covenant rooted in covenant commitments that stand against every storm of "as long as we both shall live." But that is only implicit here. It becomes explicit when the mystery of marriage is more fully revealed in [Ephesians 5:31-32](#).

Paul quotes [Genesis 2:24](#) in verse 31, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." And then he gives it this all-important interpretation in verse 32: "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." In other words, marriage is patterned after Christ's covenant commitment to his church. Christ thought of himself as the bridegroom coming for his bride, the true people of God ([Matthew 9:15](#); [25:1ff](#); [John 3:29](#)). Paul knew his ministry was to gather the bride—the true people of God who would trust Christ—and betroth us to him. He says in [2 Corinthians 11:2](#), "I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ."

Christ knew he would have to pay the dowry of his own blood for his redeemed bride. He called this relationship the *new covenant*—"This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" ([Luke 22:20](#)). This is what Paul is referring to when he says that marriage is a great mystery: "I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." Christ obtained the church by his blood and formed a new covenant with her, an unbreakable "marriage."

The most ultimate thing we can say about marriage is that it exists for God's glory. That is, it exists to display God. 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 of Christ and his church on display. That is why marriage exists. If you are married, that is why you are married.

Christ Will Never Leave His Wife

Staying married, therefore, is not about staying in love. It is about keeping covenant. "Till death do us part," or, "As long as we both shall live" is sacred covenant promise—the same kind Jesus made with his bride when he died for her. Therefore, what makes divorce and remarriage so horrific in God's eyes is not merely that it involves covenant breaking to the spouse, but that it involves misrepresenting Christ and his covenant. Christ will never leave his wife. Ever. There may be times of painful distance and tragic backsliding on our part. But Christ keeps his covenant forever. Marriage is a display of that! That is the most ultimate thing we can say about it.

I have so much more I want to say at this point. So I have decided to stay with this topic next week. Here is where we will go, Lord willing. [Genesis 2:25](#) says, "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." Why does the biblical story of the foundation of marriage end on that note just before the

Fall? The answer will lead us, I think, to some very practical counsel that I pray will help us in our marriages fulfill the great purposes God has for us.

For now, would you pray with me that God will replace in the church and in our land self-exalting, marriage-destroying, unbiblical commitments to cater to our emotional desires with Christ-exalting, marriage-honoring, biblical commitments to keep our covenants?