

A New Covenant:

Biblical Singleness, Marriage, Divorce, and Sexual Purity

Presentation 3: Biblical Marriage

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick

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Two Special Purposes

The divine plan for marriage preceded the entrance of sin and is found in two special purposes:

1. Marriage is designed to illustrate the kingdom of God (Ephesians 5:22-34; Revelation 19:6-9).
2. Marriage is designed to facilitate character development (1 Corinthians 7:16; Ephesians 5:25-27).

This is sobering. Marriage illustrates the kingdom of God. It is a revelation from God to you, the church, and to those who are outside of Christ and His church. We love the Bible because it is a revelation from God. But He gives other revelations. If you are a Christian, and you are married, a central purpose of God for your union is that it provide to others opportunity to see a working model of what God and His kingdom are like.

Beyond this outflowing witness to others, marriage is intended by God to be an aid to us toward character growth. When one marries another, and God joins two in one flesh, that one flesh is not made less but more whole. God gave to Adam a helper comparable to him. Eve was a help, a gift, an asset; they were a matched set. Indeed, the first marriage was an arranged marriage.

In a sense, all marriages where the partners are divinely matched are arranged marriages. Through providence God led you and your partner, ordered matters so that your paths crossed, and let you choose whether to join with each other and with Him in the divine purpose.

If God is in control of providence, and all biblical marriages are “arranged marriages,” these two special purposes make a lot of sense. He plans to use your union to illustrate to you

and to others His kingdom, and, He plans to make providential use of your marriage also to hasten positive character growth in husband, wife, children, in-laws and others.

The converse is also true. If one should seek to separate what God has joined together, he is then operating counter, or anti, to Christ's purposes. Then he is engaged in sabotage of the divine purpose to portray the kingdom, and subverts the positive growth the spouse's character.

Other-serving Versus Self-serving

You may notice in the two special purposes mentioned that there is a lot of "other-serving" going on. Jesus is our example:

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45 ESV). (All texts from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.)

The natural opposite to other-serving is self-serving; these are the two fundamental paradigms. If our marriage is to be an illustration to others of the kingdom of God, then it is inherently other-serving. As Jesus did, so are we to serve as an example to others of God's kingdom.

Likewise, if marriage is designed to facilitate character development, that means that God plans for the husband to especially facilitate his wife's character growth, and the wife to especially facilitate the husband's. This theme, too, is dominated by behavior that is other-serving. Surely there are incalculable incidental benefits to being other-serving, to being used to illustrate God's kingdom and to help one's spouse's character to grow. Marriage at its root is other-serving in nature.

Do all Christians enter into marriage with this theme in mind? or, could it be that some embark on marriage largely for self-serving reasons? Could this be an explanation in part for difficulties encountered? And can it change? It can.

A Study From Genesis Two

There is a reason why presentations on marriage often discuss Genesis two. Let's zero-in on events during the sixth day of creation and see what we can learn.

First, in Genesis 2:18 God sees the man alone. He is the only human being in the universe. God makes a statement: "It is not good that the man should be alone." Some of us see ourselves as extroverts, others as introverts. That's fine. But it remains true that man was created a social being. God made him alone and let him experience aloneness to help him understand his need for companionship. So this is the way it was: no one to argue with, no one to give flowers to, no one to talk to, no one to share your life. Just very perfect ants and rabbits.

Now the next thing, after God announces that it is not good for man to be alone, comes another statement from the Creator. All things were made through Jesus, so we know this is Jesus speaking, and He says, "I will make." The Creator does not leave man alone. Now He is going to arrange a marriage. What would the first wife be like?

God says that He will make for the man one who is "meet" for him. Various translations offer one "fit" for him, "corresponding" to him, a "helper suitable" for him, a "helper comparable" to him, a "fitting helper" for him, and so on. The literal Hebrew says that God will make for the man an *ezer*.

What is an *ezer*? Remember in Hymn #334 ("Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing"). The second line is, "Here I raise my ebenezzer, Hither by Thy help I've come." You'll find this in

1 Samuel 7:12. After sharp battle with the Philistines, the prophet Samuel raises up a stone, a memorial marker, to remind Israel in future that God had helped them. An *eben ezer* is literally, a “stone of helping.” *Ezer* means “help.”

In Genesis 2:18 God said He would make a helper for the man. It is clear from the context that rabbits and raccoons and gibbons and giraffes are not helpers comparable to the man. Each is special in its own way, nevertheless, inferior to the man. God is going to do something different. He is going to match Adam with one corresponding to himself. Today it is the popular understanding that there is so much different about men and women in comparison to each other, that it is as if men are from Mars and women are from Venus. From the Christian perspective, the bottom line, is that men and women are not from Mars and they are not from Venus; they’re from God. And they are ideally matched for each other. The last part of verse 18 says that the helper that God makes He makes “for him.”

Verses 19 and 20 emphasize that any selection from the menagerie of animals is unsuitable for the man. God has Adam looking at and naming these creatures through most of Friday. He makes a lengthy demonstration of this. Not the gorilla, not the cat, and not even the dog, “man’s best friend,” is a suitable helper.

Finally, nap time. God puts Adam to sleep and takes one of his ribs; He takes from the side of the man, not the top or the bottom of his body. From this rib God builds up, creates, a woman (vv. 21, 22). Then He wakes Adam and brings her to the man. In imagining the scene, I am reminded of those occasions when Jesus or Elijah raised one from the dead, and “gave him back” to a mother or father (Luke 7:15; 9:42; 1 Kings 7:24).

At Genesis 2:23, Adam, now awake, sees the woman. The King James Version has him say, “This is now,” but the ESV captures the moment much better. In the English Standard Version, Adam says, “This at last!” This at last is bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh. That is, at last, Adam says, a helper comparable, corresponding to *me*.

Notice that the wife and the husband are of the same flesh. The woman was taken from the man. And then the woman was brought to the man. This is quite the elaborate process, isn't it? God could have just said, “Watch this,” materialized a woman out of nothingness in the sky and then had her float down to the man with a delicious plate of food. But He doesn't do that. He is at pains to show that this man and this woman are bones of each other's bones, flesh of each other's flesh, and that they were made for each other from and to be together one flesh. We skip over this at our own peril.

Next comes the divine admonition. The man shall leave his father and his mother, and cleave, hold fast, to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. In order for a marriage to be healthy, a new family unit must be established; new boundaries set up. Much as us dotting fathers and mothers wish to help out our children and our new in-laws, we need to give them space to establish their own family unit. How many newly minted marriages are harmed by well-intended and yet inappropriate parental bonds? A son leaves father and mother but in part, a daughter leaves father and mother only in part, and long trouble ensues. Parents must grant room to the new family, and new couples need to forge close new ties with each other.

Finally, in verse 24 we see that the man and the woman are to hold fast to one another, and they “become” one flesh? Or they “shall become” one flesh? Marriage is not the end but the

beginning. How mercenary and self-serving if viewed only as a conquest. Rather, it is the beginning of something special. It is Genesis two for that brand new family.

Don't destroy their garden.

This union, God makes clear, has a lifetime standing open and beautiful before it. Genesis 1:26-31 show us that Adam and Eve are given co-dominion over the earth. They are both made in God's image. Their union is granted *barakah*, the first blessing. They are commanded to be fruitful, to multiply, to subdue the earth. And at last God is able to pronounce *tov meod*. He looks at all that He has created and made and pronounces it not only good, but *very good*.

God enjoys a good wedding.

There is more to the story for sure. But we have at least reviewed some high points. After they have sinned, God makes garments for both of them (Genesis 3:20). Both are morally responsible and Jesus will later sacrifice Himself on the cross to redeem them both.

What Our Fellow Believers Say

We are a world church. Let's remind ourselves what fellow believers, led by God, have said concerning marriage.

Marriage is a lifelong commitment of husband and wife to each other and between the couple and God (Mark 10:2-9; Romans 7:2). (*Church Manual*, p. 201).

Marriage is a three way covenant (between husband, wife, and God). It is intended to be a life-long commitment between all three. It is obviously central for children born into that family unit. These are solemn situations, unspeakable privileges, unparalleled responsibilities. These are not optional realities, but automatic ones. If you claim to be a Christian, this is the moral picture

you have signed up for. This covenant with spouse and God includes many benefits. Think of the anxiety you'll avoid knowing that God and your spouse are faithful.

Sexual intimacy within marriage is a sacred gift from God to the human family. It is an integral part of marriage, reserved for marriage only (Genesis 2:24; Proverbs 5:5-20). (*Church Manual*, p. 201).

Sexual intimacy is not a random animal thing; it is a sacred gift. No, the devil did not give us the gift of sexual intimacy; God did. The fulfillment of the capacity for sexual intimacy is reserved for marriage only. Some people think that they have a right to experience sexual pleasure. But we are God's, both by creation and redemption. He owns our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:11-21, esp. vs. 13). There is a difference between a right and a gift. Sexual pleasure is a gift from God who says that the time and place for it is within the confines of biblical marriage.

Marriage, as instituted by God, is a heterosexual relationship (Matthew 19:4, 5). (*Church Manual*, p. 202).

By definition, marriage between two persons of the same gender is not possible. How could two of the same gender fulfill the purposes of heaven that by definition require one person of each gender? A man uniting with a man cannot illustrate the kingdom of God, and the distinct biological and sociological differences between men and women suggest to us the same in the area of character development. If man and woman, not males only, are made in God's image, then God has designed each uniquely to show us what He is like, in a way that is not replicated but complimented by our opposite gender.

God's marriage plan requires His people to transcend the mores of popular culture which are in conflict with the biblical view (*Church Manual*, p. 202).

Popular culture offers us little in the way of other-serving. There are many causes out there: Save the whales, save the birds, save the wolves, save the trees, save the planet. How

about, “Save the humans”? We are made in God’s image. We are to echo His purposes. If He is other-serving, then we are to be other-serving. Popular culture is an intellectually thin stack of cards offering reasons to serve self. That is what is popular. That is one reason why biblical marriage is less common than it used to be. We have allowed popular culture around us to fill the space between our ears with its unchristian philosophy of self-service. We ought to be offering perishing men and women around us a demonstration of something better, but too often we reflect back to them only a pale reproduction of their own practice. They see little of heavenly illustration in us or in our marriages. Our witness is as disposable to them as a plastic shaver.

When Jesus said, ‘Let not man put asunder,’ He established a rule of conduct for the church under the dispensation of grace which must transcend all civil enactments which would go beyond His interpretation of the divine law governing the marriage relation. Here He gives a rule to His followers who should adhere to it whether or not the state or prevailing custom allows larger liberty (*Church Manual*, p. 205).

I love this. “Whether or not the state” allows it. Yes, the state may say that a woman can marry a woman. But God does not say that a woman can marry a woman. It is the same when it comes to other moral boundaries God has set up around marriage. What we believe about the joining and the dissolution of a three-way covenant between husband, wife, and God, “must transcend all civil enactments.” Are you really there? Are you ready to live under a higher authority than the men and women who compose your state legislature? Or than the nine Supremes? Or than the Constitution of the United State? God and His Word transcend all of these.

Jesus restored the creation view of marriage as a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman and between the couple and God (Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9). (*Church Manual*, p. 203).

We look forward to the earth made new. We preach about the two institutions that come to us from a sinless world. The seventh day Sabbath originates on the other side of the Fall, in the Garden of God. And so does marriage. Jesus called God's people to a higher standard, the highest, in fact, that had been seen since Eden. Civil law or prevailing custom may permit a much lower standard, but our neighbor's failed marriage is not our model. The moral sample emanating from Hollywood is not our gauge. We are constantly asking Jesus to indwell us by His Spirit; self-serving is set aside; other-serving becomes our motif. And if we are the end-time people, if we are called to be those who are sealed, who live in the time when we must cease from sin and when Jesus comes, then is it not our charge to live the pre-Fall creation view of marriage Jesus has restored?

Marriage, Christ, and the Church

A text of interest today is Ephesians 5:22-34, actually part of a longer section in which a central feature is the issue of submission (Ephesians 5:18-6:9). This section begins with a call for mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21). What is that, but an emphasis on other-serving rather than self-serving? Our focus here is verses 22-34.

First, verses 22-24 discuss the divine plan for submission of the wife to her husband. In 23 we see that the church is Christ's body. He is its Savior. The head is connected to the body; together they make up one whole. The husband takes the wife into himself and the wife takes the husband into himself. The discussion in this passage does not involve body shapes, but two who unite in other-serving.

Remember what we saw in the previous presentation: "The husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (1 Corinthians 7:4). She is to submit to him but

she also has an authority over him. When the muscles in your arm acquiesce to the signals sent to it from your brain, the arm is not demeaned. Verses 25-27 speak of the divine plan for the husband's duties toward his wife. He gives himself for her so that she may be made holy, changed, redeemed. Finally, verses 28-34 speak of the union of husband and wife. As Eve was taken from and brought to Adam, bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, so here we find emphasis on the oneness of flesh, on loving one's wife as one's own body. Is this an illustration of Christ and the church?

This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:32).

Marriage as an Aid to Character Development

About a year after we were married, I was sitting in my house and thinking about my marriage, and it was as if the ground opened up and fell out from under me. I realized as I never had before, something of how deeply my selfishness runs. Oh, I had understood that my life had been a continuing expression of selfishness, and that even as a Christian, in too many ways, my character often echoed my pre-conversion life. But it was in close contact with one I had promised to spend the rest of my life with that I finally began to see that I was much more selfish than I had thought. That was something that I needed to experience.

In a marriage we see through each other; the unrealism of our expectations soon shows itself, and we see spouse and self in a fresh—and unwelcome—reality. When God uses circumstances to let reality about yourself come out into the open, seize the opportunity. No matter how much it hurts, seek Him for help so that you may be reshaped, made more like Jesus.

How easily we tend to move in the opposite path. Self-service takes the lead. It is the way to destruction. When creature forgets he is creature, he begins to serve self. When this has become his whole horizon, he has rotted as a being, he has decided that he is god. He has come to the place where he neither trembles nor is awed by his Maker. He has grieved away the Holy Spirit and is eternally lost. He has defined himself. He has baked his character to completion. He has become a self-serving rebel and cannot safely exist in a universe filled with other-serving beings. God must withdraw life from him. In self-service man has chosen self destruction.

If we are traveling the road from Eden lost to Eden restored, then Sabbath and Marriage are a link. Those who travel to Eden restored—obviously—will honor with their life witness both sabbath and marriage. God's last-day movement, the men and women married to each other who form His last generation, will be faithful sabbatarians. Surely we agree on that. How could we believe so firmly, and then let the importance of our marriages come up short?

Marry in the Faith

The classic text must not be forgotten: 2 Corinthians 6:14, 15:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?

This text does not speak directly of marriage, but offers a general principle that Christians wisely apply to marriage. If you are already married to one who does not share your faith, the exhortations of 1 Corinthians 7:12, 13 apply: Do not divorce your spouse. But if you are not married, then take this Scripture to heart. The last thing a family needs today is confusion when it

comes to religious faith. Or, one parent practicing one thing and the other another. But even if you do not plan children, beware of marrying outside of your faith.

There are godly men and women outside of this church; that is not the question. The question to ask yourself is, What partnership can you have with one who approaches the Bible differently or indifferently, or who has entirely different health practices, or attitudes about worship in the home, or about morality? A lifetime is a very long time, and that is how long you are planning to be together. To marry outside your faith is to invite trouble.

Keep your long term interests in view. Remember the competing paradigms: other-serving or self-serving. You need to be on the same page there. If the two main purposes for marriage (illustrating the kingdom of God, and providing especially for character development of each spouse) are correct, then how can two who are divided concerning such crucial points successfully see those purposes for marriage realized in their own household?

Quick Hints for a Successful Marriage

1. Husband, tell your wife that you love her. Wife, tell your husband that you see him as responsible, that he takes care of the family, that you respect him.
2. Spend time with your spouse. Take a walk together. Wives, prepare him a special meal; husbands, take your spouse out on a date. Watch a sunset together, or a northern Idaho full moon rise, or a meteor shower (there is a list of meteor showers on wikipedia).
3. Be thankful for your spouse. This can be verbal, but it is most important that you encourage in yourself a mental attitude of thankfulness.
4. Pray for and with your spouse.
5. *Never* speak to others, even closest friends or family, of the faults of your spouse.
6. Discover or develop new interests that you can share in common with your spouse.

7. Do not crowd your spouse. There are many times when your spouse needs space.
8. Women often like to talk things out; men often do not like to talk things out. Ladies, let your husbands have some privacy and think a matter through; husbands, come together with your wife a short time later and resolve the matter.
9. No nagging, husbands or wives.
10. Do not let sexual intimacy fade away in your marriage.
11. Do not compare your spouse with movie star A or singer B. Generally, these people are successful in portraying or singing songs about immorality, and unsuccessful in having happy marriages. Again, the green grass on the other side often is just spring thistle.

Conclusion

We have covered a great deal of ground today. The topic is a vast one. Heaven has two special purposes for marriage: to illustrate the kingdom of God, and to facilitate character development. When we follow the example of Jesus, and live lives that are other-serving rather than self-serving, these goals can be realized powerfully to the glory of God. Biblical marriage is intended to be a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman. Husband and wife are intended by God to illustrate Christ and the church. It is a high calling. It will cost us something. But God knows what He is doing. He will show us the way.

We have some of the most heart-rending material next in line: The topic of divorce. And yet, first, a presentation titled, “But We’re All Sinners. . .” Sometimes the most merciful approach is not quite what we thought it was.

Biographical note: Larry Kirkpatrick has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church since 1994. He is a pastor of the American West, having led churches in Nevada, Utah, California, and Idaho. His writings include the books *Real Grace for Real People*, and *Cleanse and Close*. Larry and wife Pamela presently serve in the Upper Columbia Conference, ministering to the [Bonners Ferry](#) and Clark Fork churches in the incomparable beauty of Northern Idaho.