

Redefining Marriage (Part 2)

March 17, 2019

Last week, I asked you to think about the question, “What is the meaning of marriage to you?” I said that if a husband and a wife have different ideas for what marriage is about, those differences will show up in various ways in their married life. I started out by talking about the Biblical view that marriage was a crucial and necessary component in God’s design of the creation of the world. Furthermore, I talked about what it means for the Bible to refer to marriage as the man and his wife becoming one flesh.

In addition to what I mentioned about marriage last week, I have three more thoughts on marriage that I would like to share with you today.

The Relationship Between the Married Couple

The first point is about the relationship between the married couple. One of the ways the Bible talks about marriage is seen in **Genesis 2:24** that says, “**That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.**” It may be surprising to find the phrase “a man leaves his father and mother” in this sentence. That is because, at this point in time, there was only Adam and Eve on the earth. Although they were husband and wife, a father or a mother had not yet existed.

However, God already mentioned about a father and a mother before they came into existence. God is foretelling that as a man and a woman become one and have children, in addition to being husband and wife, they will also be known with the names father and mother. And as their children grow up, they will also become husband and wife, as well as father and mother one day.

When we talk about problems in marriage, it is common for the topic of our parents to arise. Especially these days, the matter of who will take care of our aging parents is of a growing concern to us. There are other times that the issue of parents comes up in conversations between the couple.

Let’s suppose that a wife has the tendency to consult her parents whenever an issue arises between the couple. The wife and her parents talk on the phone on a daily basis for advice, and she goes on to communicate those thoughts to her husband as if it was her own. What will happen to this couple in the long run?

Parents are important. They should be deeply valued. Therefore, the Ten Commandments includes the commandment, “**You should honor your father and mother.**” The first four commandments of the Ten Commandments are in relation to God and humans. The

remaining six commandments describe how relationships should be between humans. So, the commandment to honor our parents comes at the top of that list.

Therefore, there might be time for us to put our own family aside in order to care for and support our aging parents. That is what following the Ten Commandments requires us to do. However, the Bible also warns parents from overstepping into the realms of their children’s marriage.

Since the husband and wife are considered “one body”, no parent should get in their way. If we were to broaden our interpretation of that passage, it would also mean that nothing, not even parents nor any child should come between the husband-and-wife unit. I’m not saying that the couple needs to exclude their parents and children. However, those words in the Bible clearly speak out that the first and foremost, the married couple should guard their relationship to be the strongest of all relationships. Why? Because the Bible says that it is the husband and wife that becomes one body, not the parent and their children.

We often overhear moms saying, “I’ll do anything for the kids, but not for him.....” Who is she referring to? It’s her husband. The child may feel happy by those words from his mother, feeling that he is the most important person to her. However, we need to remember that those comments actually contribute to crumbling the foundation of that family.

What do you think kids want the most from their family? A man by the name Drescher wrote a list of ten things he would do differently if he could redo fatherhood. On the list are things like, “Make more time to laugh with children, ” and “Spend more time with children.” On the top of that list, he writes, “Love my wife more.”

What children actually want the most is to see their parents getting along. When the parents don’t get along, they try to please their children by buying gifts for them. Children will, of course be delighted by the toys. However, once again, this kind of behavior only leads to weaken the family foundation.

That is because what children really want is not toys. Toys only bring temporary joy. What children want to see is their parents trusting and loving each other. This brings true happiness and sense of security to the children.

Important Responsibilities in Marriage

Now, let’s move on to the second topic of the day, which are, “ important responsibilities in marriage.” In marriage, the couple has the possibility to, God willing, have their own children. In other words, their lives are passed on to the next generation. As parents, the couple is entrusted with the responsibility to pass on their lives. However, the couple will face and experience many trials and challenges in their every day lives.

In **Genesis 3:11-12** it says, **“God said, ‘Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?’ The man said, ‘The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.’”**

God had asked Adam, “Why did you eat from the tree that I told you not to eat from?” Instead of admitting his own fault, Adam replied by blaming his wife Eve.

We can easily imagine how their relationship became more awkward after this incident. The Bible does not go on to elaborate on this, but we get some sense of this as we read in Genesis 4 about their two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain ended up murdering his brother Abel out of jealousy and anger.

As a pastor, I am often asked to listen many kinds of problems people have. I can say that most of those problems arise out of human relationships. No one goes to a pastor to talk about how they have an over-grown tree in their yard, or that they never seem to be able to catch any fish when they go fishing.

In the Garden of Eden, God said that it was not good for Adam to be alone. Indeed, we exist in order to have relationships with others on this earth. Relationships with others should bring us joy and purpose in life. However, this relationship that was meant to be a blessing often turn out to become our worst headaches.

As I mentioned last week, marriage was part of the creational order that God had ordained. Therefore, there should be some rules that define this relationship between a husband and wife. Just as the earth’s climate is affected when there is an imbalance in the order between the moon and the sun, any marital relationship will suffer when the relationship between the husband and wife gets out of balance. That will even affect their children into the next generation. This cycle of dysfunction will get passed down to the following generations as well.

Brothers and sisters, we need to be honest with ourselves and reflect on how the cycle of family dysfunctions have affected us. Can we find a perfect couple anywhere? Can we find perfect parents anywhere? Does a perfect man or and a perfect woman actually exist? The answer is no!

What then, can be done about it? The Bible presents us with the answer that can help us get out of this cycle of dysfunction and sin. In other words, Jesus Christ is the one who brought us salvation by breaking us from this cycle of sin. All husbands, wives, parents, children are sinners before God. All of us are living a self-centered life without even realizing our own faults. We are all sinners in one sense or another.

However, when we stand before Christ, he sheds light into our hearts to expose our darkness. Then, we realize the need to turn our lives around and start walking with Christ.

Through this process, we are changed and transformed. Instead of simply passing on our wounds and sins to our children, we can break from it as we apply the cross of Christ in those areas of our lives. When our lives are connected to the life of Christ, we can pass on the true life to our offspring.

The cross is composed of a horizontal bar and a vertical bar. The vertical bar symbolizes our relationship with God. The horizontal bar represents our relationship with each other. Some of you may feel that this relationship has been broken. But we can replace that broken piece with Christ’s horizontal plank in order to restore that brokenness.

God, who created humans and ordained the marital relationship to be harmonious, will not turn a blind eye to couples that are suffering in their relationship with each other. God has already sent Jesus to be our savior to restore our brokenness. If we are aware of the areas that need some mending, let’s go to Jesus and ask him to heal us.

Marriage Upholds Each Other

My last point today is that marriage upholds each other. The apostle Paul remained single all his life and devoted himself to the ministry of evangelization. Last week, I talked about how when someone gets married, most of their time and energy will be spent for the family. However, Paul could pour all the energy he had for his mission.

In **Ephesians 5:33**, Paul writes to both husbands and wives about how they are to relate to each other. He concludes that passage with these words:

“However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”

I have mentioned this passage in the past too, but I believe that these words brilliantly sum up what the focus of marriage should be.

There are numerous books on marriage published. The contents probably vary a lot by the different approaches of the authors as well as the period it was written in. You can imagine that books on marriage published 50 years ago in Japan and those selling today would be quite different in content. If someone today were to write, “Wives should walk a few steps behind the husband,” that person may even be summoned to court.

Paul’s words were written 2000 years ago. However, his words are still very applicable to us today. Paul said to the husbands, **“love your wives as you love yourselves.”** And to the wives, simply, **“wives, respect your husbands.”**

I mentioned last week that man was created before woman. Yes, the woman was created from the man’s rib. For a man and a woman to become one in marriage symbolizes that a part of him that was taken out has now returned back to him.

That is why Paul says in **Ephesians 5:28**, **“In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.”** To the husband, his wife was made out of part of him, and that wife is now united to him, loving her is the same as loving himself.

I was listening to radio on my car the other day. I heard a discussion about how there are very few women CEOs in the world of banking. People were saying that if women’s opinions were included and reflected more in making important decisions at meetings, there would be a big difference in how banks today practice lending and investments, leading to fewer major losses. The same thing may be said about wars. I have heard someone say that if more women had become heads of states and nations, we would have had fewer wars in history.

Boys play with guns and swords (I was one of them). Boys like to battle, pretend using special powers, and always have to have a winner and a loser. However, girls are different. Girls seem to prefer to draw or to play with dolls. Those activities seem to reflect more of a notion of peace and stability.

Men chase after big and brave things. Most football fans are men. Most fans of figure skating are women. If I said that I loved and followed Yuzuru Hanyu, the famous men’s figure skating champion, you would think there is something wrong with me. I think the fact that more women like figure skating points to the fact that women have a tendency to choose things that are elegant, harmonious and assuring, in other words, showing their inner desire to be loved. However, men want to be brave and triumphant, bigger, stronger, and leave their legacy.

What these men need in life is someone who will respect them. Men thrive on being respected. However, very few men achieve the degree of respect they long for. Our society evaluates people by their achievements. Therefore, the man hopes to get the respect he wants in his home. However, even at home, men are hardly respected. The family member’s attitudes and words men can be harsh and brutal. Men need to see and hear that they are respected in by words and actions from their family members.

Men feel hurt the most by words like, “I heard that so and so got a promotion.” If those words are directed to the man on a daily basis, he will start to look for affirmation and respect somewhere outside of his home. There are many places in the world where you can meet people who will say all the praises and compliments you want to hear, as long as you pay them enough.

It's hard to explain why men and women are this way. I think that we are simply created in this way. We cannot change the nature of who we are.

I am guessing that many of you are thinking in your hearts, "pastor, it's easy for you to say this, but....." It's easy to know what you are supposed to do, but much harder to actually love and respect someone. It's because our pride and self-righteousness gets in the way. There is no straight and easy way to just do it.

How can a husband love his wife that does not respect him? How can a wife respect her husband who doesn't love her? Therefore, I have a proposal. It's a proposal for the men in this room. I am including myself in this challenge. Since Ephesians 5 starts out by addressing men first, in describing how a married couple should relate to each other, I suggest that we take the initiative. Since the Bible also says that we will also be loving ourselves when we direct our love to our wives.

Furthermore, we may often hear about "unconditional love," but hardly do we hear about "unconditional respect." Someone once pointed out that respect is something you have to earn, not simply expect from others.

Dear brothers in Christ, we have a huge challenge before us. I feel that although men yearn to become "strong," real strength is measured not from the amount of muscle we have. I believe that real strength of a man should be measured by his faithfulness and loyalty to love one woman in his life. What do you think? Isn't it a challenge worth taking on?

I am guessing that women also find it hard to respect their husbands. Well, I am not just assuming, but am sure about it. Sisters in Christ, just as men are called to shed Christ's light into their hearts, I ask you to do the same and examine your hearts. Let's start by acknowledging that you are completely different from your husband. Think about what makes him happy? If you try to make that a higher priority in your life, I am sure that your husband will love you even more.

I believe that the popular concept of "happy marriage" is achieved when the husband and wife follow this simple ancient advice of "loving your wife and respecting your husband."

To many people, marriage has a significant place in their lives. I have expanded on some Biblical views of marriage over the last two weeks. Maybe those were things you had never heard about before. Some of you may have based your view on marriage on the weekly tabloids you read.

Let's think again of which kind of literature would you like to base your life on. Those weekly tabloids? Or the Bible, that have been around and highly regarded by people around the world for thousands of years?

If there are any Biblical views on marriage that you would like to apply in your own life, I encourage you to reflect on it and really try to live it out. As you try to do so, you may encounter additional challenges of coming face to face with certain areas in your own heart. When that happens, words from other parts of the Bible will give you further comfort and advice.

As we try living by God’s Word, we will come to realize one thing. I am not who I was yesterday, and am continually being renewed inside. And as we find ourselves slowly changing, we will start to discover our partner changing as well.

Please remember that through those passages on marriage, God is longing to speak to us about something larger in scope than marriage itself. God longs to guide each and every one from our birth until our final breath in order to bless and to provide abundantly for us. May we all seek after Him and follow His ways. As a church, we are called to be a community that sharpens one another through prayer and encouragement as we follow Jesus with our lives.

Let’s pray.