

Marriage and Faithfulness

Dearly beloved, we are gathered here to..... look at what the Bible says about marriage and faithfulness.

I'm going to address four questions today which I hope will help us to explore a little of what the Bible has to say in this area. But some of you may have a question of your own in your heads. You may be asking yourself "is this man really qualified to talk about marriage?" Well, the answer to that is perhaps not as qualified as some of you who have been married a long time. However, Ruth and I have now been married for eight and a half years, so I do at least have some experience of married life. But this morning I'm not going to focus on my own experience of marriage, I want us to look instead at what the Bible says.

The first question is:

1. Is marriage really what God intended for us to do?

Or in other words, is marriage Biblical?

The first marriage

Turn with me to Genesis chapter 2. Here we see the creation story unfolding. We see how God creates man from the dust of the earth and then in verse 18 "The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone".

Then we see that God created a woman out of part of the man. God's reason for creating the woman was to be a helper for the man. She was to be his companion, a partner for him. At the end of Genesis 2 we read "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." (v24)

Jesus' own words back this up in Mark 10:6-10 ⁶"But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.'^[a] ⁷'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,^[b] ⁸and the two will become one flesh.'^[c] So they are no longer two, but one. ⁹Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." so there can be no doubt as to the meaning behind the verses in Genesis.

A marital relationship should be like Jesus relationship with the church

In Ephesians 5 marriage is likened to the relationship Christ has with his church.

Wives and Husbands

22Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. 24Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

25Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26to make her holy, cleansing^[b] her by the washing with water through the word, 27and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— 30for we are members of his body. 31"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."^[c] 32This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Obviously there are some things in there that we may find a little strange in our culture. For example, the husband being the head of the relationship and women submitting to their husbands. But the real emphasis of the passage is on the husbands loving their wives “just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”. Marriage is all about sacrificial love. It’s about putting each other before yourself. In our marriage service we often say words to the effect of putting our wife or husband before all others.

Marriage is good for bringing up children

In Malachi chapter 2 it says: 15 Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. ^[e] So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

The Biblical principle of Christian marriage provides a good healthy environment for bringing up children. Malachi says it is so as we produce godly offspring. The idea is that parents should model Christ’s love and that children learn the values of a loving relationship. A child will learn all sorts of things from watching the way their parents relate to each other. Is there commitment or a lack of it? Is there love or hatred? Is there peace or shouting? Is there tolerance or impatience? Is God to be found in the household or is he missing from it?

2. What is God’s view on Adultery?

You shall not commit adultery

It couldn’t be much clearer could it? Exodus 20:14 states: “You shall not commit adultery”

The writer of Hebrews writes: [Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral \(Heb 13:4\)](#) It comes in the middle of a passage which appears to have nothing to do with marriage. He talks about entertaining strangers, remembering those in prison and then later talks about money. The point here is that genuine love for God brings genuine actions.

I suppose what the writer is really saying is “Does the love you have for Christ Jesus make any difference to the way you live your life?” If not then we need to do something about it or how can we claim that we have a genuine love for God?

You shall not covet...

One of the commandments that is often overlooked I think also comes into play here. It is I think one of the hardest commandments of the ten to keep. Exodus 20:17 says [“You shall not covet...”](#)

We often overlook this commandment but it is right there with the other nine in the law which God gave to Moses. This commandment goes beyond adultery. The commandment is that we should not even be envious of what someone else has. It clearly says [“You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife.”](#)

It is basically a command to be satisfied with what you have. If you have a wife or a husband, then we should be grateful for what we have. But this is a world where we are now encouraged to shop around, see if you can find something better. Supermarkets display the other stores prices both in their own store and on their websites so as we can compare them and see if we can get a better deal. And it has filtered into all sorts of products; car insurance, telephone services, even banks.

But what does this have to do with relationships and converting? Well in a world of cosmetic surgery, where our outside appearance is so important, we are taught by experts what a good-looking body looks like. But ladies, when you see this sort of programme, do you compare that with your husband’s spare tyre? And similar things could be said for men. Let’s be satisfied with what we have and be grateful to God for it. And let’s look at each other with the eyes of God, because God looks on the inside not at the outward appearance.

I did hear it said once when I was at Uni that there is nothing wrong with a bit of window shopping, after all, to find someone attractive is only to have good eyesight. I would agree with the second part of that. Of course there are good looking people and to recognise them as such is not wrong. However, what about the first bit? Well, let me put it like this. How many times have you browsed around a shop and found yourself buying something that you didn’t really set out to buy? I would suggest it is the same with people. A bit of ‘harmless’ window shopping can easily turn into much more than you intended.

Temptation

Of course, our natural instinct is to want what we cannot have. It was there right at the beginning. Adam and Eve in the garden. What did God say to Adam? “And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:16-17)

God gave Adam and Eve complete freedom to eat anything in the garden except for just one tree that they were not allowed to eat from. So what is the one tree that they want to eat from? As is human nature, they wanted to know why they couldn't eat the fruit. The temptation was unbearable. Our curious nature can get us into a lot of trouble.

Maybe you feel on safe ground when we look at the subject of adultery. But Jesus said “27”You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’^[e] 28But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Mat 5:28) Do you still feel on safe ground?

3. How do we remain faithful?

As I was preparing this sermon I was looking in my ‘Life Application Bible’. There were some notes on what healthy marriages and it said that three elements should be present for a healthy marriage.

- 1 – The man leaves his parents and promises himself to his wife publicly
- 2 – The two are joined together by taking responsibility for each other's welfare and by loving the partner above all others
- 3 – The two become one flesh in the intimacy and commitment of sexual union that is reserved for marriage.

I think there is a lot of sense in these notes. They talk about making our marriage public. This is being accountable to other people, having witnesses to what we have said. It makes it harder to go back on your word. The second point is about being accountable to each other and looking after one another's needs. Putting each other first, above other people and even above yourself. Remember, earlier we said that marriage should be a life of self-sacrifice. The third point is about the intimacy between a man and a woman that comes through sexual union. This is right and proper, it's part of God's creation plan but it is reserved for marriage and only for marriage. It should be treated with respect.

If these things are maintained in marriage then arguably, we are more likely to be satisfied in our relationship and resist temptation.

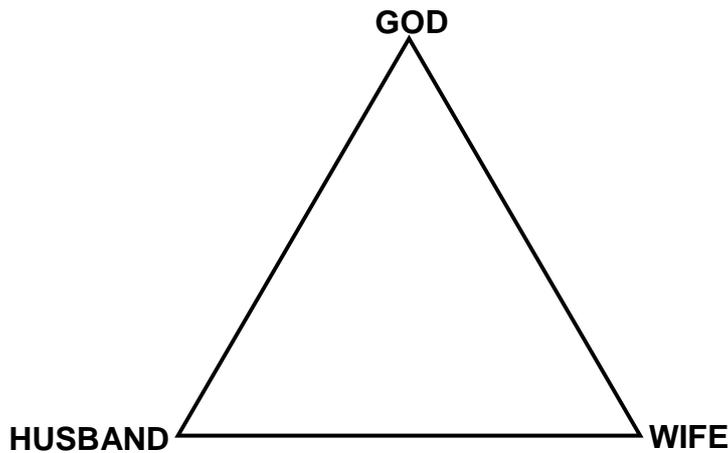
But there is one thing that works to keep a couple together above all others.

A relationship with God.

If we are going to look after each other's welfare then we have a responsibility for each other's spiritual needs. We should help each other with our daily Christian walk.

There are two illustrations that demonstrate this and I'm sure you have probably come across them before.

The Marriage Triangle



In this diagram, if the husband and wife are far away from God then they will also be far away from each other.

As they get closer to God, so they will become closer to each other.

The second illustration is 'the marriage plat' (Man, Woman, God).

Ruth and I brought a large picture once. It was fairly heavy and when we hung it on a single piece of string it wasn't long before the string snapped and the picture fell down. We decided to try to hang in on two pieces of string which we sort of twisted together. It lasted a little longer but again one day the picture fell. Ruth had the brilliant idea of plating three lengths of string together to make a really strong chord. The picture has never fallen down since.

This can be a bit like a marriage. Single strands are quite easy to break. Like two people that are apart from each other. On their own they will not be very strong. If you put the two strands together, they will be much harder to break. But in a Christian marriage, where God is at the centre, a stronger, third strand is added. And done properly, this third chord will be platted in with the other two which binds the two together and makes the chord almost unbreakable.

Genesis 39 tells us about Potiphar's wife when she tried to seduce Joseph. Joseph knew that this would be wrong in the eyes of God and so he refuses. The passage tells us that Joseph tried to avoid her but one day he found himself

alone with her in the house. She caught him by the cloak and again said to him “come to bed with me.” This time Joseph ran from her.

Sometimes that is the only way to avoid temptation, to run from it. Once you step into temptation it is very difficult to apply the breaks. If possible it is better to avoid situations where you know you are likely to be tempted.

Proverbs 5:25-27

25 Let your eyes look straight ahead,
fix your gaze directly before you.

26 Make level ^[a] paths for your feet
and take only ways that are firm.

27 Do not swerve to the right or the left;
keep your foot from evil.

And remember what we looked at a few moments ago, Do not covet. A good way to avoid unfaithfulness is to be grateful for what you have and don't consider what you don't have.

What if we fail?

As we have seen, there is always temptation and the Bible is full of examples of people who have fallen into temptation and sin.

One of the most obvious examples is David. You probably know the story well of how David was tempted when he saw Bathsheba. This temptation led him to covet, murder, steal, and commit adultery and there were probably other commandments that were broken too. Afterwards though we see Nathan cleverly rebukes David for what he has done (2 Sam 12). David then realises how he has sinned against God. But Nathan says this to him: "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die." There is always forgiveness with God for those who confess their sins and resolve to make a new start.

But there were still consequences for David. 14 But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, ^[a] the son born to you will die."

15 After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill. 16 David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground. 17 The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them.

18 On the seventh day the child died.

God forgives all who repent but our actions may not be so easy to undo.

One of the consequences of sin is that the guilt does not go away easily. This is especially true for many Christians. A certain amount can be good to stop us making the same mistake again but we should not keep punishing ourselves, this is not necessary. Jesus has paid the price of sin so we can be forgiven and free from the guilt of the past. We may however, need to forgive ourselves.

So can we do what we like beings as the price has been paid – does it really matter that much? God will forgive us anyway.

(Romans 6:1-4) 1What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 3Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Not a bit of it says Paul. To have such an attitude is to abuse the sacrifice that Jesus made for us. I'm not talking now about being tempted and falling into sin. I'm talking about deliberately sinning with an attitude of 'well it's ok, God will forgive me'. Perhaps he will, but it is an abuse of God's grace. Remember that it cost Jesus his life to save you. We who call ourselves Christians must also accept that we are disciples of Christ. That means that we follow him and follow his ways. Jesus life was a life of self sacrifice. He was always putting others before himself and always put the Father above everything. We who are committed to follow him must also do the same.

So husbands and wives...

- Dedicate yourselves to one another
- Don't look elsewhere
- Encourage each other in you Christian walk

And may God bless you in your marriage.

Amen.