

**Lesson 1:**  
**The Purpose of Marriage**

**I. Introduction**

A. John (19) and Selma (18) are high school sweethearts. John is about to graduate from culinary school, and when Selma gets accepted to an Ivy League University, John decides to propose. He wants to lock her in before she goes away, but he also has another motivation. John has serious struggles with pornography, and he hopes that marrying quickly will not only minimize the couples' temptation to impurity, but help him with his own dark struggle as well.

1. Why does John want to get married?
  
2. What will he expect out of Selma?

B. Olga is a single mother working hard to raise her son Caleb on her own. When she meets Matt she notes that he is successful at work, and seems to connect well with her son. While he is not a studmuffin like Caleb's father, she knows Matt will be a dutiful husband, provider, and father.

1. Why does Olga want to get married?
  
2. What will she expect out of Matt?

C. Rick and Susan have serious chemistry. They seem to please each other out of instinct. When Rick detects a touch of sadness in Susan's voice, he sneaks by her apartment and deposits a rose. When Susan senses that Rick is having a tough day at work, she texts him messages of encouragement. They love to do the same things, converse about the same topics, and seem to meld together like once-separated soul mates.

1. Why do Rick and Susan want to get married?
  
2. What will they expect out of each other?

3. In general, how do our reasons for getting married impact our expectations of marriage?

4. Why is it important to have the right reasons for getting and staying married?

Our motivations for getting married shape our expectations within marriage. Those who marry for happiness will look to marriage to bring them happiness. Those who marry for sex will expect sex. Those who marry for money will expect their spouse to make them rich. Naturally, many marriages sink on the rocks of unmet expectations.

In order to have a God-honoring marriage, we must approach it with the right expectations: rather than allowing the world to tell us what to look for in marriage, we need our minds to be transformed by the word of God. In the Bible God tells us about *His* expectations for marriage, which are bound up with His purposes in creating it.

## II. The Definition of Marriage

Marriage was created by God. He defines what marriage is, and His definition reveals His expectations. Before we come to a definition, we need to look at how marriages are formed and dissolved:

A. The Formation of Marriage:

***Genesis 3:18-25*** <sup>18</sup> Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." <sup>19</sup> Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup> The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. <sup>21</sup> So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. <sup>22</sup> The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup> The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." <sup>24</sup> For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. <sup>25</sup> And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

1. Why did God create marriage (vv. 18, 20)? What need was He addressing?

2. How did God go about arranging this marriage? (v. 21-24)
  
3. Why is it significant that the woman was taken out of the man, as opposed to being a separate creation (v. 23)?
  
4. How does marriage impact how the husband and wife relate to each other (v. 24-25)?
  
5. How does marriage change family relationships (v. 24)?
  
6. Should this serve as an example for all marriages? Why or why not?
  - a. When did this marriage take place?
  
  - b. Who designed this marriage?
  
  - c. How does Matthew 19:4–6 help us to appreciate the relevance of this passage?
  
  - d. What does **Eph. 5:31** suggest about its relevance today?

***Ephesians 5:31 FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.***

7. Does this passage allow for polygamy? Why or why not?

**Note:** There are numerous reasons for the rise of polygamy, which apart from sensuous considerations included the need to maintain endogamous marriages<sup>1</sup>, the desire to increase the Israelite population (necessary because wars decimated the male population), the necessity of providing for destitute widows in order to avoid slavery, prostitution and the like, and the maintenance of the nation's working force. These factors notwithstanding, the ideal Hebrew marriage continued to be monogamous, despite the examples set to the contrary by royalty.<sup>2</sup>

B. The Dissolution of Marriage:

1. One warm summer night Gunther and Gretchen find themselves in the heat of passion. As Gunther begins to move in for the kill, Gretchen pulls back and tells him, "No, not until we're married!" Gunther pledges his undying love and commitment to Gretchen, and she reciprocates; thus, they both conclude that they are, for all intents and purposes, married. Are they? Why or why not?

2. How would you advise a friend who is considering sleeping with his fiancée, reasoning that they have already made a commitment to one another and the marriage ceremony is a mere formality?

3. What ends or dissolves a marriage according to the following Scriptures?

Matthew 5:32 ***but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.***

Romans 7:2 ***For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband.***

4. How can the knowledge of what ends a marriage contribute to our understanding of how a marriage begins?

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<sup>1</sup> An endogamous marriage – also known as a levirate marriage – was designed to preserve the brother's family line so that the widow could bear a son and keep the brother's name and the inherited land in the family. Judah and Tamar as well as Ruth a Boaz are the most famous examples of this type of marriage.

<sup>2</sup> R.K. Harrison "Polygamy" in ISBE V. III (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 1986) p. 901

### C. The Universality of Marriage:

1. Does God recognize the marriage of unbelievers? Why or why not?
2. Consider 1 Corinthians 7:12-13:

***<sup>12</sup>But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. <sup>13</sup>And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away.***

Given that Paul forbids believers from marrying unbelievers, how did the members of these mixed marriages find themselves in this situation to begin with?

3. What does this tell us about which marriages God recognizes?

### D. The Definition of Marriage:

Marriage is the state of being united with one member of the opposite sex in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law and dissolved only through divorce or death. This union is consecrated by God, regardless of the religious or nonreligious beliefs of the participants.

1. Why is it important to recognize that the institution of marriage is not socially constructed, but divinely constructed?
2. How does this definition shape our expectations for our own marriages?

## III. God's Purpose for Marriage

### A. Genesis 1:26

***Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."***

1. Should we take this passage to mean that God made only males in the image of God? Why or why not? (Hint: Gen. 2:21-23)
2. According to the passage above, for what purpose did God make man?
3. How is man to relate to the world, and how is the world to relate to God?

"Mankind was to be the face of God to creation. Recently many scholars have drawn attention to a Near Eastern practice of conquering and victorious kings erecting images of themselves. These statues were identical to the kings in form and if they were defaced and dishonored, it was taken to be an insult to the king. In a similar way, mankind was placed upon this planet as the image of God." (Eugene Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion*)

- B. In Genesis 1:28 God commissions those made in His image with the "creation mandate":

***And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."***

1. What commands does God give to the male and female?
2. How does the spread of mankind throughout the universe enhance the glory of God?
3. Why is marriage essential to the fulfillment of this mandate?

- C. The Impact of the Fall

When Adam and Eve fell into sin, it impacted all of their relationships. They moved from transparency to shame, hiding from each other and from God. Further, they were cursed by God.

1. How does the curse impact the woman's role in the creation mandate?

Genesis 3:16 ***To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."***

2. How does the curse impact the man's role in the creation mandate?

Genesis 3:17-19 ***<sup>17</sup> And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; <sup>18</sup> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."***

3. How has sin impacted the relationship between every husband and wife?

**Key Point:** Marriage was created so that mankind – made in the image of God—might plant His flag over all creation. When Neil Armstrong planted the American Flag on the moon, it sent a powerful message to our Cold War adversaries: This belongs to America. In the same way, when humans spread throughout the earth, we declare that all creation belongs to God.

However, there is a problem. Men made in the image of God have rejected God. Therefore, in the New Testament, marriage becomes a picture of the way mankind can be restored to its proper station.

- D. Ephesians 5:22–33

***<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. <sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her,***

*having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup> In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, <sup>30</sup> because we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup> “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” <sup>32</sup> This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup> However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

1. According to verse 32 what is the purpose of marriage?

**Note on *Mystery*:** This word is used for the great eternal secret of God’s purpose for mankind, hidden in the past but now revealed in Christ.

2. According to verses 23 and 24 what “gospel role” does the wife represent in the marriage?
3. How does a wife’s submission preach the Gospel?
4. What “gospel role” does the husband play in the marriage (vv. 25-27)?
5. How does a husband’s sacrificial leadership preach the gospel?
6. How does the gospel impact a marriage?
7. According to Revelation 19:6-8 what reality does marriage anticipate?

Marriage pictures the act of redemption. Jesus Christ is the groom who seeks, pursues, and redeems His bride. The church responds to her Groom’s loving leadership with trusting submission. God will



receive glory as He conquers sin, reveals His mercy, and restores humanity so that they can fulfill the creation mandate under His dominion. The purpose of marriage is worship.

It should be noted that Scripture does give us other purposes for marriage, including companionship (Gen. 2:18), delight (Pro. 5:18-19), and help with personal holiness (1 Cor. 7:1-5). But all of these contribute to the overall purpose of worship.

How this is lived out will be discussed in the next point.

#### **IV. Living Out the Purpose of Marriage**

- A. The idea of marriage as an act of worship may sound strange to some. How do people typically define worship?
- B. Why is it important that we have a proper understanding of worship?
- C. John 15:10

***If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.***

1. How does God want us to express our love for Him?
2. What is the relationship between obedience and worship?
3. Is it legalism to tell a follower of Jesus to keep His commandments? Why or why not?
4. What are some commands that God gives Christians which have a direct application to marriage?

5. Is it possible for a husband to simultaneously love God and loathe his wife? Why or why not?
  
6. What happens when we don't connect loving our spouse with loving God?

D. Romans 12:1–2

***I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.***

1. How do people typically define worship?
  
2. How does Paul define worship in this passage?
  
3. How do we discern the will of God for our lives and marriages?
  
4. Why does Paul want us to discern God's will?
  
5. What does this world teach about the purpose of marriage? What does verse 2 instruct us to do with such thoughts?
  
6. So how do we worship God in marriage?

From these passages we see a direct link between obedience and worship. Essentially, we worship God by heeding His commands. Every time we say no to our desires, and yes to His desires,

we proclaim His worthiness. To worship means we live our lives like God is the most worthy being in the universe.

## V. Thought Questions:

- A. Why is it important to remember that marriage exists to please God not ourselves? What happens when we forget this?
  
- B. What kind of marriage can we expect if both parties earnestly live to please God?
  
- C. What is the danger of making marriage about our own personal happiness?
  
- D. Why is it important that you devote yourself to God first, and then to your marriage?
  
- E. Is it possible to please God in your marriage if you are not a Christian or not acting like a Christian? Why or why not?

## VI. Conclusion

The purpose of marriage—and the purpose of all of life—is to give God glory. From the beginning God intended marriage to be the means by which He would bring little image-bearers into the world. As they spread and subdued the earth, God would expand His reign. Tragically, these image-bearers turned away from God and His plan. Yet God intervened by sending His Son to rescue and redeem some of the fallen (the church). We know now that marriage is a reenactment of that work of redemption. The husband sacrifices to serve his wife, just like Jesus sacrificed Himself to rescue the church. In response, the wife offers joyful submission just as the church responds to Jesus' gracious work with submission. Thus, a godly marriage pictures God's work in turning rebellious image-bearers back to Himself.

The purpose of marriage is not just happiness, children, or finding the one who "completes me." The purpose of marriage is to give God glory; it is an act of worship. Understanding this reality changes the expectations we will have for our marriages, our spouses, and ourselves.