

Marriage Matters

Introduction

Marriage is a lot of work, risk, vulnerability, and it can mean a lot of pain. Let's be honest...marriage is hard. In fact, many people in our world today choose to end their marriages. About 50% of all marriages in the US end in divorce. If it's so common to divorce, why should we care?

Well, there are some good reasons – such as:

- It's a covenant made before God which should never be broken (Matt 19:6)
- God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16 – see NASB version)
- It's one of the primary ways God's shapes our character and makes us like Jesus (Rom 8:29)
- Divorce tears families apart and wounds children deeply
- The breakdown of the family leads to the breakdown of society in general

But there are two other reasons we don't often think about, which are even more important:

1. God designed marriage to be a picture of himself

The Bible teaches that there is only one God, but that he exists eternally in three distinct persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each of them is characterized in Scripture as possessing the same essence of deity – that is, they are each fully God. But though equal, they have different roles. The Father sent the Son to save the world, the Son took on human flesh and died for our sins, and the Father and Son together send the Spirit to live inside believers. And yet, Scripture emphatically says that there is only one God, not three. This is what we call the Trinity, or the Godhead. It is a Tri-Unity...a "3 in 1". They are 1! Exactly how this works is a mystery to our finite minds. But it's how God has revealed himself to us in Scripture. That's why in Genesis 1:26-27 we read about the creation of mankind in this way:

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." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

[Note: both plural and singular pronouns used for God]

We see that men and women were created equally in the image of God as distinct individuals. Then in Matthew 19:3-6 Jesus explains how marriage displays the image of God even more clearly:

³ And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" ⁴ He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵ and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? ⁶ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

Here's the point – God designed marriage to reflect his unity of relationship. In the Trinity there is a complementary relationship that exists in perfect harmony – they are 3 persons, each described as being fully God, with distinct roles, and yet there is only 1 God. Similarly, a marriage is a union of a man and a woman – two distinct people, equal in value and worth, both bearing the image of God, yet with very different functions and roles, and specifically called "one flesh" (not 2). So they no longer live as two separate individuals, but as one unity. And in this unity they produce children with their own DNA and likeness, similar to how the HS is sent by the Father and the Son. This unity in marriage is experienced physically in their exclusive sexual oneness – but it extends further. We joke about our

“better half”, but the idea is actually accurate. Husband and wife are two halves of the same whole. Together we form one flesh – one entity – one unity. This is reflected in one home, one name, one family, one set of loyalties, one purpose, one set of values, one set of goals, one set of priorities, one focus, one love. A good marriage is a union in every sense.

So a marriage between a man and woman is a union, designed and joined together by God, to reflect God himself – the perfect and eternal relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In other words, your marriage is intended to be a mirror to show the world what God is like. Done well, it is the best picture on earth of the heavenly reality of God himself. The unity of a good marriage brings glory to God! For that reason alone, marriage is worth protecting, defending and fighting for. That’s one reason why Jesus said: *“What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”*

2. God designed marriage to be a picture of the Gospel

God chose to use marriage as a picture of the covenant God he made with His people.

- We see this in the Old Testament with Israel:
 - Isaiah 54:5 *For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.*
- Then in the New Testament the Church is called the “Bride of Christ”
 - 2 Cor. 11:2 *For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.*
 - Rev. 19:7 *Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready*

In Ephesians 5, the apostle Paul specifically refers to marriage as a picture of the relationship between Jesus and the church. He says in Ephesians 5:31, quoting from Genesis 2:

- Eph. 5:31-32 ³¹ *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”* ³² *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

What does marriage have to do with Christ and the church? Earlier in that same passage, he gave specific instructions to both the husband and wife that tie directly to Jesus and the church. Listen to how he compares marriage to Christ and the church:

- Eph. 5:22-23 says: ²² *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.* ²³ *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.*
- Eph. 5:25 says: *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*

The Gospel message is that the Lord Jesus Christ gave himself as a loving sacrifice for the church, for you and me, to provide the forgiveness of sins and to make us right before God, by faith. The Apostle Paul says that marriage should demonstrate that relationship and sacrifice. That is the model we are to follow. The husband is to love his wife sacrificially. That means he is to give up his own rights for the good of his wife – just as Jesus loved us (Eph. 5:25), gave up his rights (Phil 2:1-11), and sacrificed himself for our good (Eph 5:1-2). In turn, the wife is to respond to her husband’s love with respect and submission, as a picture of the way each of us in the church should respond to Jesus’s love. In a good marriage, the sacrificial love of the husband and the willing (voluntary) submission and respect of the wife bring glory to God, by pointing to his relationship with us!

Consequently, how we treat our spouse has direct implications for our relationship with God:

- Malachi 2:13-14 ¹³ *You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. ¹⁴ But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.*
- I Peter 3:7 *Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.*

Implications

When we divorce, we are effectively teaching our children that:

- God's love is conditional and depends on our behavior
- God's forgiveness has limits
- God's grace will not cover all sin
- God will not be faithful to us

But when we honor our marriage vows with love and respect, our lives demonstrate the truth that:

- God's love is not based on our behavior (Rom 5:6-8) and will not be taken from us (Rom 8:38-39)
- God's forgiveness is grounded in Christ (Col 2:13-14) and has no limits (Matt 18:21-35)
- God's grace in Christ abounds to cover all sin (Rom 5:15-21; 8:1)
- God is faithful even when we are faithless (Lam 3:22-23; 2 Tim 2:13)

A Word of Caution

Some pursue divorce against God's will, confident that "God will forgive me." But the Scriptures caution us not to presume on the grace of God:

- Rom. 2:4-5 ⁴ *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?* ⁵ *But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.*

If fact, Jesus specifically warned against withholding forgiveness from our spouse, while claiming God's forgiveness for ourselves:

- Matt. 6:14-15 ¹⁴ *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,* ¹⁵ *but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Instead, our confidence in God's forgiveness should be the basis for the forgiveness we offer our spouse:

- Eph. 4:32 *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

Summary

So why does marriage matter?

- Because God designed marriage as a picture of himself – He joined one man with one woman in marriage to show his own oneness in relationship.
- Because God designed marriage as a picture of the Gospel – The loving sacrifice of Christ for the holiness of the church is the standard by which we love our wives and respect our husbands.

Conclusion

Marriage was designed by God, joined together by God, as a reflection of God, to communicate the love of God, all for the glory of God. We must care about marriage because the glory of God Himself is at stake! This is about way more than just you and me. It's ultimately about God. That's why it matters.