

Second the Covenant rescues us from two lies. One, that there is somewhere a soul mate just for you. There are many who think that somewhere there is one person and only one person for you. That is nowhere in the Bible. We are not to be unequally yoked, but even then Paul gives us some leeway in working on marriage. Yet, the thought that there is one and only one for me, leads many to the wrong idea about marriage and ends many marriages because it leads to the other myth, and that is there must be someone better.

Here is a little statistic for you. Two thirds of all marriages that are described as troubled are described as happy only five years later. In other words, keeping a covenant and our promise most of the time leads to happiness. It rescues us from the two lies of the soul mate and there is someone better.

The Covenant or promise of marriage makes us work at it. Without the commitment, without the paper, without the legal hassle, without the trouble of separation and divorce, we would quickly move in and out of relationships. Which is exactly what was happening in Jesus' day. Jesus called this rebellious toward God. The Covenant of marriage means that there is power in the promise and it makes us work on the marriage. If someone has told you that when there is true love there is no work, then you have been lied to. That is not love that is a fairy tale. Love is work, love is choice, love is hard, but love is worth it.

The Covenant or promise makes me a true free person. We think a vow is restrictive, but not so. The power to make a vow means I personally have the power over my own passions and the lies of culture to choose to keep my vow. Some people think they are free because they do what they want but the truth is they do not do what they want, they do what comes next. They are as Kierkegaard said, living accidental lives. The person who makes the vow and keeps the promise, they are truly free.

The Covenant promise also means future love and future passion. Wendy Plump wrote in the New York Times an essay on her marriage, which was destroyed by an affair. That essay is now the popular book "Vow." In the essay she talked about the excitement of the affair as it began and then the end result. In reflection, she looked at her parent's marriage of 50 years. She says it is a success of time and will that no few moments of passion can compare too. She goes on to say, when you are 75 do you want a relationship that may have some

moments of strained devotion, or one that looks like a city hit by a bomb with nothing but a crater remaining? Her parent's marriage was more interesting and exciting than any moment of unfaithfulness no matter how exciting the moment might be.

The promise gives us future love and passion. When Robin and I first started dating and I got the nerve to put my arm around her or touch her hand or hold her hand while we would sat in the movies was so exciting. Exhilarating. Those days are gone, but let me tell you after 31 years it is more than that now. Now a reach and a touch of the hand as we walk down a hall or through the parking lot says "think what we have come through." It says "I am here with you right now." It says, "This is not the last time I will hold your hand. Think what awaits us in the future."

My friends which do you want? Which do you think God has for you? It is the Covenant, the power of the promise that gives us future love and passion.

I have decided that the problem in marriage today is not that we have aimed too high and failed, I think we have aimed too low and reached our goal. We think marriage is about being happy, being self-fulfilled and a non-ending romance. The problem is when we have this it is fleeting. It like so much of our consumer lives comes and goes.

Let's aim higher as followers of Jesus. Marriage is about companionship. Marriage is about displaying the gospel and letting the gospel work in us. Marriage is about the power of the covenant. There is power in the promise. When we realize this we not only have a healthy marriage, we more importantly glorify God and that just like everything else as Christians is what our lives are about.



TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH
RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

Trinity Baptist Church

4815 Six Forks Rd * Raleigh, NC 27609 * (919) 787-3740



TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH
RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

Till Death Do Us Part - Having a Purposeful Marriage

Matthew 19:1-14, Ephesians 5:21-33



In his book, *The Meaning of Marriage*, Pastor Tim Keller writes:

"I'm tired of listening to sentimental talks on marriage. At weddings, in church, and in Sunday school, much of what I've heard on the subject has as much depth as a Hallmark card. While marriage is many things, it is anything but sentimental. Marriage is glorious but hard. It's a burning joy and strength, and yet it is also blood, sweat, and tears, humbling defeats and exhausting victories. No marriage I know more than a few weeks old could be described as a fairy tale come true. Therefore, it is not surprising that the only phrase in Paul's famous discourse on marriage in Ephesians 5 that many couples can relate to is verse 32, printed above. Sometimes you fall into bed, after a long, hard day of trying to understand each other, and you can only sigh: "This is all a profound mystery!" At times, your marriage seems to be an unsolvable puzzle, a maze in which you feel lost."

Excerpt From: Timothy Keller. "The Meaning of Marriage."

Maybe you feel that way about marriage. It was much harder work than anyone told you. Maybe the only thing we can say when we look across the table or roll over in bed is this is a profound mystery. Robin and I met in college and were married three years later. We did not grow up together. We only met, fell in love and married. There were times we used to laugh when we were first married that we would look at each other and say to ourselves "who are you? How did we get here? Where did you come from? You are my husband/wife" It just seemed a little odd. There was a profound mystery.

Today we are beginning a series on the topic "Made in God's Image." We are going to be looking at various topics over the next four weeks. Today we are going to be considering the idea of the Biblical purpose of marriage. Next week, we will celebrate with our children as they give leadership. On the 15th of February, Valentine's Day Weekend, we will be focusing on the physical relationship within

marriage and our children will be exiting during the service to have a special time of worship. We will finish our series with the topic of the wholeness of singleness.

As we begin today, I think I need to make a few opening comments to set the tone for what I am going to say. First, let us acknowledge that in our family of faith, here at Trinity, we have people who fine themselves in all situations in regards to marriage. We have those who are married and some are newlyweds and some who have been married for decades. We have those who are engaged and we have those who are divorced. We have those who are divorced and remarried. We have people who are single adults by choice and may remain so by choice. We have those who are widowed and find themselves in a place they never thought they would be... without a spouse. We have those in our congregation who are cohabitating and have chosen not to marry for various reasons. This is our family. Like every family we run the gamut when it comes to relationships. We need to say up front that no matter what your experience has been or will be, we love you as a part of this family of faith. Here in this place there is grace as we try our best to teach what the Bible says about this important topic.

We also affirm today that God wants for us what is best. So, no matter our situation and experience we can be assured that God wants what is best and sometimes we discover that what is best is not what we have chosen.

We also affirm that singleness is not some how a lesser choice. In fact, Jesus chose singleness and the Apostle Paul chose singleness, and even in 1 Corinthians 7 believing that Jesus second coming was near he wished that everyone could just embrace singleness for the cause of the gospel. So, if you choose singleness or singleness is your current state, you should in no means feel lesser in the family of faith and the church. So, today we are going to look at God's purpose for marriage and marriage is a gift of God for us and to us and should be received as such. Thus, it needs to glorify God just like other areas of our lives and relationships. But let us acknowledge that marriage is not a gift

TRINITY PULPIT

for all. The Apostle Paul states in regard to marriage in Romans 7:7 "I wish that all men were as I am, but each man has his own gift from God: one has this gift, another has that."

Let us look for a few moments at the purpose of this gift of marriage. The first thought I want us to consider is the thought of companionship. God grants to us marriage for companionship. God determines that it is not good for man to be alone. In the creation story from Genesis 1, and then Genesis 2, we find the creation of man and woman. There are some interesting comments made in these creation accounts that gives us insight into the depth of God's love for us and our need for companionship.

In the first chapter of Genesis, the creation of man and woman is described this way:

"Then God said let us make man in our own image... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Genesis 1:26-27

What we find in this first account is that God, the Triune God, the majestic God, as denoted in the plural "let us make," creates man. The general term for humanity's origin. The term refers to the ground or earthly substance. God creates human beings and God creates them as male and female. Both are created in the image of God and both are given rule and dominion. Genesis 1 tells us God created man and woman both in God's image.

Genesis 2 of course is a more poetic and narrative account of this creation. In Genesis 2, God first creates the man and places the man into Garden to care for it, but God comes to a conclusion that it is not good for man to be alone. God then parades all the animals God has created in front of the man and then man gives names to all the animals and thus, participates in God's creative and naming acts. But for the man, Adam, no suitable helper was found. There was still something missing. After all that God had created something was still missing. God made man fall into a sleep, the word means stupor, and took from the man's rib or from the man's side and then made woman from the man. This story of creation is much more intentional and painstaking than that we find in Genesis 1.

Then God brought the woman to the man and said "Ta Da!" The man is so overcome with joy he waxes poetic "This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." In other words, "we belong together." Then we find that first thought of marriage that Jesus would quote in Matthew "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh. Then man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame."

What we have described in Genesis 1 and 2 is God's

creation of man and woman, male and female for each other. This relationship of marriage, described here as uniting with one another and one flesh, is the picture of the intentional act of God to give to us an intimate and deep relationship with another that in some ways is beyond description. Here is what we can surmise from the creation story about marriage.

Marriage is a gift from God. It is good. It is about deep companionship. It is about a relationship where we can lay ourselves bare before each other, and there is no shame. There is in that statement freedom and grace between the man and the woman.

I do want to push this word suitable helper for just a moment. The term means one who is like unto him. Literally it means, "set before him." Like in her he sees his own image." There is a sense that the woman helps the man not only in the role of humanity and God's plan, but also helps the man see himself as he is. In other words, there is a completeness that comes to the man's own self in the creation of the woman.

Marriage then, has as its root in creation of the uniting of a man and a woman in a relationship of companionship, where there is equality with each other and before God, and where there is a freedom to be fully oneself with the other. What a gift.

The first purpose of marriage is for companionship, with a second purpose, according to the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5, is to reveal the gospel out of servant hood toward another. Interestingly we read this passage from the Apostle Paul and what we take away from it is that husbands should be like Christ and wives should be like the church. That is true but why is that true? Is that true so we know how to treat each other, or is it true so that in marriage we may model to the world what God has done in Christ? In other words, our marriages are not about us, but ultimately about God's glory. Our marriages are a way for us to express to the world this is how Christ loves the church and the church loves its Christ.

If we read this passage in its fullness, Paul concludes with this statement. This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church. Then he adds, however, this does inform you how to treat one another. "Husbands love your wife and wives show respect to your husbands." So Paul is saying yes, this passage does inform us on how to treat each other, but this is more than that. Paul is saying our marriages have the opportunity to actually display to the world the gospel. More so, marriage more than any other relationship molds the gospel in us.

Here is what I mean. First of all, marriage is hard work and takes effort. It must be a relationship where love, not sentimentality, but real love is a choice. In marriage we have to choose to love each other. In our vows we

say we will love you in good and bad, in sickness and in health, whether rich or whether we are poor. Till death do us part.

In marriage vows we say we know things are going to change. We know our lives are going to have ups and downs. We know we are going to have celebration and disappointments, but we are going to love each other regardless. That is the gospel. God loved us in spite of our flaws. God loves us no matter what we do. God loves us in a sacrificial way putting us before Self. God loves us through all the changes of our lives. God gives to us because of love, the freedom to try and fail and yet, remain in relationship.

Marriage is our best opportunity to model this to the world. It is our best relationship to model acceptance, love, and forgiveness.

This is done through one single word and that is submission. Submission to God and submission to each other. The Apostle Paul begins this section with "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." The submission and sacrificial language we find in Ephesians 5 is contained in the concept that we as Christians want to follow God and give God glory more than anything else. Thus, in our marriage we definitely want this to occur. So because we submit to God we submit to one another. The husband out of great sacrificial love makes the greatest act of submission. If this passage teaches about the husband as leader it is this lesson, he is the greatest sacrifice. The woman submits as the church to Christ. The act is a loving one that is done voluntarily, and not out of force. Out of response to the sacrificial love of the husband, the wife willingly and happily also submits to her husband.

Now remember Paul's main point is to model the gospel with marriage, but he does say husbands ought to love their wives like they love themselves, and wives should show respect to their husbands.

Marriage then has the purpose to not only form Christlikeness in us, but also for us to express Christlikeness to the others.

"Recently, New York Times columnist Tara Parker-Pope wrote an article entitled "The Happy Marriage Is the 'Me' Marriage":

The notion that the best marriages are those that bring satisfaction to the individual may seem counterintuitive. After all, isn't marriage supposed to be about putting the relationship first? Not anymore. For centuries, marriage

*was viewed as an economic and social institution, and the emotional and intellectual needs of the spouses were secondary to the survival of the marriage itself. But in modern relationships, people are looking for a partnership, and they want partners who make their lives more interesting. . . [who] help each of them attain valued goals.*²⁶

This change has been revolutionary, and Parker-Pope lays it out unashamedly. Marriage used to be a public institution for the common good, and now it is a private arrangement for the satisfaction of the individuals. Marriage used to be about us, but now it is about me." *Excerpt From: Timothy Keller. "The Meaning of Marriage."*

THE COVENANT OR PROMISE OF MARRIAGE MAKES US WORK AT IT. WITHOUT THE COMMITMENT, WITHOUT THE PAPER, WITHOUT THE LEGAL HASSLE, WITHOUT THE TROUBLE OF SEPARATION AND DIVORCE, WE WOULD QUICKLY MOVE IN AND OUT OF RELATIONSHIPS.

How foreign this view of a me-centered marriage is to the marriage described in Ephesians 5. The marriage in Ephesians 5 is about servant hood, sacrifice, forgiveness, and putting the other first. In other words, it reflects what God did for us in Christ and our response to God's love in Christ.

This is a hard question we have to answer. In what ways do our marriages, which are supposed to

be Christian marriages, reflect the servant and sacrificial nature of the gospel? When others look at our marriage do they see a reflection of Christ's love for us as we are, and Christ's forgiveness in our failures? We might ask it this way... in our marriages is there the evidence of the fruit of God's spirit?

Marriage is a gift that grants to us companionship and marriage is an opportunity for us to experience the love of the gospel and to model the love of the gospel.

A third purpose for marriage is to display covenant. We know that God covenants to love us, and that God's love for us is not altered by our love or lack of love for God. God covenants with us to love us. Marriage is neither a contract nor an agreement... it is a covenant. It is a vow to love when the other is lovable and when they are not. Not only this, but for those of us who are Christians we vow to each other and to God. Thus there is a vertical and horizontal part of the Christian marriage. This is why Jesus sets the Pharisees straight in Matthew. God allowed divorce and your ways because of your rebellion, but here is what God intended. God intended one man, one woman for their whole lives.

The Covenant of marriage does five things for us. First it rescues us from a consumer relationship in marriage. A consumer relationship is when we use people for our benefit and when we are no longer benefitting we move to someone else who can provide for us what we have convinced ourselves what we need or deserve.