

*Marriage as God Designed It: Genesis 2:18-25*

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Sunday, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015

I'm planning for this to be a 10 week sermon series on God's Meaning in Marriage. We'll start this morning in Genesis 2: Marriage as God Designed It. Next week will be Genesis 3: Marriage in a Fallen World. Then we'll do a couple studies in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, one from Proverbs and one from Song of Solomon. And don't worry parents, I'll make sure that's age appropriate for everyone here. I want to make sure we all recognize what a beautiful thing God has done in creating marriage, creating it to be a blessing to men and women, and creating it to be a parable of Christ's passionate and steadfast love for His bride.

Then we'll move to the New Testament and have a couple sermons that may not seem like they fit in a series on marriage. One will be on the gift of singleness, from 1 Corinthians 7. I think that's an important subject to include in this series, because God doesn't call every believer to be married. To many He gives the gift of singleness. And we all need to have an understanding of God's design for singleness as well as His design for marriage. And then a sermon on God's view of homosexual activity. That, obviously, is a very controversial topic in our current context, and it's a big part of what prompted this sermon series. In light of the confusion in our culture as well as the confusion in the American evangelical church, we need to have a clear understanding of what God says positively about marriage as He designed it (and that will be my main emphasis throughout this series). But we also need to have a clear understanding of what God says is a deviation from and a perversion of what He designed. So we'll take a week to study verse-by-verse through part of Romans 1 to be clear on that.

Finally, we'll spend 2 weeks in Ephesians 5 and 2 weeks in 1 Peter 3 looking at God's instructions to husbands and wives in their particular roles in the marriage relationship.

Well, now as we begin this series on marriage I want to emphasize again that this is not only for those who are married. This is for all of us. There will certainly be points of application directed toward husbands and wives, but the vision of marriage presented in the Bible is something that every person should behold. If you're single, don't think that the biblical passages on marriage are irrelevant to you! They are immensely relevant to you, and not just because you might be married someday. The

portrait of marriage that God paints in the pages of Scripture is important for each and every one of us because marriage is ultimately about Christ and the church. That's exactly what Paul writes in Ephesians 5:32. Speaking of marriage, and immediately following a quotation from Genesis 2:24, he writes, "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."

So whether you are married or single, it is of utmost importance that we as a church understand what marriage is about, because marriage is a pointer to Christ's relationship with His bride, the church. What an awesome thing this is! The institution of marriage is something so wonderful, so profound, so mysterious, so glorious, that it is infinitely bigger than my marriage or your marriage or your desire to be married or your disdain for marriage and bitterness toward it. Whatever your impression of marriage is, whether you are married, single, divorced, whether your marriage is going well, or if your marriage is a disaster right now, I want us to understand what God designed marriage to be, and what it is designed to communicate about Christ and the church.

We'll begin this morning by looking at Marriage as God Designed It in the very first chapters of the Bible. There are two main things I want to emphasize. First of all, I want us to see God's beautiful complementary design for man and woman, husband and wife. I want us to see in creation, before the Fall, how God assigned specific roles to the man and to the woman which are equally important and honorable and also gloriously different and complementary. These differences make plain the fact that should be so obvious, the fact that marriage is intended by God to be between one man and one woman. There is a beautiful complementarity that God ordained, a complementarity that is impossible between 2 men or 2 women. In creation God made Adam and Eve. He didn't make 2 Adams or 2 Eves. Marriage as God designed it is one man and one woman, bringing together their unique differences into a lifelong intimate union. The second thing I want to emphasize this morning is that lifelong aspect, the permanence of this God-ordained institution. Marriage is not something you sign up for and then you quit on when things get difficult. Marriage is to be lifelong, by God's design.

## **Equality**

Let's start in **Genesis 1:26-27**, because here we see the absolute equality of man and woman. In chapter 1:26-27 God says, "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.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” A fundamental thing we learn from the story of creation is that ALL human beings are equal before God. No one is more important than anyone else. No matter what your age (from the unborn baby to the elderly person in a nursing home) or gender or ethnicity or intelligence level or financial status, we all have equal worth and value as creatures made in God’s image.

The New Testament makes this point as well, in verses like Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” This verse stresses our equality in Christ.

Before we begin to talk about the differences between men and women, it’s important that we firmly establish this point of equality. Because it’s a sad truth that many men have taken what the Bible teaches about role differences between men and women, and have used that teaching to domineer over their wives and even abuse their wives. Oh, what sinful creatures we are, that we take God’s good and beautiful plans and pervert them in such horrific ways to serve our sinful passions. Shame on us when that happens! In order to rightly understand God’s design for male and female, we first have to understand the equality between male and female. God assigns distinct roles to each gender, but that does NOT mean (and I want to be as emphatic as I can be on this point) . . . it does NOT mean that one gender is better than the other. Just because the man is to be the leader does not mean he is better, or more important, or smarter, or more competent. In fact, he may be (and often is), *less* intelligent, *less* competent in many areas, *less* spiritual, and yet he is still commanded by God to lead and provide for and protect his wife and children.

We are equal in essence, and distinct in role. Men and women have the same value and worth, and in God’s good plan we are given different roles in the marriage relationship. A deep and profound illustration of this is the relationship of God the Father and God the Son. The Father and the Son are EQUAL in essence. They are equal. They share the same essence. Jesus said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:31). But they also have different roles. They relate to one another as Father and Son. The Father is the head, and the Son submits to the Father. 1 Corinthians 11:3 shows the similarity between that relationship and the husband / wife relationship. Paul writes, “But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.” God the Father is the head over

Christ. The Father and Son are equal, yet function in different roles in the relationship. Likewise, the husband is head over his wife. They are equal, and yet they are given different roles.

Hopefully now you're convinced that differences in role do not mean differences in importance or worth. Many who disagree with the biblical teaching on manhood and womanhood would object at this very point. They would say that you cannot have differences in role without implying inequality. They would say if the man is to be the leader and the wife is to submit to him, then that necessarily means the woman is inferior to the man. But that idea, that objection, is totally foreign to the Bible. It comes from somewhere else, but not the Bible. Because in God's Word there is equality and role distinction both in the marriage relationship and in the Trinity. The Trinity is such a clear and persuasive example of how equality and role distinction can be present in the same relationship. The Father and Son are equal and different. And likewise, men and women are equal and different. Equal in essence, distinct in role.

Now let's look at Genesis 2 where we'll continue to see the equality between men and women, and we'll also see God's design for their differences. There are several indications here that God created the man to be the leader and the woman to be the helper.

### **God Made the Man First**

The first observation is that God made the man first (in verse 7), and then He made the woman (in verse 22). And we might not think that's very significant. After all, the animals were created before Adam, and that certainly doesn't imply that the animals are head over man. But in the creation of humankind, who are entirely distinct from animals, God chose to make the man before the woman. It's interesting to think about this. He could have done this differently. He could have made the woman first and then the man. Or He could have created two of them simultaneously. He could have made the man and the woman in the very same instant. He is all-powerful, after all. So He could have done this however He wanted to. So we should take note of how He chose to do this. He chose to reveal His design for male and female in the order of creation. In this act of creation He was revealing His plan for male headship and leadership. In the New Testament Paul points to this order as a reason for male leadership in the church. In **1 Timothy 2:12** he writes, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet." And then he gives the reason in verse 13, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve."

Now that prohibition does not mean that women cannot use their gifts or cannot teach. There are endless ways that women can and should use their spiritual gifts for the benefit of the church. And in many cases that will involve a teaching function. I'm so grateful for the women who teach children's Sunday School classes in our church and lead women's Bible studies and lead women's ministries and serve the church and minister in so many important ways.

What Paul is instructing in 1 Timothy 2 is that women should not teach or have authority OVER men. That's the focus of the prohibition. And then he points to the order of creation as the basis for this. So if we had a woman serving as one of the elders in this congregation, or if we had a woman preach here in this Sunday morning gathering, that would violate the order of creation. It would go against God's design for the roles of men and women. And I'm not going to discuss that further this morning, but I am planning to teach a Sunday School class this fall that will deal with the questions of how we interpret and apply passages like 1 Timothy 2. I hope you'll join us for that.

So we see first of all the significance of the fact that the man was created first and then the woman. In the order of creation we see God revealing His plan for the man to be the leader and for the woman to be the helper.

### **A Helper Fit for Him**

The second observation is in Genesis 2:18, "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him.'" Do you recall how chapter 1 recorded God's delight in His creation? Over and over (7 times to be exact), the text says, "God saw that it was good" (vv. 4, 9, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). The last time, in verse 31, it says, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was VERY good."

After hearing that refrain over and over, we come to chapter 2:18, and this statement is startling. "It is NOT good." Something about God's creation is said to be NOT good. And what's not good? The fact that Adam is alone. He is without a human companion. He doesn't have an equal. None of the animals are equal to him. They aren't FIT for him. So God says He will make a helper fit for Adam.

God's good creation was not complete until he made the woman. He created light, and it was good. He separated the waters and the land, and it was good. He made the sun and moon and stars, and it was good. He made all the animals, and it was

good. He created Adam, and He saw that Adam was by himself (even though he was surrounded by animals). And God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him.” In the goodness of God’s creation, the absence of the woman was NOT good.

### **An Implication for Single Men**

There’s a clear implication here for single men. For some of you, it may be that God has called you to a life of singleness for the purpose of focusing solely on the work of the kingdom. And that is just as much of a gift as marriage is a gift (Paul writes about this in 1 Corinthians 7:7, and I’ll be preaching a sermon on singleness later in this series).

A great problem in our day, however, is that many single men are staying single, and they’re staying single *not* for that reason. It’s not for the cause of Christ that they are feeling content in their singleness. For many young men, it’s a matter of immaturity and lack of commitment. In addition to that, the world tells you that marriage is miserable and confining. That is a motivator for me in wanting to preach this series. I want to combat that mindset and show the beauty of God’s design in marriage. What kind of message does it send when people refer to their wife as “the old ball and chain”? You don’t want one of those, do you? Put it off as long as possible. That’s the world’s message. Sleep around, enjoy life, enjoy your independence, make everything about you, and at all cost avoid tying the knot.

Here’s a place where the culture and the Bible collide. Men, if you don’t sense that God has given you the gift of singleness and celibacy, then you should be very intentional in your life about pursuing marriage. And that doesn’t just mean looking for someone to marry. It starts with growing and maturing into the kind of man whom a godly woman will want to marry. You should be pursuing marriage. It should be a great passion of yours. You should be reading books on biblical manhood and marriage. You should be asking godly men to disciple you. You should be working a job that can support a family (or getting the training you need in order to do that). It is not good for you to be alone.

A book that I would commend to you on this subject is entitled ***The Masculine Mandate***, by **Richard Phillips**, a pastor in South Carolina. Listen to what he says about this. “As a result of a male culture that fears marriage, men in their twenties and thirties slide into sexual sin . . . and cultivate antisocial behaviors that perpetuate emotional and social immaturity. Today, when

God looks on single males and says, ‘Not good,’ He undoubtedly has in mind a long list of truly ‘unfit helpers,’ among them the pornography, video games, sports obsessions, and empty pizza boxes that are intrinsic to so many young adult male lives, even among Christians. Our society tells young adult men to deprive themselves of God’s provision for their physical, emotional, and sexual needs so they can remain as immature and self-absorbed as possible, for as long as possible. You know what the Bible says about this: it just is not good.”<sup>1</sup>

I hope that will be an encouragement to single men to recognize the blessing of marriage, and I hope it will be a motivation to set your life on a course to pursue a Christ-centered and God-glorifying marriage.

### **A Helper Fit for Him**

What God does next in Genesis 2 is designed to help Adam feel the reality of what God has just called “not good.” God has just declared, “It is not good that the man should be alone,” and now He wants Adam to realize the truth of that statement. God wants Adam to feel the need for a companion, the need for a helper fit for him, equal to him.

So God brings all the animals to Adam in order for Adam to name them. Verse 20 says, “The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him.” A couple things are going on here. Adam was exercising his dominion over creation, as God had instructed him to do. He was to rule the world for God, and his naming of the animals was one way in which this played out.

But the other thing that’s happening here is that Adam is realizing the inadequacy of the animal kingdom. The animals are wonderful. They are each beautiful and unique, but none of them are fit for the man. They don’t share his essence. They aren’t equal to him. Dogs are *not* intended to be man’s best friend. They can be great pets. But they’re never going to meet the relational needs like a spouse can.

Think about Adam’s loneliness as he came to the end of this task. He had named all the animals, and not one of those animals was a suitable helper for him. Now, in a much deeper way, he felt the need for a companion. He desired fellowship with one of his own kind.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard D. Phillips, *The Masculine Mandate: God’s Calling to Men*, page 60.

In that phrase, “helper fit for him,” we see both the equality and the difference between the man and the woman. She is fit for him, meaning she is equal to him. And she is also created as a helper for him, which clearly demonstrates a difference in role. A couple things to clarify here . . . Just because it says the woman is a helper to the man, it doesn’t mean the man doesn’t help the woman. There is certainly a mutual helping that goes on in any healthy marriage. After all, the headship described in Ephesians 5 is a headship that manifests itself in sacrificial love. But still, the helping role of the wife does point to the complementary roles in the marriage—the husband leading and the wife supporting and following and helping him.

And another thing to clarify is this concept of helping. Don’t think that the word helper implies inferiority in any way. The Bible refers to God as our helper in several places. Does that mean God is inferior to us? I don’t think so! So the word certainly doesn’t imply a lower status at all. But in the context of Genesis 2 it does emphasize God’s design for male headship and leadership, and the woman’s role of coming alongside him and supporting that leadership. Again, equal but different.

### **Woman Made from the Man**

A third indicator of these roles is seen in how God made the woman. We see this in verses 21-22. What an amazing miracle this was! “So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.” Again, the equality between man and woman is seen in the fact that the woman was made *from* the man. God made her from the man’s rib. And then He brought her to the man. The Father brought His daughter to be married to this man. It was the first wedding, the first marriage. In verse 23 when Adam woke up he was elated to meet this woman. He was no longer alone. “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman (*ishah*), because she was taken out of Man (*ish*).”

Adam names the woman, another indicator of his God-given headship, and he gives her a name that is like his own, pointing to their equality. He is *ish*, and he calls her *ishah*. He derives her name from his own, and thus shows the similarity and equality between them.



## **Man Leaves Father and Mother**

Fourthly and finally, in verse 24 we see another example of the headship that is assigned to men. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” It’s the man who takes the initiative in the marriage relationship. It’s the man who leaves his parents in order to hold fast to his wife. The marriage relationship now takes priority over the relationship with parents, and the husband needs to take the lead in separating from the household of his father and mother and establishing the new household with his wife.

This is very practical instruction, because it’s important for couples to leave and cleave. Young couples need to distance themselves somewhat from their parents in order to solidify the new relationship. The man needs to leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife. Husbands and wives shouldn’t be constantly running back to their parents every time there’s a conflict, or they need help. That can be unhealthy and can hinder the development of the new marriage. The point here is that it’s the man who should be initiating the leaving and cleaving that establishes the new marriage relationship.

We’ve seen in these ways that God created men and woman to be equal but different. We are equally created in the image of God, and we also have distinct, complementary roles.

## **The Permanence of Marriage**

The other thing I want to highlight from this passage of Scripture is the permanence of marriage. Look at the words in verse 24, “hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” What does that mean? It means there is a new union. A new family is formed. You come from your father and mother, and there is a blood kinship there. But now the man distances himself from his family of origin and unites himself with his wife, establishing a new blood kinship, a new family.

The one flesh relationship is expressed in the new husband and wife coming together in sexual union. In 1:28 they receive the instruction to “be fruitful and multiply,” and that happens through this amazing thing God created called sex. He created sex for marriage, not to be used and abused and marketed and experimented with. God created sex to be an expression of and symbolic of the overall bond between a husband and his wife. The two become one.

In 2:23 Adam says of Eve, she is “flesh of my flesh.” Now we read in the very next verse (v. 24) that the man and his wife become “one flesh.” This is a powerful union, a powerful bond that is created. This is why sex is for marriage, and why sex shouldn’t be fooled around with outside of marriage. Because the one-flesh union is meant to be permanent. It’s for life. It’s for one man and one woman to enjoy within marriage for a lifetime.

Listen to what Jesus says in **Mark 10:7-9**. First, He quotes Genesis 2:24, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” Then Jesus adds, “So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” The leaving and cleaving and one flesh union of marriage is to be lifelong. That’s God’s design. So if you are married, it is God who joined you together with your spouse. And who are you to separate what God has joined together? God created marriage, and this is what He created it to be.

And what a beautiful thing it is. Genesis 2 concludes with a statement about the purity and innocence of this first marriage. Verse 25 says, “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” After the Fall their nakedness was a source of shame. Division and competition and conflict and manipulation and blame all invaded the marriage relationship. But before the Fall there was none of that. There was nothing to hide, nothing to be ashamed of, no threat of being ridiculed or put down. They lived in perfect peace and harmony and openness.

### **Christ and the Church**

Next week we will look at marriage in a fallen world in Genesis 3. Before we conclude today, though, I want to direct our attention again to Ephesians 5, where Paul quotes Genesis 2:24, and where he also reveals the deepest meaning of marriage.

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

This passage tells us why marriage exists. Marriage exists to be a drama of Christ’s relationship to the church. Sadly, most marriages are a very poor example of that reality. But the glimmers of beauty that we can see in good marriages are a portrait of Christ’s love for the church and the church’s glad submission to Christ. Your marriage, if you’re married, and my marriage, is intended to be a living testimony of the Gospel. Husbands, we are

to love our wives sacrificially, giving up our selfish desires. We are to lead our wives with kindness and gentleness, seeking to sanctify them. And as we do that we will reflect the glory of the Gospel, that Jesus laid down His life for us, and sanctifies us, and will one day present us to himself in splendor.

Wives, as you submit to your husbands you will reflect the glad submission that Christians should demonstrate toward the Lord. This is the meaning of marriage. It is a pointer to something much greater. It is a pointer to Christ, the Bridegroom, and His Bride, the church. Revelation tells us that Christ is coming for His bride, and when that happens everything that marriage points to will be fulfilled. In fact, in heaven there won't even be human marriages (none of us will be married in heaven; see Mark 12:25), because the reality to which marriage points will then be the complete focus.

May we all honor the institution of marriage as we look to that great reality that marriage points to. And for those who are married, let us strive to live out God's model for marriage that is evident in how God designed it.