

Three Biblical Purposes for Marriage

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In thinking recently about the sanctity of marriage and God's design for marriage, I thought of three biblical purposes for marriage. I want to lay them out in this brief write-up so as to direct your heart and mind to the sufficient and clear Word of God so as to hear what God has to say about the glorious and beautiful institution that He created — marriage.

I. A Biblical Purpose for Marriage is ILLUSTRATION.

In the opening pages of the Bible, God created a man in His image and commanded the man to give names to all the animals that God had created. In doing so, Adam must have felt an overwhelming lack; an omission of sorts. He had no companion just as the other animals had. God then created a woman from the man, brought her to the man and he named her Eve. God then performed the very first wedding ceremony in the history of the world between one man, Adam, and one woman, Eve. They covenanted together as companions. God decreed that a man must leave his father and mother to be joined to his wife and they thus become one flesh. This is the first wedding, the first marriage, the first wedding vows, and thus God's design for marriage. All this happened in a pre-fall state (cf. Genesis 2:18-25).

The Apostle Paul writes in the first century AD and quotes this text from Genesis 2:24 and he explicates by saying that this was a mystery. The mystery in the Bible is not something that is a riddle or hard to understand. Rather, the biblical idea of mystery refers to something that once was not revealed but now God has revealed it clearly. God says in Ephesians 5:32 that this "mystery" of a man leaving father and mother and joining to his wife to become one flesh (cf. Gen 2:24) is actually a living, breathing, walking, visible *illustration*. That is, it is a reference to Christ and the Church.

Ephesians 5:32 makes unmistakably clear that since the very first marriage of all time — that between Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:18-25) — God has designed the marriage institution to be a living *illustration* of Christ's relationship with His bride, the Church. Marriage is illustrative of the gospel of Jesus Christ. A biblical marriage is the greatest, the most beautiful, the most visible, and the clearest portrait of the glorious gospel.

When a man and a woman leave their parents and, thus, their old lives in a sense, they join to another in a lifelong covenant, a pact, a life of serving another person. So it is with the gospel of Jesus Christ. When God saves a person, he leaves his old life of sin, rebellion, and self worship to join himself to another, to follow another, to submit to another, to serve another — namely, Jesus Christ. Just as marriage was designed by God to be lifelong ("till death do us part"), so is the relationship between Christ and His bride. It can never fail. He will never divorce His bride, the Church. Christ died for her, to redeem her, to rescue her, to pardon her, to purify her, to reconcile her, to glorify her.

And as great as marriage is, it is temporary; that is, confined to this life. But not so with the marriage of Jesus Christ to His bride! This is an eternal union, an unbreakable bond, a covenant of companionship that shall never cease! Marriage thus illustrates the better, the more eternal and intimate relationship between Christ and His bride, the Church.

2. A Biblical Purpose for Marriage is SANCTIFICATION.

God calls husbands to fulfill the high calling and supreme privilege of loving their own wives in the same way that Jesus Christ has loved His bride, the Church. Christ gave up His very own life for His bride and so husbands must strive to do the same. This, in fact, is what biblical love is — an ongoing, fervent, biblical self-giving of oneself to another person in spite of how they respond. Christ loves His Church perfectly, sacrificially, supremely, and eternally (Eph 5:25)!

Christ gave Himself up for the Church so that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory. That means that she would have no spot or wrinkle or any such thing but that she might be holy and blameless (Eph 5:26). This example of Christ sanctifying His bride is the illustration that Paul provides to show how husbands ought to sanctify their own wives. The greatest tool that God gives to wives for their own sanctification is their husbands. And the opposite is also true: the greatest tool that God uses to sanctify the husband is his own dear wife. We must note that sanctification in marriage is inextricably connected with a marital “washing each other in the Word”. The husbands must wash their wives. God has designed that this sanctify the wife and prepare her for glory. If a husband does not wash his wife then he neglects the greatest God-given tool at his disposal to grow, sanctify, and mature his wife in Christlikeness.

We could also mention that the church, the pastor, the women’s bible study leader, and other ladies groups are not mentioned here. It is primarily the husband’s role to sanctify his wife. Others can — and should! — help encourage a woman and stimulate her to greater love and good works. But the primary responsibility for Christian growth and spiritual strengthening comes as her own husband deliberately, daily, intentionally, gently, tenderly, and instructively washes her in the Word of God.

3. A Biblical Purpose for Marriage is PROCREATION.

God commanded the man and the woman whom He had created to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen 1:28). Then, after the worldwide flood, God told Noah and his sons to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen 9:1). In fact, just a little bit later God tells them to be fruitful and multiply and *populate the earth abundantly* and multiply in it” (Gen 9:7). Children are a gift from the Lord and the fruit of the womb is a reward (Ps 127:3). The man who has many children is blessed (Ps 127:5). A blessing that God gives to women is the bearing of children (1 Tim 2:15). Young women are called by God to get married and bear children (1 Tim 5:14).

Thus, a purpose of marriage is to reproduce, to engage in sexual relations so as to enjoy the God-given miracle, the hand-crafting of a new little life (a baby) in the womb of the mother so that when the baby is born the parents have the distinct, consuming, and blessed responsibility of teaching and disciplining that child in the ways of God.

God has ordained that all sexual relations occur within the bounds of a monogamous, heterosexual marriage between one man and one woman. In fact, it is only biologically possible to reproduce when a man and a woman come together sexually. God has designed the male and female organs to reproduce when they come together in intimacy. And God has also given stipulations that sexual enjoyment and sexual pleasure should happen frequently yet *only* within the bounds of marriage (1 Thess 4:3-8; Song of Solomon 2:7; 8:4; Pro 5:15-19).

A glorious blessing and benefit of marriage is the reproducing of children by a supernatural act of God when a man and a woman come together in marriage. And when that child is birthed, the parents are called to “nurture the children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). They are called to teach their children of the works and ways of God (Deut 4:10). In fact, it should be so regular that the parents should strive to create a context of learning about God at all times and in all places throughout daily life (Deut 6:4-9). Parents have the glorious responsibility of telling the children about God and teaching them to fear the Lord (Ps 34:11).

When these three purposes of marriage are examined we find that each of these points can *only* happen when one man and one woman are married. Homosexuality distorts the beauty of marriage in every single respect.

It is impossible for homosexual relationships to illustrate the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ is the bridegroom and we are His bride. He is our Head, our authority, our leader and we as His bride submit to Him, follow Him and obey Him. Egalitarianism and homosexuality and the feminist movement mar the illustrative impact and beauty of physical marriage picturing and pointing to Jesus Christ and His Church.

It is impossible for homosexual relationships to be sanctified because those who engage in ongoing lifestyles of homosexuality reveal themselves to be unsaved and thus cannot be sanctified. They first need to be justified! They need God’s supernatural, monergistic, regenerating work to take place in their own hearts *before* they can be sanctified. Only a justified person can be (and will most certainly be!) growing in sanctification.

It is impossible, of course, for homosexual relationships to procreate. It cannot happen. It distorts the beautiful union between a man and a woman whereby their own physical organs come together and can reproduce by God’s power. Thus, homosexuality is wholly unable to reproduce which is a purpose of God’s design for marriage.

May we as believers cling to God’s most glorious purposes in marriage between one man and one woman. May we praise God for His infinite wisdom, transforming grace, and sanctifying love so that we may witness to the lost and present to them God’s design and purposes for the sacred, beautiful, illustrative, sanctifying and biblical purposes of marriage.