

“God’s Design for Marriage”

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Scriptural Foundation: Matthew 5:31-32, NIV

Divorce

³¹ *“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’* ³² *But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.”*

Marriage is a gift from God so magnificent, so praise worthy, and so wonderful that our human minds cannot fully appreciate it nor properly cherish it. That statement is very remarkable to the modern ear. If you hear that statement and you think to yourself, “Whatever!”, or you think to yourself, “Yeah, right! Maybe for some people”, then Jesus would call you to sit at His feet even as He called His Disciples in the 1st Century. The culture of Jesus' day had lost its lofty and high view of marriage. That culture’s view had, indeed, become the Disciples view and that is what often happens. The Disciples, the followers of Jesus, simply often adopted the prevalent view of the world around them. That was certainly true of these Disciples sitting at Jesus' feet in Galilee.

I believe that it has become even more difficult for followers of Jesus, in our own day, to comprehend and embrace the majesty of marriage. Ours is the day of great selfishness; a day in which personal autonomy is lauded as our very chief end and the greatest purpose for our existence. Today we are taught that the greatest goal in life is to learn to love oneself, don’t walk in anyone’s shadow, and depend upon oneself for personal fulfillment. To such a culture, God’s teaching concerning marriage is unintelligible; it makes no sense, and it is almost incomprehensible. Only God’s revelation can rescue us from deception and restore to us the glorious design that God created for marriage.

In Hebrews 13, God says very clearly,

⁴ Let marriage be held in honor among all...¹

To paraphrase that, we should value marriage like we value a precious jewel; esteem marriage like you would esteem the most highly respected, the wisest, most righteous person you know. We should cultivate the conviction that marriage is not to be handled casually or treated commonly, but rather we should honor it and revere it as though it carries the very glory of God within it.

Marriage is a priceless gift that glorifies God as the giver. My goal, in this study, is that our minds and our hearts will be in harmony with God’s mind and heart concerning marriage. If we accomplish this goal, I know that we will be out of step with the people around us. If we choose to accept this mission of returning to God’s lofty view of marriage, know that we will not be successful without a willingness to fight. We will have to fight against the accepted “norms” that this world places before you, in relationships and in media and in entertainment. You will also have to fight against your own feelings, feelings that long to justify autonomy and independence from God.

John Piper writes of the difficulty of this battle when he says, “I start with the assumption that our own sin and our own selfishness and cultural bondage make it almost impossible for us to feel the wonder of God’s purpose for marriage between a man and a woman. The fact that we live in a society that can even conceive of, let alone defend, two men or two women entering into a relationship, and with wildly inconceivability call it ‘marriage’ shows that the collapse of our culture into debauchery and barbarism and anarchy is probably not far away. I mention all of this in the hopes that it might possibly wake you up to consider a vision of marriage higher and deeper and stronger and more glorious than anything that this culture, or perhaps you yourself, ever imagined. The greatness and glory of marriage is beyond our ability to think or feel without Divine Revelation and without the illumining and awakening work of the Holy Spirit. The world cannot know what marriage is without learning it from God.” That is exactly true!

¹ English Standard Version (ESV)

Jesus teaches us an aspect of marriage in Matthew 5 and He makes a very straight-forward and difficult statement regarding divorce. He says,

³¹ *“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’”*

Jesus is combating the teaching of the Pharisees when they look in Deuteronomy 24 and they misunderstand it and they misread it.

¹ *“When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house...”*

The Pharisees said, “Moses’ teaching is that if a person wants to divorce his wife, at least he needs to go through the legal process. He cannot just say, ‘Be gone with you,’ and kick her out. He needs to go through the legal process, but if he goes through the legal process and a judge says, ‘Here is the certificate of divorce’, he has fulfilled the Law.”

Jesus comes to His Disciples and says, “I know that this is what you have been hearing and this is what you have been learning from the people you trust and respect, but it is a wrong view.” He goes on to say something shocking to the modern ear,

³² *“But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.”²*

Jesus has been teaching us about the righteousness that God requires and this context is very important for us to understand. In Verse 20, He says,

²⁰ *“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

Jesus is saying that unless our righteousness surpasses the kind of righteousness that the most moral, the most loving, and the most good person you know in life possesses, unless our righteousness surpasses that person’s we will not be able to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, because that person’s righteousness, who is the most moral, loving, kind, gentle, and truthful of human beings, their righteousness is not enough to be accepted by God.

Jesus is pointing us to the fact that we need a righteousness that we cannot reach in our own power and that we cannot climb a ladder of works and of obedience to God’s Law and somehow grab ahold of. That is the message of the Gospel.

In Romans, the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of God’s Spirit, explains very clearly to us this Gospel, wherein a righteousness is available to us as a free gift from God; a righteousness that we need and a righteousness that, indeed, does surpass the righteousness of the Pharisees.

In Romans 3, God’s Word says,

²¹ *But now a righteousness from God, apart from the Law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.*

Jesus has been explaining the righteousness to which the Law and the Prophets testify. He is giving us six illustrations of this kind of righteousness, and as we come to these, we realize that that righteousness might be beyond our personal grasp. Jesus tells us that the Law and the Prophets testify to a complete, perfect, and whole righteousness. But, now He says that this righteousness is fully revealed and offered to us through Christ when He says, “This righteousness comes to us through faith in Jesus Christ and it comes to everyone who would believe.”³

² ESV

³ Romans 3:22

This is the remarkable gift behind the Gospel. We can possess a righteousness wherein we can know God and we can enjoy God and apart from this righteousness we would never know God and we would never be able to enjoy God and we would never be able to spend eternity with Him in worship. But, with this righteousness we possess the acceptance of God upon our lives; adoption into His family and Heaven itself, and a relationship with God. It comes to everyone who believes.

We need to ask ourselves this question of Jesus' words, "Do I possess this righteousness from God? Without it, nothing in God's Commandments will be of value because I have broken those Commandments. With it, I possess a true-heart righteousness that makes a real change in my being; that God's righteousness is not some sticker we apply to the lapel of our soul, but it is a righteousness that sinks in and permeates our lives so as to affect real change so that we can live different kinds of lives; lives that reflect the principles that Jesus brings to us," in Matthew 5:31-32.

The great application of this practical righteousness that Jesus brings to us today, which can be ours and becomes ours through faith in Jesus, is simply this: if you possess the righteousness from God in your heart, then you will remain faithful to the vows you made in the covenant of marriage. That is what this righteousness does.

In this study we will look at the design of marriage itself. I believe that in order for us to begin to understand Jesus' words in Matthew 5, and elsewhere in the Gospels, regarding divorce, we need to understand, first, the design of God behind marriage. It is only in our understanding of the big picture of marriage that the Scriptures give that there is sensibility to Jesus' strong and straight forward words about divorce.

We will see five descriptions of which God designs marriage to be. We will see that God designs marriage to be sacred and permanent and sanctifying and pleasing and uniting. Before we look at the design God has for marriage, let me clear the table of some questions that litter the surface and may keep us from listening and hearing what God has to say to us. These are questions that are natural to ask in regards to divorce.

The first question that may be asked by someone is, "Are divorced Christians second-class members of Christ's church? Are they on a different, lower tier because they have this as an aspect of their life?" The answer to that question is absolute not! The ground really is level at the foot of the cross and we all come to Christ as sinners in need of grace and as sinners absolutely, rightly, and justly condemned, and there is no place for self-righteousness or pride in Christ's church. When God accepts us, He accepts us wholly and those whom God accepts we accept wholly and completely and without division.

Another question that someone may ask is, "Can God bless Christians who have been divorced? As this has happened in my life is there any possibility of God's blessings? Can God bless a person who has been divorced and re-married?" Again, the answer to those questions is yes. God is the redeeming God. He is the One who takes messy, sinful situations and He redeems these situations for those who humble themselves. He brings exaltation to those who submit and lower themselves underneath His mighty hand.

Absolutely, God can bless a person wherever he or she might be.

Another question someone might ask is, "Are there biblical grounds for divorce?" We will discover that there are and they are very limited. In fact, there is only one biblical ground, I believe, that God gives for a believer to initiate the divorce.

The fourth question is, "How can we help another believer who is contemplating divorce? I know someone, I know a family member, I know a friend; how can I help them?" It is important that we love them in two ways. First, we love them by coming along side of them in the midst of their pain, listening to them, hugging on them, praying with them, and letting them know that we want to be their friend. It is vital for us to love them in that way that is very personal.

It is also vital that we love them by speaking the Truth of God's Word to them, even if that Truth will be rejected by them and sound very offensive to them. God's Word always brings blessing to those who embrace it and we do not wish to assume that the person is not going to embrace it and thereby not offer them the potential of God blessing. It is vital that we not move ourselves away from God's Truth in the midst of our love and our desire to bring comfort to one who is contemplating divorce.

God designs marriage, first, to be sacred. When I say “sacred” I primarily mean that the marriage relationship is uniquely designed by God to reveal His glory to mankind and to reveal, specifically, the saving glory of Jesus' love for His church. We hold marriage with great respect and reverence because it is the portrait and painting which God has given mankind to reflect and picture to others in this world His greatness, His goodness, and His glory.

We want to pay attention to the flow of this sermon as Jesus presents it. The flow will help us see that Jesus is teaching us the sacredness of marriage. Jesus begins this message by describing the inner character of the Christian and He gives us the eight Beatitudes. What happens in the heart of one who is receiving God's saving grace? They become poor in spirit; they become mourning over their own sin; they become meek and submissive to God; they hunger and thirst after righteousness; they are pure in heart; they are merciful to others; they are peace-makers; and they are persecuted for the sake of righteousness.⁴ This is the character of the believer.

Then Jesus goes on to relate the effect that a person has upon the society when they possess this character. As a person walks about in this world with these eight attributes that God has given them by His grace and that they have held onto through faith, there is an effect that takes place from their life. What is that effect? They become the salt of the earth and they become the light of the world.⁵ There is an effect of preserving and an effect of illuminating and enlightening this world in regards to God's grace and in regards to His Truth.

What is the result of that person's being salt and that person's being light? We see that answer in Verse 16, when Jesus says of a person being salt and light,

¹⁶ “...that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

There is an affect of worship that flows from the heart of one who possesses this characteristic and who has this influence; a heart that, in effect, flows toward the worship and praise of God within this dark world, even among unbelievers.

Jesus is going to apply this to six various areas and one of them is marriage. What does it mean to “let your light shine”? The light has to do with this righteousness that is ours in Christ. For a believer to let his or her light shine is not merely to give a tract, although that is helpful and I do not want to disparage that, but it means that we are going to exhibit the righteousness of Christ throughout our life and as it pertains to marriage, it means that even if we are in a difficult relationship, letting our light shine is attaching the righteousness of God to my life in that situation. Others are going to see that and they are going to look and say, “How is it are we able to remain loving and kind and gentle and free from bitterness and anger in the midst of this relationship,” and we will say, “Praise God that it is His grace.” They are going to praise the Father in Heaven as a result of our good works in marriage.

It also works if you have a great marriage, as well, where both people have this characteristic and both are pursuing the worship of God and the exaltation of God through their lives. Together, the world looks at that and it looks at the good deeds of that kind of marriage and that kind of family and they say, “What is happening there?” They are able to praise God as a result of Christians being in a right relationship to each other in marriage. This is the effect and because of this, marriage is sacred.

The design of marriage that God had from the very beginning was not so much to bring about the happiness of man or to bring about procreation so that children would be born. Certainly these two are aspects of marriage, but the predominant design of God behind marriage is to reveal Himself in His glory and in His plan of salvation.

The Apostle Paul will elaborate upon this in Ephesians 5, when he says,

²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Right away this becomes very curious: if you are going to talk about marriage, talk about marriage. If you are going to talk about Christ and the church, talk about Christ and the church, but what is this intermingling of the two? Paul continues,

⁴ Matthew 5:3-10

⁵ Matthew 5:13-16

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...

What the Apostle Paul understands is that marriage is sacred, it is designed to reflect God's glory, and now that the Gospel has been revealed and the "mystery" of God's plan of redemption through His Son, offering Himself as a sacrifice for our sin, resurrected, and proclaiming Himself to be Lord of lords and King of kings has been uncovered, drawing unto Himself a covenant people, marriage is the picture all along that God intended to display the Gospel. It is all about Christ's relationship to the church and the marriage is there to be a mirror that casts light upon Christ's relationship to the church to draw people unto Himself.

Paul goes on to say, in Ephesians 5,

³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."⁶ ³²This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.

Paul goes all the way back to the beginning so as to say that this is not something that is new; this is something that was in God's design and God's intention all along. Paul corrects the interpretation of what he is discussing; the discussion of marriage was not his point, but the main point is God-centered and it is Godward. It is that, in marriage, God displays and reveals a relationship that Christ Jesus has with His church, a relationship that is permanent, that is uniting, and based upon the commitment of the Groom to love the Bride. When Christ covenants with His church, He covenants to love us despite our great sins that are many and deep. He covenants with us to never stop loving us and to never remove this commitment from us and to always be working for our ultimate good.

This is the reason why Jesus will say in Matthew 5,

³² "But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery."

In Luke 16, we see another statement of Jesus that is very similar.

¹⁸ "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Jesus is going to make these categorical statements and He is going to make a similar statement in Mark 10, and He links up divorce with adultery,

¹¹He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her.
¹²And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."

He does so because the effect of divorce is the same as the effect of adultery. Just as adultery ruins the picture of God's righteousness implanted in the heart of the believer to the world around and it robs God of the glory that was rightfully designed to be His in that believer's life, so does divorce have the same effect. It removes the glory of God from the picture of that person's life; a picture that God had designed and established.

Divorce treats marriage as though it is a merely human invention with no greater purpose than temporal happiness of those who enter into it. The Christian who follows Christ and has Him in their heart must ask them self, "How can I bring glory to God?" That becomes our number one passion: to seek first God in His Kingdom and His righteousness. In regard to marriage, Jesus is going to specifically say that we bring glory to God by remaining faithful to the commitments we made in marriage.

Jesus always works for the improvement of His church. He always works for the greater loveliness of His church. He always cares for His church. He always provides for His church. He is always patient with His church and forever forgiving of His church. If Jesus were not so faithful as a Groom, we would all be ruined. God says, "You are my people. Reflect my glory to this world. It does not understand the offer that I am making."

⁶ Genesis 2:24

Because marriage is sacred, I want to give one additional, practical application to this truth. We, as believers, should resist speaking ill of marriage, even in humor. The world loves to joke very cynically and very critically in regards to marriage. The truth is that some of those jokes are really, really funny. There is much humor, except they are destructive to God's glory, so for the Christian, even though there is a human element of humor, we look at that and we say, "It is not good. It is not lovely. It is not pure. It is not right. It is not just. We will put that away from us." When we speak of marriage we are going to speak of it in exalted and lofty terms so that everyone understands through our lives the greatness of God's glory within it.

When Kimberly was a freshman student at a Christian college, she had a large class by one of the most respected of the professors in that college. That professor would often, on a weekly basis, begin the class by telling a joke in regards to marriage and in regards to wives. They were always jokes that would demean marriage and demean wives. This grated at Kimberly, and rightfully so. She said that she was often compelled to go to the professor after class and tell him that what he was doing was not right. She continues to kick herself today that she never did confront him. A few years later, we discovered that this man was having an adulterous relationship.

I am not suggesting that everyone who jests or jokes cynically about marriage is having an adulterous relationship, but I am saying that there is a connection between a low-view of marriage and a low commitment to the vows that we make in make.

The second description that Jesus sets before us is that God designs marriage to be permanent. Marriage is not just an agreement between two individuals, but it is an agreement between three persons: the man, the woman, and God Himself. God does something that the man and the woman cannot do. He takes these commitments and He binds them together into one. This is the reason why, in Matthew 19, Jesus is going to say, in response to the Pharisees question, "Can a man divorce his wife for any and every reason?"⁷ They wanted to get Jesus into a theological argument. There was some disagreement among the rabbis of the day. One was very liberal saying, "For any reason, if a woman literally burns your supper, you have a right to divorce her." Another rabbi was a bit more conservative, although he was still fairly liberal, but he still had a long list. They were asking Jesus, "Which rabbi do you line up with?" Jesus responded, and instead of saying that He was in line with Rabbi Hilliel or Rabbi Shami, by going back to the Scriptures and He quotes Genesis 2:24,

⁴ "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?⁶ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let (no man tear asunder⁸)." "

When He uses the word "man" He means mankind as a reference between human's prerogative and Divine prerogative so as to let man not think that he has a divine prerogative to tear this apart. He does not because it is a work of God.

When I was in third grade I had a friend named Mark. One of the great things about going over to his house was that he had loads and loads of Lincoln Logs and we could build these huge mansions. We had been playing for forty-five minutes building a mansion of Lincoln Logs and Mark's older brother, who was in ninth grade, came into the room and he said something derogatory toward Mark. Mark was not one to back down so he said something back to his brother. Then my friend went back to his room and he got out his bullwhip. Back in those days parents gave their children bullwhips as toys! He brought it back to where we were playing and he laid it down beside us. I did not know why he did that, but he did. Sure enough, his brother came back into the room and said a few more words and Mark responded with a few words. His brother came over and crushed the Lincoln Log mansion we were building with his foot. He walked away triumphantly, not wearing a shirt, and my friend reached out and grabbed his bullwhip. I don't think my friend was an expert with the bullwhip, but that day he was! I saw that whip come back and they forward and it hit his brother square in the bare back. His brother cried out as he fell forward and then I saw my friend get up and run to his mom!

I certainly do not commend Mark's act of vengeance against his brother, but Mark had a right to be offended. We were making that house and the person who makes the house has a right to break the house, but no one else does,

⁷ Matthew 19:3

⁸ KJV

therefore, what God has joined together, let no man tear asunder. God is building this work and let no man think they can step past Him and knock it over.

Marriage is permanent because God is the author of it. In spite of the clarity of the Bible regarding the permanence of marriage, many still take W.C. Fields attitude, who was a comedian who disregarded God and he was a very profane fellow. One day, late in his life, he was reading the Bible. This was rather shocking to his friend who had never seen him read the Bible before and who heard him profaned God's name and he asked, "Why are you reading the Bible?" W.C Fields said, "I am looking for loopholes, my friend." He was reading the Bible because he realized that his life did not reach God's standards and if there is a God He was going to hold him to a standard when he dies. He knows that his life is not long so he was looking for loopholes and an "out".

Many of us read the Bible that way. Instead of reading the Bible to say, "God, what is your will and I will submit myself to that will knowing that it is good and that there is a reward behind it. It might be hard and it might be difficult, but you have told us that we need to carry our cross and follow you, but I am going to believe that it is good and I am going to believe that there is joy there." Instead of reading the Bible with a submissive and weak heart, we read the Bible as W.C. Fields does, looking for loopholes.

We will find them, but in regards to divorce there is only one exception for a believer to initiate divorce and that is the exception of marital unfaithfulness; when one spouse continually and unrepentantly pursues sexual perversion and adulterous relationships. That is the protection for the innocent party from remaining in a sexual relationship with one who is continuing to go out and pursue sexual relationships with others. That is the only exception, but our world, and even Christ's church, will hold a host of others, but the Bible does not recognize incompatibility, mental cruelty, verbal abuse, non-support, drunkenness, the lack of spirituality, the fact that they are non-Christian, or any other reason that as "legitimate" for tearing apart when He has joined together.

The third description is that God designs marriage to be sanctifying. That is to say that God has a greenhouse for us to learn to become more like Jesus and one of the greenhouses that God has is marriage. It is a sanctifying influence and a means by which God helps us to become more humble and to become more dependent upon God and more loving and kinder and more merciful and more willing to experience persecution for righteousness sake.

The path to happiness is holiness. This is Jesus' point behind the eight Beatitudes. They all begin with "blessed". Other translations say "happy". "Blessed is the man who is poor in spirit"⁹; "Blessed is the man who mourns"¹⁰; "Blessed is the man who hungers and thirsts after righteousness"¹¹; "Blessed is the man who is merciful when he is wronged"¹²; "Blessed is the man who is a peacemaker, not willing to win the conflict, which is not the goal, but to make the conflict peaceable"¹³; "Blessed is the man who is persecuted for righteousness when they are doing what is right and they are persecuted because they continue to be loving and merciful and gentle and kind and righteous and truthful and honest"¹⁴. "Great is your reward in Heaven,"¹⁵ God says, "blessed is that man."

We see easily the application of these traits and the blessedness of holiness in marriage. When all of those things happen in the context of marriage, there is a blessedness because there is a holiness that has taken place; a holiness which God will absolutely reward. Marriage asks us the question: do you really believe that Christ-likeness is the path to joy? That is the question marriage will cause us to ask. The flesh will say, "No, the path to joy is in an emotionally stable, and good relationship. That is the path to joy." We have to make a decision – what are we going to believe? Are we going to believe God's Word or are we going to believe our feelings, because God's Word categorically tells us that the path to joy is the pursuit of practical holiness and that marriage is the context in which we can best pursue joy.

When we are outside of marriage, when a person is single, he or she has other means of sanctification.

⁹ Matthew 5:3

¹⁰ Matthew 5:4

¹¹ Matthew 5:6

¹² Mathew 5:7

¹³ Matthew 5:9

¹⁴ Matthew 5:10

¹⁵ Matthew 5:12

The Apostle Paul is going to pick up on this idea of the sanctifying influence of marriage in Ephesians 5, when he writes,

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives...

Christ's goal was to make the church holy with a sanctifying influence to bring about a relationship and to pursue practical holiness. In the way that Jesus' love is a sanctifying love, in the same way the Scriptures say that husbands ought to love their wives.

Jesus' act of service to the church is the reality of which marriage is the portrait or picture. Ideally, marriage is sanctifying through mutual encouragement. We see this in God's instructions to husbands when He says that husbands have a special role in the sanctification of ourselves and of our spouse. We are in Jesus' position of pursuing the holiness and the purity of our bride and we do so by not criticizing, complaining, stomping around, and becoming angry. None of those things are sanctifying. How do we sanctify ourselves and our spouses? It is through the washing of water with the word. We take the Word of God and we open it and we say that it is God's resource to help us in our sanctification, but it is also to help us as husbands and as fathers to sanctify wives and children. We open it up and begin to spill it out upon their hearts and upon their lives and by letting it do God's work. We must believe that the Word has the power to do that.

Let me give you a hypothetical situation to help understand how important this is. Imagine a man and a woman get married and for the next ten years the husband does not wash his wife with the water of the Word. He gets busy; there are many things going on, he has good intentions, but there is not the simple act of opening the Word and spilling the water out upon their soul. You do not have to be a preacher or a teacher and you do not have to know much, but you open the Word and you spill it out upon your wife's and your children's hearts. The husband does not do that for ten years. The tenth year of marriage has been very difficult to the point of being miserable. The woman he married is not the woman whom she is and that is true of everybody after ten years of marriage. We are either more like Jesus or we are less like Jesus.

Now, she is less kind, less loving, and less gentle. She is less forgiving, less attentive, less desirous of pursuing a warm relationship, and she is more critical, more complaining, more difficult, bitterer, and angrier. The husband is experiencing the pain of the change in his wife's life. Who has that husband to blame? I tell you, there is only one person who should go through his mind when he gets upset and that person is himself, because he had the opportunity for ten years to bring about a sanctification in his wife and he did not do that. Now he is reaping not the results of his wife's undoing but of his own.

The wife cannot say, "I am less like Jesus today because my husband did not bring the Word to me." Every person is responsible to God for their own sanctification. She does need to look at herself, but marriage is to be sanctifying in the best of times when both people are moving towards God together and in the worst of times when there is only one and that is you. The context of difficulty and the sin of another is the context in which God says, "I want to use this to help you become more like me because how did they treat my Son Jesus? They spat upon Him and they insulted Him and they did not stop until they killed Him, but He learned obedience through the things He suffered."

If we have that as our greatest goal, we will say, "This is where I need to be and this is where I will stay because this is the place of God's blessing for me."

God designs marriage to be pleasing; that is to say to be good and to be beautiful. I direct my thoughts particularly on this one description of marriage being pleasing to young people who are not married yet. It is true that sin in this world, sin in our hearts, and the fall have a real and dramatic affect upon marriage that cannot be denied. There are weeds in the garden, but please understand that there is still a garden, and if you attend to it by God's grace, it is a pleasing and wonderful garden. The emphasis of our day is not on the glory and goodness and pleasing nature of marriage, but it is upon the barrenness that many experience there because they are not following God's Word. It is vital for you to hold onto this precious view of marriage of being pleasing and good. I know many of you have suffered underneath the divorce of parents or have friends who have suffered under that and you have become cynical

to the point of not knowing if that is something that will be good or something that you may even want to pursue, but understand that God has presented marriage as a gift designed to reveal its glory to you and to other people through it.

Martin Luther was a man who lived in a time when there was a low view of marriage; it was a dull necessity, if that, or a social convention. The church was teaching that the height of spirituality was celibacy; that if you wanted to be a spiritual leader – a nun or a priest – you had to sign off marriage forever. Those were the days in which Martin Luther lived and those were the days in which people were thinking about marriage. Martin Luther came along and he had a traumatic affect upon theology and upon the Gospel, but he had an equally dramatic affect upon the church's understanding of marriage and of family. We continue to benefit from Martin Luther's reformation in this regard today. Let us not lose it. Listen to what he would say, "No one can have real happiness in marriage who does not recognize, in firm faith, that this is estate, together with all of its works, however insignificant, is pleasing to God and is precious in His sight."

What he is saying is that our understanding of marriage will have an affect upon the blessing that marriage provides for us. If we do not regain this preciousness and the pleasing nature of marriage in our minds and in our view, when we enter it there is a greater possibility that we will not experience it. That is true for all of us regardless of where we are in our relationship. We need to regain it. We cannot become upset with this as an institution and we need to hold this up as precious and good and pleasing in God's sight.

God, in six days, created the world. At the end of the first five days He said that He saw that it was good.¹⁶ At the end of the creation of man, which included the creation of marriage, He said that He saw that it was "very good"¹⁷ and very pleasing to Him.

The last description of God's design for marriage is that it is to be a union. In Genesis 1, we read,

²⁴ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

There is a profound mystery here of two people meshing together, gluing their lives and their souls in such a way so that they become one new entity. We do not know where one ends and the other begins. This is God's intention, design, and goal for marriage: the goal of oneness. Like children playing with paint and mixing yellow and blue. The yellow is lost and the blue is lost, but there is green. It is as though their individual entities are gone and they cannot think about themselves individually without thinking of this new entity that has been created and joined together by God in mystery.

Let me close with a picture of a couple that I have come to know about: Bob and Jo Ann Conrad, who, I believe, are in their 80's. They began life together at Moody Bible Institute and God called them into missions. After they graduated from Moody, they went to the jungles of Papua New Guinea. Their first home was a boat house fixed upon two canoes as the foundation and living among a swamp people. Can you imagine beginning a marriage that way? You do not know their language and they do not know yours.

The first year they wanted to help the people medically and learn their language. Two years into this mission, Bob contracted hepatitis twice and malaria, diseases that could have taken his life, but which is believed also affected his mental health. In the jungle, in the middle of the night, Bob broke with reality. He was very aggressive, saying all kinds of strange things. Can you imagine being a wife in a situation like this: no communications; in the middle of the jungle; transportation was not very good; and her husband has broken with reality? She finds help and by God's grace she gets Bob in a canoe and he is calm enough for the trip out of the jungle.

They arrived at a station where helicopters sometimes flew into and when a helicopter arrived to pick them up, Bob thought that the pilot was a violent man and he began fighting him. They restrained Bob, but had to strap him outside the helicopter and he was flown back to the United States. He received counseling, but nobody was able to help him. Severe depression and breaks with reality happened for seventeen years.

¹⁶ Genesis 1:3-25

¹⁷ Genesis 1:31

If Jo Ann were your daughter, what would you tell her to do, living with a husband who seemed as though he would never get better? You want her to be happy and have a good relationship. You have all hopes and dreams. What would you tell her to do?

If you were Jo Ann what would you do? Jo Ann understood the biblical principles about marriage; that it was sacred, permanent, sanctifying, and that it is a union. She was, lovingly, Bob's helpmate through the ups and downs. There were some up, but there were many downs.

After seventeen years, through spiritual counseling and medical help, Bob and Jo Ann were able to return to the mission field. Recently, Moody Bible Institute honored Bob and Jo Ann Conrad with the "Alumni of the Year" award. In their times remaining on the field, Bob Conrad, in an age where there were no computers, translated the Bible into four different languages and myriads of Bible studies to help the people.

The last paragraph of the Moody alumni article about this couple reads, "Countless throngs of redeemed people from many tribal groups will one day in Heaven thank the Conrad's for the untold sacrifices made in bringing the Light of the Gospel to them. Entire New Testaments, countless Bible portions, and Bible studies are now in existence because of these tremendous efforts. Upon hearing and reading God's Word in their native tongues, numerous souls have become believers in Jesus Christ."

I tell you that not to exalt Jo Ann or Bob as a saint who had to persevere in the faith and hold onto faith and fight for the faith through that time, and I don't tell you that to lift them up as saints who had no sin or who were so wonderful so as to almost be unearthly, but I tell you that story to remind us all of the grace of God that is available to everyone of us; the grace to redeem seemingly irredeemable circumstances, a grace to perform miracles, a grace that results in praise, honor, and glory to Jesus Christ through our lives.

Jesus says, "Let your light so shine before men that they might see your good works and that they would give praise to God in Heaven because of you."