

Marriage

1. God's purpose in creation: the ideals of marriage
2. The impact of the Fall on marriage
3. The effect of Christ's redemptive sacrifice on marriage

Genesis 1-2 God's intention in marriage in creation

Ch 1

- Male + female together = the human image of God
"Let *us* make man(kind) in our image, after our likeness. And let *them* have dominion over the fish of the sea...
So God created man in his own image,
In the image of God he created him;
Male and female he created *them*."
- And God blessed *them*. And God said to *them*, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion...
And God said, "Behold I have given *you (pl.)* every plant.... And every beast of the earth..."

Picture = of unity and equality.

No suggestion that the work of one, or authority of one, above the other.

Ch 2

The man alone NOT good. God = in Trinity and humans best in relationship too.

- ⇒ An 'ezer 'helper' opposite/corresponding to him
NO helper opposite/corresponding among livestock or birds
- ⇒ Put man to sleep and took rib and made a woman
= an extension of himself "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh"
- ⇒ A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast (cleave) to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Marriage (leaving and cleaving) does something.

- A new and stronger union than that of child to parent
- Literal becoming of one flesh
- No shame in marriage, not even in nakedness = not just physical unity but emotional and spiritual too. Lit. nothing to hide from one another

NB. Nothing about self-fulfilment or self-gratification

Nothing about the man gaining a slave

Ch. 3

The impact of the Fall on marriage: NB. Significant that first thing affected, first casualties of Fall = relationship with God and one another.

- First casualty = eyes opened and knew were naked: no longer unashamed in each other's or God's presence. Innocence/purity died and selfishness born. Greatest desire = self-protection. Shame comes when realise something you wish to keep hidden is exposed; when you realise you're not perfect. Cf. "a shameless act" = no awareness of wrong
- Second casualty = unity between man and woman. NO longer operating together/helping one another, but against one another. Birth of the other: Man blamed woman, woman blamed snake
- Third casualty – man's gratitude to God for the woman. Instead of wonder and joy ("bone of my bone", accusation: the woman you gave me is not good, but bad; not a helper but a stumbling block
- Rivalry, desire to rule = born – but man will rule over woman cf. 3.16 and 4.7. NB. Desire isn't sexual but to be sovereign over/control.

NB. God reinforces Adam's rule by having him name Eve; it is Adam alone he deals with, and whom he seems to hold accountable. See 3.22-24.

LESSON: All that mars marriage belongs to Fall, not God's creative work.

YET in many ways the secular view of marriage, and much Church teaching too, reinforces the distorted model of Fall:

- Male domination/headship which is selfish, exploitative or abusive
- Feminism: rivalry for headship
- Putting own interests first and treating marriage as a contract between 2 individuals, with both seeking to gain – rather than give - as much as can
- When dissatisfaction with what getting out of marriage, separation.

If Jesus redeemed us (those who believe in him, and that he died for our sin), surely that includes redemption from all that mars marriage.

- ⇒ Christian marriage, as the marriage of the redeemed, should differ from non-Christian marriage.

Relationship with God, vertical relationship has been restored; the horizontal relationship should be too (granting that neither is complete until Day of the LORD)

- ⇒ No excuse for Christians to champion a post-fall doctrine of marriage; have to accept that still live under the effects of the Fall as long as in a fallen world, but should at least be living in God's kingdom.

Is in this light that read Paul in Eph 5.

Ephesians 5

Recognition that in light of Fall marriage needs to be redeemed by Christ, and that a work of sanctification needs to be done. Marriage = sanctifying work: Keller: Marriage brings out and reveals traits in you that were there all along but were hidden from everyone including you, but now they are all seen by your spouse. In marriage you are exposed. You finally have your mask and finery stripped away, as it were. "Marriage does not so much bring you into confrontation with your spouse as confront you with yourself." (140)

Keller argues that marriage is for helping each other to become our future glory-selves, the new creation that God will eventually make us." (120) One must be able to say "I see your flaws, imperfections, weaknesses, dependencies. But underneath them all I see growing the person God wants you to be." (122) This is the essence of true spiritual friendship, eagerly helping one another know, serve, love, and resemble God in deeper and deeper ways. Sanctification is a group project, and most intense between two spouses.

Relationship Christ and Church = model for understanding marriage.

Primary within church = mutual submission to Christ, and to one another in Christ (20f. "giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."

Particular instructions re marriage:

- As Church submits to Christ, so wife to own husband (not all men!) – as head of family (spiritual responsibility of husband, recalling post fall God held Adam responsible).
In v. 33 respect = substituted for submission.
- As Christ loved the church, so husband to love wife
 - sacrifice for purpose of sanctification
 - love wife as own body/flesh, harking back to Gen 2.23

- Mystery – and paradox - in this union, = imp. Cannot fully grasp, only experience. Foolish for humans to think can tamper with or change: inevitably leads to loss.
- Shame and rivalry and blaming = replaced with submission and sacrifice and sanctification

NB. The limits of marriage – not in heaven. Help us to grow spiritually into Christ, but union with Christ always the ultimate goal.

To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw us.” (95)

One of the paradoxes you talk about is how the commitment of marriage actually produces freedom: the freedom to be truly ourselves, the freedom to be fully known, the freedom to be there in the future for those we love and who love us. Why do you believe that the commitment of marriage is viewed as largely anything but freeing today?

Our culture pits the two against each other. The culture says you have to be free from any obligation to really be free. The modern view of freedom is freedom *from*. It's negative: freedom from any obligation, freedom from anybody telling me how I have to live my life. The biblical view is a richer view of freedom. It's the freedom *of*—the freedom of joy, the freedom of realizing what I was designed to be.

If you don't bind yourself to practice the piano for eight hours a day for ten years, you'll never know the freedom of being able to sit down and express yourself through playing beautiful music. I don't have that freedom. It's very clear that to be able to do so is a freeing thing for people, with the diminishment of choice. And since freedom now is defined as all options, the power of choice, that's freedom *from*. I don't think ancient people saw these things as contradictions, but modern people do.

The Christian view of marriage does not offer a choice between fulfilment and sacrifice but rather mutual fulfilment through mutual sacrifice.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. What do you understand by Eve being “a helper fit for” Adam?
2. In what ways do a husband and wife become one flesh? What does it mean to be one flesh? And how does leaving and cleaving work and impact a marriage?
3. If you are married (or have been married), how has marriage sanctified you? What have you learnt about yourself which you have had to change?
4. If you are not married/never been married, how has God worked in your life to sanctify you through singleness?
5. Jesus says (in Matt 19) that his teaching re divorce will be too difficult for some to receive. What do you think he’s saying, and not saying?
6. Discuss headship and submission further, both in the context of the church (submitting to one another in Christ) and marriage.