

Relationship Goals...Jesus and Marriage

9/15/19 – Pastor Randy

Our series is titled: Relationship Goals. The title expresses the truth that we should establish goals for our relationships. Last week we looked at some goals we should establish in all our relationships: To be loyal, to be truthful, to be good listeners, to speak life-giving words, to refrain from gossip, to not be obnoxious, etc... Today we are going to look at goals for marriage.

Getting married should be a desire more than a goal. A goal is something we set out to achieve because we know it is God's will. A desire is something we hope is God's will, but rely on His sovereign provision.

When I was single it was my desire to get married, but that desire was going to require the cooperation of someone else. So, that desire was subject to the will of God. Once Christine agreed mercifully to marry me our mutual desire to marry became a mutual goal to be in an exclusive life-long relationship!

Marriage: Jesus Definition vs. Western Culture's Definition

Matt. 19:3-10

Some Pharisees came and tried to trap him with this question: "Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife for just any reason?" "Haven't you read the Scriptures?" Jesus replied. "They record that from the beginning 'God made them male and female.' And he said, "'This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.' Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together." "Then why did Moses say in the law that a man could give his wife a written notice of divorce and send her away?" they asked. Jesus replied, "Moses permitted divorce only as a concession to your hard hearts, but it was not what God had originally intended. And I tell you this, whoever divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery—unless his wife has been unfaithful." Jesus' disciples then said to him, "If this is the case, it is better not to marry!"

The religious leaders posed a question to Jesus about interpretation of the Mosaic law regarding the subject of divorce. Jesus response not only addressed their question about the permissible grounds for divorce, but also in doing so Jesus provided a clear definition of marriage.

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According to Jesus response marriage, as ordained by God, is a **permanent, monogamous, heterosexual** relationship.

A. Marriage is a Permanent Union

In Jesus' response he cited two OT passages. First from Genesis 1:27: *So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

Building upon the foundation that God created us male and female, with the female being created from the male, Jesus then cited Genesis 2:24 which forms the conclusion.

"This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one."

Jesus then added his own commentary on these OT passages saying, *"Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together."*

The leaders were apparently trying to drag Jesus into a contemporary religious debate between two Jewish schools of interpretation concerning the OT teaching that made allowance for divorce. Jesus' response exposed the improper motivation behind the question. He essentially said, "Why are you trying to figure out a justification for getting rid of your spouse? Your focus should not be on what criteria you need to meet so can divorce without breaking God's law, but rather your focus should be on what you need to do to faithfully love the spouse that God has joined you to.

"Let's stop looking for ways to justify undoing what God has done, and start focusing on how to faithfully maintain the bond of love that God created."

Law-based religion seeks to define the limits of one's obligation. A grace-based, Spirit-led, relationship with God does not act out of obligation but out of passion for God and compassion for others.

Jesus went on to say that if you divorce your wife, other than in an extreme case like infidelity on the part of your wife, and then go and get yourself another wife your actions are comparable to that of an adulterer. Since most

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men were not divorcing their wives due to adultery, Jesus words shook them to their core. Basically, Jesus was saying there is no justification for divorce unless your spouse has broken your covenant by committing adultery.

The most important statement in Jesus response is: “...let no one split apart what God has joined together.”

Getting a hold of this truth will have a dramatic impact on how we approach our struggles in marriage. Understanding that God has joined me to my spouse places my marriage in God’s hands rather than my own. If it belongs to me, I can do with it what I want. But if it belongs to God, my job is to do everything in my power so that my marriage fulfills God’s purpose for it.

Defining marriage as a permanent union has been widely accepted in our American society forever. However, the notion that marriage needs to be, or even ought to be a life-long relationship is being challenged more and more. Some have given up on the idea because they have observed so many marriages break down around them. If most of the people you know get divorced, that will surely erode your expectations of a life-long marriage.

Back in 2013, Paul Rampell, a divorce attorney in Florida created quite a stir when he wrote and op-ed in the Washington Post suggesting that we change the legal structure in marriage to provide people the option of entering into a “wedlease” rather than “wedlock”. He received lots of criticism of course by proponents of traditional marriage but his idea was picked up and treated as deserving of consideration by others. NPR, not surprisingly, was quick to interview him so as to give positive exposure to his idea expressed by their suggestive title, “Would Some Marriages Be Better If Couples Signed 'Wedleases'?” Here is an excerpt from his op-ed.

“Why don't we borrow from real estate and create a marital lease? Instead of wedlock, a “wedlease.” Here's how a marital lease could work: Two people commit themselves to marriage for a period of years — one year, five years, 10 years, whatever term suits them. The marital lease could be renewed at the end of the term however many times a couple likes. It could end up lasting a lifetime if the relationship

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is good and worth continuing. But if the relationship is bad, the couple could go their separate ways at the end of the term.” (WashingtonPost.com Aug. 4, 2013)

The truth is, this attorney is just trying to adapt the law to reflect the increasing incidence of people entering into successive short term marriages, and successive short-term cohabitation, aka serial monogamy. Listen to this quote from an article in Psychology Today by Aaron Ben-Zeév Ph.D. written to make a case that privileges serial monogamy over life-long monogamy.

“The difficulties surrounding romantic relationships in modern society have popularized a version of monogamy, which may be termed “serial monogamy.” In this version, commitment or exclusivity typical of monogamy is maintained but it is usually confined to a limited period. In this increasingly popular romantic pattern, people still believe in some moderate form of ideal love, but give up their basic pretense that it should last forever. The beloved is still regarded to be unique, but in many cases he is not so for the rest of our life.”

As Christians we must swim against the tide of no-fault divorce and serial monogamy. If you are divorced and remarried this truth does not place you under condemnation. The Lord is not expecting you to dissolve your current marriage, but to be faithful within your current marriage. If you are single and desire to get married, do not marry someone who does hold to this conviction that marriage is a life-long covenant!!

B. Marriage is Monogamous Union.

Jesus did not just define marriage as a permanent union but also as a monogamous union. Jesus’ answer to the question about divorce makes the argument that marriage, as ordained by God, is a monogamous relationship. It involves two people becoming one. Serial monogamy (multiple marriage partners in succession) is ruled out as comparable to adultery because they violate the “two as one” principle – with the exceptions of the death of a spouse or infidelity/abandonment by the spouse.

This conclusion implicitly rules out polyamory (multiple wives/husbands at the same time) as acceptable. Since Jesus taught that it is contrary to God’s will to take a second spouse serially, based on the fact that an application of

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the Genesis passages define marriage as the union of two people, it logically follows that polygamy (taking a second spouse concurrently) is also prohibited. Marriage is to be a monogamous relationship; an exclusive relationship with one other person.

But there is a growing challenge to this understanding of marriage. I have dozens of examples in my file that I have accumulated over the past few years.

1. Polyamorous Marriage: Is there a future for 3-way marriages? BBC.com 6/21/17
2. You, Me, and Polyamory – Philly Inquirer Dec. 2017
3. Inside America's Growing Acceptance of Polyamory, Rolling Stone Sept. 2017
4. Here are a couple of article titles from the Washington Post.

“Can you be in love with two people at once? ‘The Bachelor’ keeps raising the question.” March 2, 2018

“She’s a polyamorous Sunday school teacher. One of those things bothered her date.” April 11, 2019

Listen to this quote: “Chad later told me that Mary’s practice of polyamory had almost nothing to do with his decision. “If the scenario was right,” he said, he would have considered it. What was more concerning to him was her religious fervor.”

5. The American Psychological Association recently established a “Consensual Non-Monogamy task force”. This task force “promotes awareness and inclusivity about consensual non-monogamy and diverse expressions of intimate relationships,” “These include but are not limited to: people who practice polyamory, open relationships, swinging, relationship anarchy and other types of ethical non-monogamous relationships.”

Marriage is ‘two becoming one’ in a bond of love; the kind of love Jesus demonstrated for us by giving up his life for us!

C. Marriage is a Heterosexual Union.

There are two points contained within this one statement.

1. Marriage is a sexual union. When Genesis 2:24 states that the man and his wife will be joined together and become one flesh, the sexual union is obviously in view. However, the “one-flesh union” involves more than sexual intercourse. The physical union is intended by God to enhance the spiritual, emotional, and psychological bond of love. Sex, when expressed as God intended is a profound, powerfully intense expression of love between a

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husband and wife. In 1 Corinthians 6:15-17 Paul call's out some men in the church for visiting prostitutes. Here is how he expressed his condemnation of their actions: *"Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "The two shall become one flesh."* This is just one evidence that Genesis 2:24 is a reference to the forming of a sexual union between a man and a woman. The two become one in a bond of love; the kind of love Jesus has for us!

2. Marriage is a heterosexual union. Although there are plenty of people attempting to argue that the bible is not clearly opposed to same sex relationships or marriages, nothing could be further from the truth. One argument that is made is that Jesus did not explicitly say anything about homosexuality. First this is not quite true. In Mark 7, Jesus said, *"For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you."* When Jesus spoke of sexual immorality in this list of "vile things" which defile he was referring to all sexual practices condemned under Jewish law. To suggest that Jesus would have exempted homosexuality, which was treated as a severe violation of sexual ethics, from that category requires an incredible leap of faith. Second, Jesus did not address for the same reason he did not address incest, prostitution, or polyamory. There was no debate about any of these!

In Matt. 19, the basis of Jesus argument against non-monogamy provides an even stronger implicit rejection of same-sex marriage than it does of polyamory. Jesus reasoning is consistent with that of the Essenes, a strict Jewish religious sect in Jesus day, who rejected polygamy on the basis that God created only two sexes; male and female (Damascus Covenant 4.20-5.1). When Jesus appealed to the Genesis passages to demonstrate that God's designed marriage to consist of only TWO people, where did he get the number "two" from? Did he just pull it out of the sky? Did it come from the fact that people by nature like to pair up? NO! The numerical limitation was based on the fact that God has created only two compatible sexes; male and female. When affirming life-long monogamy as God's will, he established it upon a male-female foundation. If we remove the two, complementary created sexes as the foundation for marriage we have simultaneously removed any basis to limit the number of participants.

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For years, marriage was understood to be a life-long union between one man and one woman based on the scripture. Over the years there has been an increasing failure to fulfill God's plan to stay faithful to one's spouse until death. There is a growing perspective that because so many marriages fail to endure, we should either abandon the institution altogether or marry for a season. Marriage as a permanent union is being abandoned. Should we abandon it as well? NO!

In recent years, there has been a monumental shift in the understanding of the definition of marriage. In 2015 the Supreme Court of the US issued a decision that declared our former definition of marriage unconstitutional. Marriage is still defined as a life-long commitment by two persons but it is no longer limited to two persons of the same gender. God's definition of marriage as a heterosexual union is being abandoned by society? Should we abandon it as well? NO!

And the shift away from Jesus' definition of marriage, embraced by Judeo-Christian cultures for the past 2000 years, is increasingly undermining the monogamous aspect of marriage. If the trajectory we are on is not reversed by a spiritual awakening we will soon find ourselves under fire for suggesting that non-monogamy is a sin. If our society abandons Jesus' definition of marriage as an exclusively monogamous union, should the church abandon it as well? NO!

Jesus affirmed what Genesis 1 & 2 revealed. Marriage is two sexual complementary people becoming one as a sovereign work of God. Every single one of us in this room has been affected by our fallen sinful nature, hindering us from living up to this ideal, if not in our actions, at least in our hearts and minds. However, we must not, we cannot, abandon our pursuit of the ideal. We must bring our weaknesses and brokenness to the cross to find forgiveness and to the Spirit to find freedom for the sake of human flourishing and, most importantly, for the sake of human flourishing.

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