

Reforming the Mess of Modern Marriage #1

The Chief End and Covenant of Marriage – *Heb 13:4*

Introduction – This will be a short series on marriage. The biblical case for marriage needs to be preached because Christ needs to be preached, and Christ is preached when we declare the biblical covenant of marriage, and more importantly, when we live it out. Paul could not speak about marriage without seeing the gospel of Jesus Christ, and he could not speak about the gospel of Jesus without seeing a marriage (Eph 5:29-33). The church must understand as “the church” the importance of the institution of marriage and she must preach the glorious mystery that is marriage because she is herself a bride; in fact, she is *the* bride (Rev 21:9-11). The theology of marriage is critically essential because the gospel message itself is at stake. The success or failure of a culture is at stake.

The state of marriage in these modern days is in shambles. We have lost the battle for the dictionary. Churches do not teach the biblical theology and sociology of marriage. Young Christian men and women do not understand why they cannot cohabit (read: friends with privileges) before marriage nor why there is such a fuss being made about two men in love with one another. What has a low, secular, and social-Darwinist view of marriage brought our culture? Easy no-fault divorce laws and high divorce rates, fatherlessness, STDs, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, the murder of unborn children, single-moms in poverty, lower and lower birthrates, infertility, same-sex “mirage”, date-rape, open and accepted pornography, the abuse and trafficking of women and children, and all in the name of “getting God and your morals out of my bedroom.”

But we have been given an answer. And it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and this is preached and pictured in God’s institution of marriage.

Marriage is Honorable Among All (Heb 13:4) – Marriage is honorable because it is God’s design, and its chief end is to glorify God. God’s command from the beginning was for man to subdue the earth and fill it (Gen 1:27-28). And it was His desire to use the institution of marriage (and family) as the means for this to take place. He decreed that man’s solitude was not good and set out to rectify this (Gen 2:18). None of the animals qualified (vv19-20) because this helper must be of the same essence, a fellow human being made in God’s image (1:27). In order for a marriage to take place, God decided to divide into two and then bring back together into one; He brought about a death and resurrection (2:21-22). Marriage and the families they create are God’s building blocks for society and culture. Marriage is a public declaration, not a private ceremony, because it is for society and the glory of God. And this is why marriage is honorable “*among all*” – that is, the married and the unmarried. Therefore, the institution of marriage must be kept in culture according to God’s plan. There is blessing upon a culture that does so, and there are curses upon cultures that do not. And this is because of the dangerous power of “*covenant*.”

What Is a Covenant? – A useful definition is that “*a covenant is a solemn bond, sovereignly administered with attendant blessings and curses.*” This is the way in which God always deals with men.

The First Adam - All men were in Adam, who was in covenant with God (Gen 2:15-17, Hos 6:7). We are taught that in his sin, we all sinned (Rom 5:12, 17, 1 Cor 15:22).

The Second Adam – Christ is related to Adam in that He too is a representative Head on behalf of His people – “*The first Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit*” (1 Cor 15:45). The work of the first Adam brought condemnation upon all those who were in him. The work of the second Adam brought justification upon all those who were in Him (Rom 5:17-21). It is only through our covenantal relationship with Christ that our sins can be imputed to Him, and His righteousness imputed to us.

Is Marriage A Covenant? – What does all this have to do with marriage? Everything.

The Bride of Christ – The church, those who are in the second Adam, is the church by God’s covenantal promise – “*I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*” (2 Cor 6:16). The church is also comparable to a bride betrothed and brought to her husband, Christ (2 Cor 11:2-3, Rev 21:2-3, 9-10).

The Mystery of Marriage – As was mentioned in the introduction, Paul declares this comparison in the relationship of husband and wife (Eph 5:25). He instructs us that the paradigm of Genesis 2 is a picture to us of Christ and the church (Eph 5:31-32). There are two explicit references to the covenant of marriage as well – Prov 2:17 and Mal 2:14.

Application: Authority and Individualism – If we do not understand our marriages covenantally, we begin treating the roles of husband and wife as two individuals with one in charge (to break the tie), rather than as an organic union. Without a covenant, we are left with an individual man in charge of an individual woman, rather than a man having representative authority and responsibility over their one-flesh union. Marriage is not a picture of boss and slave, but of head and body.

The Blessings of this Covenant – A study of Scripture shows what God intends to provide through this covenant of marriage.

Companionship – Prov 2:17 and Mal 2:14 both speak of the companionship which exists in this covenant. The two Hebrew words used point to being “*in intimate relationship with*” and to be “*united to.*” Together, they speak of commitment and intimacy. The commitment and the intimacy necessary to bring together the “*one-flesh*” promise of marriage. Another way to look at it is that the commitment (covenant) brings about the intimacy (companionship). This is why when a couple takes vows, they vow to provide companionship for one another for the rest of their lives regardless of the circumstances of life. They do not take vows to receive companionship. Each vows to give all that is necessary to meet his or her spouse’s need for companionship whether or not he or she will ever receive the same in return. This is what Christ did for His bride. As an act of love, marriage vows commit one to giving, not to receiving.

Sexual Companionship and Fidelity – “You may now kiss the bride!” - While marriage involves a covenantal agreement to meet all of your spouse’s needs for companionship, a central need and a peculiar provision exists only in the marriage relationship: sexual enjoyment and purity. Heb 13:4 tells us that in the marriage bed (bound by covenant) sexual intimacy is honorable and therefore there is no shame. 1 Cor 7:2-3 teaches us that sexual activity within the marriage is God’s kind provision and practical help against sexual temptation. Husbands and wives must study one another in their spouse’s particular needs as they seek to be a companion in this area. But the commitment here is the same – the vow to give, not the vow to receive or the vow to only give “if.”

Godly Children – Of course, one of the main ways God intends to glorify His name through marriage is through bringing forth a filled earth, full of generations upon generations of godly offspring. His covenant with Abraham pointed to this (Gen 17:6-7), reiterated through Moses (Deut 7:9) and passed on to all Christians (Eph 6:1-3). Again, these families, through generations, are the building blocks of society and culture.

The Chief End of Marriage – The chief end of marriage (and therefore your marriage) is to glorify God and enjoy Him (including His covenant blessings). Your marriage is not primarily about you. And the sooner you act like it, dying to yourself, the sooner you enter into blessing and enjoyment, glorifying God. The covenant of marriage is the place where the deepest human needs and desires are met. But to enter in, one has to die to self through vows before God and society, trusting in the living God Who Himself died in covenant faithfulness for His people and to the glory of His name.

Dave Hatcher – February 6, 2022