

XIX. Timeless Truth for Timely Topics in Biblical Perspective

*What Does the Bible Say?*

“Marriage: What Is It? Is It a Church or Creation Ordinance?”

Matthew 19:1–10

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It is very clear after the June 27, 2015 legal fabrication decision of the Supreme Court, basically under cultural and political pressure reached in and did something that the Constitution doesn't allow which was to decide to define marriage, secondly began to give civil rights to sexual choices of life, thirdly began to affirm sexuality as an identity in life and fourthly began an avalanche of various repercussions of that on the levels of the state that many are aware of. Al Moler has said that for Christians with such a decision attacking something so basic as an institution of culture as the family because the family is based upon marriage, then in a real sense the landscape changes dramatically when that happens yet on the other hand nothing changes because we still have our mission, message, ministry, means of grace, our call to evangelize and our call to disciple. Yet, everything has changed in terms of the context of our ministry.

So whenever a particular institution comes under assault in our nation in that we're willing to distort marriage in order to affirm distorted sexuality and declaring that which is unnatural as natural and not applying Gospel solutions to those matters, then that will have some serious repercussions and will also put us as Christians who embrace the Bible out in the open where you won't be able to hide. You will have to make a decision and so will churches because with an increasingly fascist government that will use its judicial power and tyranny aggressively implementing these things, it will come in a series of decisions that people will have to make. First it will come in the market place. Secondly it will come to our extended ministries like educational institutions, orphanages, ministries on college campuses for the state will make certain decisions and we'll have to know how to respond to that.

First of all when an institution is under assault, what is it that we believe about that institution and then secondly how do we hold to what we believe about that institution with a Gospel framework for life? So framed by the Gospel how does the Bible shape our understanding of the institution of marriage and how does the Bible shape our ministry to uphold that institution of marriage? What is now before us is that there will be some churches with a response in order to remain affirmed by the culture will accommodate their doctrine and practice to what the world is now saying is legal and right and that what we hold to is illegal and wrong as a definition of marriage and sexuality. They will in effect abandon the Word of God and what it says about marriage and sexuality.

Another group of churches will respond by isolating themselves. That is why I entitled the study “Marriage, is it a creation ordinance or church ordinance?” People that approach me on this think the church ought to do this no matter what the state does or not and I explain to them that they are living in a fool's paradise if they think the state is going to continue to allow you to practice Biblical marriage for they will bring through taxation and other means to try and conform you to what they now say you must believe. You won't be able to isolate so should the church as it is may become somewhat Amish in this matter where we'll just have our enclave and do it our way. And say nothing about marriage to the public policy and public arena.

I think the answers to those questions have to be answered from the Bible itself. So is marriage a creation ordinance that we hold to or is it a church ordinance that we hold to? Isn't

the best testimony of marriage to the world actually us doing it right? The answer is yes but do we have to make a choice to do it and speak publically about it. We are going to answer this in this study.

I believe there are three primary creation ordinances in the account of the creation. One is life. The other is sexuality and the third is marriage. Life is sacred and we're made in the image of God. Marriage is sacred and designed by God for the well-being of those whom He has created in His image. Sexuality is a gift from God of intimacy to initiate, refresh and procreate within the context of marriage. Those are three creation ordinances and after creation came something called the fall and when this came it now attacks all three of these creation ordinances. You see this in the account of the Bible.

So are we going to hold to creation ordinances for the well-being and flourishing of creation – life, sexuality within marriage, marriage as was designed by the Creator – or are we going to call those church ordinances that in the church we will honor life, sexuality within marriage and marriage right? Or do we have a responsibility into the culture itself because it is not a church ordinance only but a creation ordinance? I have already given away where I stand on this but let us see if I have any legs to stand on this belief. Let's start by looking in Mark 10 where Jesus is dealing with the fact that paganism has infiltrated the first century of Judaism in Israel and in Jerusalem in particular. It also has distorted marriage in a variety of ways and what amounted to basically no-fault divorce. So there are a couple of competing parties within the Pharisees that are coming to test Jesus. So here is what happens in Mark 10.

Mark 10:1–9 says [1] *And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them.*

[2] *And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" [3] He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" [4] They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." [5] And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. [6] But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' [7] 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, [8] and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. [9] What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."*

Now let's look at the Gospel of Matthew where this same account is also recorded but I primarily want you to see what the disciples say. Matthew 19:10–12 says [10] *The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry."* [11] *But he said to them, "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. [12] For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it."*

There is one basic thing I want you to see here and then I want to draw out some implications. They come to test Jesus in this matter because marriage had become something of a matter of convenience. So now there was gender confusion in terms of the dignity of women. Women had become a commodity in marriage and if a woman did not perform appropriately in whatever area that then was deemed as a cause for a divorce. So when they asked Jesus if a man could divorce his wife for any cause at all Jesus basically tells them why divorce is here. Divorce is here not because of God's design but because of a gift from God to remedy the effects of the fall if someone is being violated and then Jesus will go on to give the only grounds for such a divorce, but there is no such thing as no-fault divorce. This wasn't a license from Moses

that someone could walk in and out of a marriage because your wife burned the toast or didn't meet you at the door or by any means at all.

Then you have the disciples listening to what Jesus is telling them and thinking that perhaps it's better not to get married if you can't just walk in and out of this marriage. Jesus tells them that not all men can accept this for it is only to those whom it is given. Then He goes to the matter of a eunuch. A eunuch is one who is incapable of a sexual relationship. Because of the fall and sin there are some born in such a way that sexual relations are not possible physically so they are eunuchs from birth and there are those who choose to be a eunuch because they want to be celibate. Then there are some who are made that way like the Ethiopian eunuch who attended the queen and the king would make a man a eunuch so that nothing physically would happen between the queen and her eunuch. Paul will talk about this issue as well in someone having the gift of celibacy and if you don't have that gift then you will need to be married. Why? It is because sexuality is only to be practiced within marriage.

Having said that, where do we get our doctrine of marriage? Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24 which says *'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, [8] and the two shall become one flesh.'* This indicates not only the legal relationship but the sexual relationship and the intimacy of the relationship – the two become one. In order to begin to rescue Israel in the first century from the pagan onslaught of sexuality and marriage, Jesus goes back to the creation account. There are a lot of things here for us theologically, isn't there? How is Jesus treating the book of Genesis? He is treating it as a historical fact. How is He treating Adam and Eve? He is treating them as a historical fact. How is He treating marriage? He is treating it as a historical fact by Divine design.

What is He telling us about marriage? Jesus is saying that marriage is a creation ordinance. It didn't start with the church. It started at creation and at creation He made man – male and female – in the image of God with the sacredness and sanctity of life. Then He designed marriage as the foundational institution of creation and the resulting cultures of humanity. He designed marriage as foundational – one man, one woman, one life. Marriage is a creation ordinance and must be defined from creation in this manner; marriage is a heterosexual (one man, one woman), monogamous (one man, one woman), conjugal (the two become one) and by creation procreative. We haven't dealt with the issue of the fall yet. It is designed to be procreative because a man leaves his father and mother so what is clearly happening is that the husband and wife through a conjugal relationship have children who will then leave them in order to cleave. It is designed for the right issue of the future generations. It is also a covenantal relationship in which they come together in the vows of this relationship and fidelity to one another.

So out of what Jesus says in this text in order to confront the Pharisees and then when His disciples question He doesn't back down, but takes them right back to the creation as well. He says there is a place for divorce Biblically designed because of the hardness of hearts and because of sin there will be victims that need to be protected and then He will give the grounds for that. But He tells them that they start at creation and that marriage is a creation law/ordinance from the Creator, designed by the Creator and implemented for the benefit of those whom He has created in His image in a covenantal relationship with each other. He didn't create marriage for the animals. He created it for those created in His image.

So what does that mean for us? I want to give you seven things as we move into this cowardly new world where we now minister. Number one, is that we must understand that marriage is not a church ordinance but a creation ordinance. It is for the well-being of God's

creation – just life and sexuality. Why is it in the church that we rightly and should respond to this horrific onslaught of the culture of death upon the unborn, the weak, and the elderly, whether its abortion, partial birth abortion, infanticide or now the proposals of active euthanasia? It is because life is sacred by creation. God gives life and takes away life and therefore we uphold the sanctity of life. That is not something that we just uphold within the church for that is something we uphold and declare as public policy good for all of humanity because it's a creation ordinance.

What about sexuality? Sexuality is a God given gift and it has been given to initiate a marriage for let the marriage bed be held in honor among all. And it is that which renews marriage and procreates within marriage. God has given sexuality within marriage. It is a natural sexual relationship between a man and woman and an ethical sexual relationship only within the bounds of marriage. So whether it is life, sexuality or marriage it is a creation ordinance.

Number two, marriage like sexuality and life is a creation ordinance that is affected by the fall of sin, the curse of sin. Let's look at Genesis 3. I wish we were still in the pristine majesty of Genesis 1 and 2 in terms of marriage but we're not because Genesis 3 records the fall of sin where Adam and Eve sinned against the Lord. I'm not going to go through the account of their sin nor their attempts to cover up the sin by hiding in the trees and leaves that they sewed or dealing with their guilt and shame by covering up or covering up by blaming each other or blaming the serpent. I want to look at the curse of sin that comes as a result of this fall.

Genesis 3:14–15 says [14] *The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. [15] I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring (seed); he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."* That is the anticipation of a Virgin birth because women don't have seed but there will be a woman who does have seed and that Seed speaking of Christ, will deal the death blow to the head of the evil one, the serpent, even though it will cost Him as His heel is bruised.

Genesis 3:16 says [16] *To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing (the reminder of sin is in the pains of childbearing); in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.* Then He goes on to speak to Adam in Genesis 3:17–19 about how the curse comes on another creation ordinance which is work. Work is not a curse. I think we're going to work when we get to the new heavens and the new earth. Work brings dignity. We were made to work. The curse brings thorns and thistles and frustration to the work but work was a creation ordinance.

I want to focus though on what He says to the woman in the last part of Genesis 3:16 which says *Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.* Looking at that word desire here is interesting. I wish that my wife Cindy would have that desire for me all the time but I'm sure at times that is probably not the case. Now my wife will put up with me because she made vows to me. How would desire here be a curse in our normal thinking of desire? It is a tough word to translate and it's only found three times in the Old Testament. It is found once in the Song of Solomon, once in Genesis 3 and the other time it is mentioned is in Genesis 4. Let's look at that for a moment and I'll try to show you how you are to read it.

In Genesis 4 Cain kills Abel and then the Lord confronts Cain and his sin. Genesis 4:5–7 says [5] *but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. [6] The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? [7] If you*

*do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.*” There is again desire and rule which was mentioned to the woman in the latter part of Genesis 3:16 when it said ‘your desire shall be for your husband but he will rule over you.’ How will your husband respond to your desire for him? He will rule over you.

Notice the language in Genesis 4:7 when it says ‘sin is crouching at the door.’ It sounds like a tiger or lion here. Sin wants you as its prey. Its desire is to control you, to devour you. That is the way the word desire is being used. So the woman because of the curse, instead of honoring her husband, the woman who has fallen unless God’s grace restrains her, will desire her husband’s position, to take his place, to control him, to dominate him. How will men respond under the curse of sin? They will respond by ruling over her. The word translated, rule, as a verb, in the noun would be translated as tyrant. So if you take tyrant and turn it into a verb it can be translated as your desire to control/dominate him, his response would be to tyrannize you. How do men tyrannize? I’m bigger, stronger or I can take care of myself and just walk away. So they can intimidate by ignoring and walking away or intimidate by physical violence.

I want you to see that marriage, the creation ordinance, is under the attack of sin. That is not the only thing under attack from the creation ordinance for the sanctity of sexuality and the sanctity of life are also under attack. What is the first thing the first generation does? They murder. Then Cain bears a son and we see what happens in Genesis 4. Genesis 4:17–19 says [17] *Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. [18] To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mehujael, and Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech. [19] And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah.* Lamech even writes a song.

Genesis 4:23–24 says [23] *Lamech said to his wives: “Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. [24] If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold.”* Here is a man, Lamech, who becomes a tyrant and he perverts marriage into polygamy and under sexual gratification as he will have two wives. Then he furthers the descent on the sanctity of life for he says if Cain murdered then watch what I do for I will kill a boy if I want to. So you have this continual descent into depravity, as total depravity unchecked by grace becomes absolute depravity. So it is that marriage is affected by the fall – the relationship within marriage, the view within marriage, the design of marriage. The curse of sin brings the marriage relationship design under attack.

Thirdly, the Gospel not only redeems men and women but it can redeem marriage and God’s people said ‘Amen!’ You can go to a passage like Ephesians 5 and find out that husbands, instead of tyrannizing their wives, can love them and sacrifice themselves for them. Ephesians 5:25–27 says [25] *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, [26] that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, [27] so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.* He gave Himself for her so that we can lead as servants and love sacrificially, instead of being tyrants.

The wife, instead of trying to control and dominate, by the grace of God and the Gospel can submit, respect and come along side of her husband, not competing with him but completing him with honor and respect. That is what the Gospel can do, as the woman does that unto the

Lord and the man does that to reflect the Lord as he loves and leads his wife. That is another whole series on the Christian marriage and that is for another time.

Number four, is the Gospel calls us (the Christian and the church) to pursue marriage in Christ and for Christ. Here is a church ordinance for you about marriage. Paul says to the Corinthians that it is a Christian's duty to marry in the Lord. That means our marriages are not to be unequally yoked. When we pursue a marriage we are to pursue another believer. We can have friendship with anyone but what fellowship does light have with darkness and what is the most intimate fellowship of all? It is the marriage so we are to pursue marriage in the Lord. Marriage in the Lord is not only between two believers but it is a marriage that is framed by God's Word. God's Word defines how we are going to live in this marriage, not the prevailing fads of the day. A marriage that is in the Lord is a marriage that exists to give praise to the Lord. It is an act of worship to the Lord. That is how Christians pursue marriage.

Number five, the Bible tells us marriage exists for two reasons. There is a primary reason and a secondary reason. The primary reason for marriage is that God created marriage for those created in His image in order to communicate to the world the covenant (redemptive) relationship He has with His people. What is perhaps the most favorite metaphor in the Old and New Testament to describe God's relationship with His people? It is marriage. Christ is the Bridegroom and we are the bride. God has established Himself as the pursuing Husband to His Old Covenant people who would walk away from Him into whoredom and He would continue to pursue them and bring them back into marital fidelity with Him. It was a covenant relationship and God created marriage primarily for that purpose. It is not that God sent His Son Jesus and Jesus purchased for Himself a people, then God looked out there and said "I need an illustration for this – perhaps marriage!" No, He made marriage from the beginning in creation in order to establish what would be the exhibit of a covenant relationship that He would enjoy with His people.

Genesis 2:24 says [24] *Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.* What does Jesus do? He leaves His Father to lay down His life and purchase His bride. And He cleaves to her. Romans 8:38–39 says [38] *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ so there is no divorce possible. We are His and He is ours. It is a Divine institution to communicate the covenant relationship that God has with His people. That is its primary purpose.

What is the secondary purpose of marriage? It is for human flourishing. It is a foundational institution for those made in His image to live. In the church with redeeming grace we apply the Gospel. In the world we labor for common grace for marriage to be held in honor among all. The writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 13:4 says [4] *Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.* This is not just to the church because this brings flourishing. What kind of marriage? It should be a monogamous, heterosexual, conjugal, covenantal and if God blesses, a procreative relationship. That is one that God has designed in creation.

If these are the two purposes then what should we do? I believe that the church and the Christian should labor to bring the Gospel blessings of both redeeming grace and common grace to the institution of marriage in our society. When we talk about redeeming grace we want to win people to Christ and when they come to Christ along with being disciplined the very first

blessing ought to show up in a marriage that would then overflow into a family, an extended family and then to a community, etc. This should then seep throughout the world. That is what our forbearers did. They went into communities, led people to Christ and began to see the work of redeeming grace in marriages. And they then spoke to the culture to bring the blessings of common grace so that pagan, marital anarchy and sexual anarchy was confronted for the well-being of others because we love our neighbor. If we love our neighbor we can't be silent about the institution that God established for the well-being of humanity and for the engagement of true sexuality and all of the intimacies of love.

So we are called to both speak to the public square with public theology that we are instruments of common grace while at the same time doing the work of redeeming grace in the lives of men and women and marriages. Know this. I want to make this point as carefully as I can. When we do this, this can only be blessed when the people of God become salty and shine the light of the Gospel. Without that we make no significant impact. It's not the only thing we can do but one of the best things we can do is to ask God increasingly to give us hearts that pursue marriage Biblically with the Gospel framework that is described in the Scriptures so that the world would look and see that's what we want and need. When we falter let the world see the work of the Gospel that restores men and women when they falter and then those marriages producing families even in a fallen world that shows something is different.

The best apologetic for marriage, but not the only apologetic for marriage, is Gospel marriages in the church of Jesus Christ. It's just like the best apologetic against the promiscuity of natural sex or the perversions of sex is the redeeming, life transforming work of Christ where God's people labor for sexuality within marriage and celibacy outside of marriage. I hope to speak to this a little bit more pointedly in our next study as we take on another timely topic and that is the matter of Biblical sexuality and the sanctity of sexuality.

The seventh one is that we need to get our expectations right. Every once in a while in your life God will just kind of microwave something and I hope that technology hangs on for a while because I don't have time to keep changing illustrations and metaphors. This happened to me for the day I was converted God microwaved out my blasphemous, profane mouth and now God lets me teach His Word with this same mouth which is hard to get my head around. I actually get paid to preach and teach His Word and that's just overwhelming to me to think of what I came out of. There were other issues in my life that didn't get microwaved that I'm still working on with the Lord now forty something years later. I say to God "Can we do some microwaving work here for this crockpotting is about to kill me." I wish I could tell you that God's people in this day will hold fast and that God will send a microwave Gospel awakening and we'll get this thing restored but that's not usually the way it happens. You have to take the long haul.

Number one we're not going to hold to marriage as a creation ordinance to be properly supported with public theology for common grace and redeeming grace in the lives of God's people so that the United States will get a good culture back. That is not why we are doing it. We are doing it because we love Jesus and because we love Jesus we love other people enough to tell them about it. I am more than happy for God to restore some sanity to this nation but I'm not doing it for that. I am asking God to do that but I'm not doing it for that. I am doing this because I love Jesus and Jesus loves marriage. And Jesus has marriage here for two purposes – to tell everyone about His relationship with His bride and to bring a foundational institution whereby humanity can flourish, even unsaved people can receive blessings of common grace when marriage is held in honor among all.

I would love it if God would bring that sanity back to my country but I am taking the long view. It is kind of tough for me to take this long view because I don't have much longer here but I am going to take the long view. Whenever you try to get a quick fix you usually get a bigger problem. Take the long view and I'll finish with this illustration.

Last week a dear brother name John Wyatt went to be with the Lord and he was only 38 years old, a member of our church. It brought me back to when I first came to this year and another man who was only 34 years old passed away when he was out fishing and his heart basically exploded. When we had his funeral this place just filled up with people all over the world and now all over the world there are things named after him – conference rooms, buildings and other things and he was only 34 years old. Probably the best thing to understand was one of his business partners stood in the eulogy and said “You all are here because of your respect for him, most of you because of your respect for him in business but what you don't know is what I know. The reason you respected him in his dealings with you is because whenever we would discuss something he say ‘that's simple. Let's do the next right thing.’”

So Christians I am asking you for Christ's sake, do the next right thing. Man proposes but God disposes. So we will propose by God's grace in humility and courage to do the next right thing for the sanity of marriage to be held in honor among all as God designed it and for those who oppose it I have Good News. Your distortion of marriage will not save you but I know a Savior who loves you so much He'll take you right where you are but He loves you too much to leave you where you are. That's your Savior. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. I thank You for my brothers and sisters in Christ that we have been able to enjoy fellowship in singing and in Your Word and now step into a new week. Help us for Your glory, by Your grace, to do the next right thing and when we do it to tell everybody about Jesus, in whose name I pray, Amen.