

It's my intention this morning to begin a three-part series of sermons on the topic: Three Reasons for Marriage. These reasons are imitation, companionship, and procreation. We will consider each one in a sermon (beginning this morning with imitation).

Now, let me clarify at the outset—these are not the only three reasons for marriage, but I want to suggest, they are three primary reasons or purposes for marriage.

And thus, before I come to consider the first of these, I want to briefly provide the goals I have in preaching these sermons: (1) to encourage and strengthen those who are married. There is a sense in which the health of our marriages has a direct relation to the health of our church. Ordinarily, strong churches are comprised of strong marriages.

(2) To prepare and educate those who are not yet married. And here of course I am especially thinking of our young people who are presently single, but desire one day to be married. It's my hope that over the next few weeks, you will not only be reminded of the primary purposes for marriage, but you will also be excited about marriage.

And so, in coming to consider our first reason for marriage, I want to first state and prove a doctrine, expand upon it, and then apply it. Thus, our heads will be these: The Doctrine Stated and Proved, Expanded, and Applied.

- I. The Doctrine Stated and Proved
- II. The Doctrine Expanded
- III. The Doctrine Applied

#### I. The Doctrine Stated and Proved

1. The doctrine I want to state and then prove is this—a primary purpose of marriage is to illustrate the relationship that exists between Christ and His church.
2. In other words, marriage doesn't happen to resemble the relationship between Christ and the church, marriage was created primarily to reflect this relationship.
3. Perhaps another way of saying this would be—as God made man in His image, so He made earthly marriage in the image of heavenly marriage.
4. In other words, the one (earthly marriage), was intended from its conception, to reflect our heavenly marriage.
5. George Knight—"Marriage was designed by God from the beginning to be a picture or parable of the relationship between Christ and the church. Back when God was planning what marriage would be like, He planned it for this great purpose: it would give a beautiful earthly picture of the relationship that would someday come about between Christ and His church."
6. Now, I know for you brethren, because you are overall well taught in the Scriptures, this statement is evident.
7. But I fear it's not so evident to many if not most Christians—many people view marriage as merely something that concerns them.
8. Marriage, as with everything else, it's all about me—marriage is intended to satisfy my wants, needs, and desires.
9. I want to suggest, that it's the failure to realize this higher purpose of marriage, that causes many marriages to fail.
10. Thus, at this point having stated the doctrine, I desire to prove it by providing three broad or general arguments.
11. (1) God's relationship with OT Israel was that of a Husband and bride, and this, typified Christ and His church.
12. Isa.54:5—"For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is His name"—this of course refers to Israel.

13. As the OT foreshadowed or typified the NT, God's relationship with OC Israel typified Christ's relationship with NC Israel.
14. (2) The Song of Solomon—here I simply want to remind you that the Song of Solomon is typical of Christ and His church.
15. Those who merely understand it to describe human marriage and love, have an impossible task of understanding it.
16. The Hebrews never would have allowed a book with 8 chapters in the OT canon, if it merely spoke of human love.
17. And thus, Solomon refers to it as the Song of all Songs, because it describes the greatest of all loves, which is the love between God and His people.
18. (3) The NT Scriptures—here I want to briefly examine four texts that use marriage to describe our relationship with Christ.
19. Jn.3:29—"He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled."
20. Here John the Baptist refers to himself as "the friend of the bridegroom" and Christ Himself as "the bridegroom."
21. Christ came into this world to pursue a bride—He came to redeem her and to call her to Himself because of love.
22. 2Cor.11:2—"For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."
23. Most of you will know that the Jews understood marriage to take place in two states—betrothal and consummation.
24. Betrothal took place first and resulted in a formal marriage, and then groom prepared a place for his bride, and then after the wedding feast, consummated the marriage (they lived together)
25. Thus, Christians are presented betrothed to Christ, who has gone away to prepare a place for His beloved bride.
26. When He returns, we will have the wedding feast, and then live with Him forever, in the new heavens and earth.
27. Eph.5:31-32—"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church."
28. At the heart of Paul's instruction to husbands to love and cherish their wives, he quotes Genesis 2:24 (about leaving our parents and being joined to our spouse becoming one flesh).
29. Paul then says—"This is a great mystery"—a mystery in the NT sense, is a previous truth now clearly made known.
30. Thus, the question becomes—What is the mystery that Paul speaks about—is marriage a mystery—is the union between husband and wife a mystery?
31. No, for he then tells what this mystery is—"but I speak concerning Christ and the church"—this is the mystery.
32. In other words, the mystery is that Christ and the church would be united as one—this was shadowed in marriage.
33. There is a sense in which Christ left both His Father (in heaven), and His mother (on earth), to join Himself to His Bride.
34. And this brethren, is a great mystery—that God and Man (in Christ) should become one—what a great truth!
35. It was for this reason marriage was created—to reflect or shadow this great mystery—to point man to Christ in His gospel.
36. Rev.19:7—"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."
37. This describes the consummation, the wedding feast, when Christ returns to dwell with His bride for all eternity.
38. And thus, we learn, the Scriptures describe our relationship to Christ as a marriage, that in some sense began in eternity.

39. The Father chose a bride for His Son and gave them to Him as a love gift—the Son came for her in time to purchase her, and will return for her at His second coming.
40. Thus, there's a true sense in which our heavenly marriage predates God's ordinance of marriage, as our heavenly marriage began in eternity.
41. Though there's a sense in which we are not actually wed to Christ until we are converted, and come to Him by faith.
42. There is another sense in which, we've already been selected as His bride by the Father, in His eternal decree (this was an arranged marriage).
43. And so, having created man, God instituted marriage as a means to illustrate the relationship between Christ and His church.
44. Thus, marriage doesn't merely bear some resemblance to our relationship between Christ and the church, it was created to reflect that relationship.

## II. The Doctrine Expanded

1. Here I want to expand upon our doctrine by suggesting five primary ways marriage mirrors the relationship between Christ and His church.
2. (1) Covenant fidelity—the covenant faithfulness between a husband and wife reflects the covenant love between Christ and His church.
3. The first point can really be summarized by the word "covenant"—a covenant is a relationship founded upon promise.
4. Just as the relationship between Christ and His church is a covenant, so Scripture describes marriage as a covenant.
5. Now, to perhaps be a bit simplistic, at the heart of a covenant is the idea of an oath-bound promise or commitment.
6. Ordinarily, in a covenant, both sides make promises—this is also true in our covenant relationship with Christ.
7. Christ promises His bride that He will never leave her nor forsake her—that He will meet all of her eternal needs.
8. And what does the church promise Christ? But that she would love Him and find all her salvation and satisfaction in Him.
9. And yet, it's important to remember, that our keeping our promises, is necessary contingent upon Him keeping His promises.
10. In other words, a part of Christ's promise to His people, is that He would enable them to keep their promises to Him.
11. And so it is in marriage—both the husband and wife make promises to each other—they make covenant vows.
12. What do they fundamentally promise? Well, they both promise never to leave nor forsake each other, as long as they both live.
13. They promise to love each other and live with each other, through hard times, good times, sad times, and glad times.
14. Dear brethren, this is why we don't give up on our spouses—because Christ never gives up on His spouse (church)!
15. What a tremendous thought this is! Even if I gain a few pounds, lose my hair, grow old, or get sick—my spouse will never leave me.
16. Why? Because we have covenanted together before God and man, and we've promised never to leave each other.
17. This is one of the most obvious ways marriage reflects the relationship that exists between Christ and the church.
18. And brethren, if this is true, what have we said to the world concerning Christ and the church, in that we've allowed divorce for any reason!
19. This is why, unless there's been unfaithfulness or abandonment, the Scriptures simply do not allow for divorce.

20. (2) Mutual intimacy—by this I mean, the physical and relational intimacy of marriage, illustrates the intimacy that takes place between Christ and His church.
21. Perhaps I can best summarize this second point with the phrase "one flesh"—only in marriage do two people become one flesh.
22. Christians are one flesh with Christ by faith and love, and it's the Holy Spirit within both that unites us together.
23. And thus, it's important to realize the intimacy between Christ and the church is a mutual intimacy (two-sided) intimacy.
24. Christ does not merely give us salvation, but He gives us Himself, and in turn we give ourselves to Him (and not merely service).
25. Song of Solomon 2:16—"My beloved is mine, and I am His"—these are the words of the church to beloved Savior.
26. All that Christ is He gives to us, and all that we are we give to Him—the church and Christ are one (one flesh).
27. And to too, a husband and wife become one flesh in marriage also—this is to say, they enjoy the closest intimacy.
28. Now obviously brethren, this happens in physical intimacy, but being one flesh actually transcends the physical act.
29. It refers to intimacy on every level—marriage provides the closest possible intimacy between two people on earth.
30. This is something I intend to return to next week (when we will consider another purpose of marriage is companionship).
31. But what an amazing gift is marriage—a covenant relationship wherein two people share themselves with each other!
32. (3) Humble submission—by this I mean, the wife's humble submission to Christ illustrates the church's submission to Christ.
33. Thus, I want to suggest wives submit to their husbands, as the church submits to Christ, in at least three ways.
34. (a) Lovingly—why does the church submit to Christ but because she loves Him, and thus she loves obeying Him.
35. Surely brethren, if the Scriptures teach us anything, it teaches us that Christians obey Christ because they love Him.
36. Jn.14:15—"If you love Me, keep My commandments"—or we could say—we keep His commandments because we love Him.
37. This is why Christ's bride submits to Him, because she loves Him, and she loves Him because she married Him.
38. And so it should be for wives—because you have covenanted with you husbands, you have promised to love them.
39. This is another way of saying—you should humbly submit to his leadership willingly and with your whole heart.
40. (b) Respectfully—the church submits to Christ because she owns Him as her Head—she recognizes His authority.
41. And so too, wives must submit to their own husbands with respect—which entails an acknowledgement of authority.
42. Eph.5:33—"Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."
43. (c) Universally—the church submits to Christ in all things—she obeys all that He commands her within Scripture.
44. Eph.5:24—"Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything."
45. Now obviously, a wife is never expected to obey her husband if he expects her to do something that is immoral.

46. Furthermore, a wife always has the right to express her opinion on a matter, and even disagree with her husband.
47. But brethren, at the end of the day, a wife must submit to her husband in all things, just as the church is subject to Christ.
48. (4) Loving headship—that is, the loving headship of the husband, illustrates the headship of Christ over His church.
49. Thus, I want to suggest husbands are to lovingly lead their wives, as Christ leads the church, in at least three ways.
50. (a) Consistently—by this I mean, Christ lovingly leads His bride steadily—He's the same yesterday, today, and forever.
51. The church never has to wake up and ask the question—I wonder what mood our heavenly Husband will be in today?
52. And here's why—He'll be in the same mood He was yesterday and tomorrow—He's level in His rule over us.
53. And so it should be for husbands—their poor wives should never feel and if they are being pulled in every direction.
54. They should know their husband is consistent, and that he's not going to expect one thing today and another tomorrow.
55. Now, this obviously doesn't deny that husbands may change their minds on things, and thus alter family policy.
56. But it simply means, husbands should be overall stable in their grasp of Scripture, and its application to their homes.
57. (b) Selflessly—Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her—He sacrificed Himself for her eternal good.
58. And so too, husbands must love their wives selflessly or sacrificially—they are to give of themselves for their good.
59. This means, husbands must not put their own interests first, but must put their wives before themselves in everything.
60. They must put the needs and interests of their wives above their own—they must give of themselves for the sake of their wives.
61. (c) Gently—Christ loves the church gently—He knows she is the weaker vessel and thus needs tender leading.
62. Perhaps we can say, Christ dwells with His wife in perfect knowledge, knowing all of her fears and weaknesses.
63. Does Christ lead His wife with authority? Yes. But He also leads her with a perfect understanding of her needs.
64. Brethren, I trust the application here is obvious—husbands must be gentle with their wives because they know their wives.
65. 1Pet.3:7—"Husbands, dwell with your wives with understanding, giving honor to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life."
66. (5) Numeric fruitfulness—by this I mean, the fruitfulness of the marriage in making children, illustrates the fruitfulness of the church in making disciples.
67. Now, it's my intent to return to this topic under our third sermon, and so I can be rather brief in my treatment of it here.
68. It's a very important and wonderful way in which the marriage imitates or illustrates the relationship between Christ and His Bride.
69. Just as the union of a man and woman usually results in children, so the church is likened to the mother of us all.
70. Gal.4:26—"The Jerusalem above is free (the church) which is the mother of us all"—we are her all her children.
71. And so just as God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, our beloved Husband has exhorted His bride—"Go in into the world, and make disciples (children) of all the nations."

### III. The Doctrine Applied

1. I suggest our doctrine answers three important questions—Why we should have healthy marriages, How we can have healthy marriages, and When we will have perfect marriages.
2. (1) Why we should have healthy marriages—in other words, what is the ultimate motive in seeking a healthy marriage.
3. And as I have said before, I believe this is where many couples err—they make marriage in the first place, all about them.
4. But as I have sought to show you this morning, in the first place, marriage isn't about us, it's about glorifying Christ.
5. I want to suggest to you—this is 80 or 90 % of the problem in marriages that struggle—both people are looking out for themselves.
6. They have believed the lie that it's all about them—they simply don't feel loved, wanted, satisfied, or fulfilled.
7. Perhaps another way of putting this would be—marriage is about what can I get, but instead, what can I give.
8. That is—how can I give glory to God in my marriage, as it imperfectly but generally, reflects Christ and His church.
9. Dear brethren, I trust we understand this—we are all telling people about Christ and the church with our marriage.
10. The question is not—are we telling people something about Christ and the church—the question is—are we telling them the right things.
11. O husbands—what a blessing—we get to show others around us, in our marriage, the love of Christ for His church.
12. O wives—what a blessing—you get to show others around you, in your marriage, the love of the church for Christ.
13. Husbands get to show others what Christ is like, and wives get to show others what we truly think about Christ!
14. (2) How we can have healthy marriages—if marriage is primarily intended to reflect the relationship that exists between Christ and the church, then what is the most obvious way Christians can improve their marriages—by imitating Christ and the church.
15. In other words, the best way for husbands to love their wives is to behold how Christ loves the church, and the best way for wives to submit to their husbands is to behold how the church submits to Christ.
16. This really goes back to something that I have said many times—the health of our marriages, depends on the health of our souls.
17. Put another way—you will be a good husband and/or wife, to the degree you are a good (or healthy) Christian.
18. How are we made healthy Christians? Well, obviously we are to imitate the relationship with Christ and the church.
19. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church, and wives are to submit to Christ as the church submits to Christ.
20. (3) When we will have perfect marriages—simply put, we will have a perfect marriage when we get to heaven.
21. And of course, I do not here refer to our earthly marriages, for the only marriage that continues in heaven is that between Christ and His church.
22. While our earthly marriages are intended to reflect or illustrate our heavenly marriage, all of us fall very short.
23. The only marriage that will be eternal, and the only marriage that will be perfect, is the one between Christ and His church.
24. Dear brethren, as beautiful as earthly marriage is, it's a very imperfect and even temporary relationship—it ends with the grave.
25. But our heavenly marriage with Christ will one day be perfect, and that marriage dear brethren, will last forever.