

Biblical Anthropology

*Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion”
(Genesis 1:26 ESV)*

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in
place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?
(Psalm 8:3-4 ESV)*

The Goodness Of Marriage

February 11th, 2024

Genesis 2:18-25

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Genesis 2:18; that’s on page 2 in the church Bibles. This morning we are building on what we talked about last week. Last week we were talking in a general sense about the fact that when God created human beings, he made them male and female. This week, we are getting a bit more specific as investigate the essential goodness of marriage.

Marriage IS a good thing – can you say amen to that?

Saying “amen” to that is one of the things that makes you ODD in this culture. There are other things that make you ODD but this one in particular is significant, because fewer and fewer young people are convinced that marriage is a good idea and many people are beginning to sound the alarm over that. Jean Twenge for example, in her book *Generations*, reports that the average age for marriage now in North America is 31 for men and 28.5 for women. (display chart).

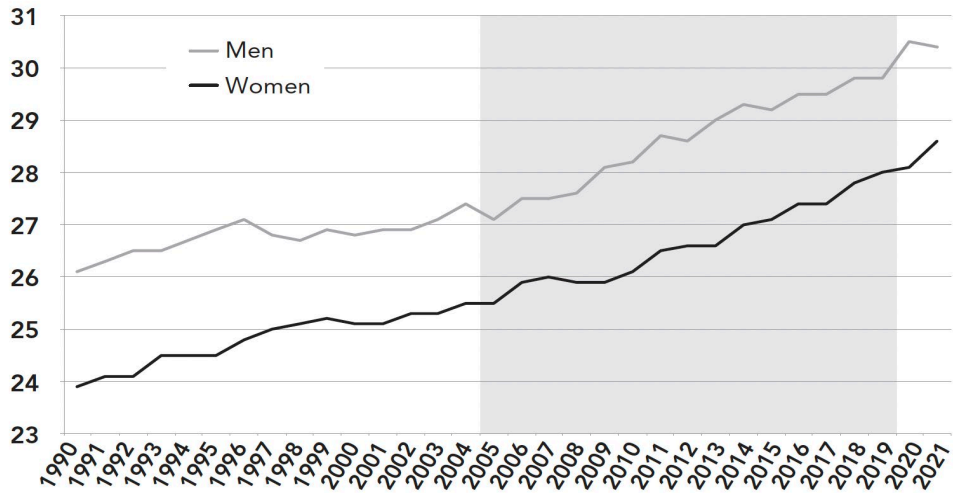


Figure 5.28: Median age at first marriage, U.S., by gender, 1990–2021

Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Census, Historical Marital Status Tables

Notes: Millennials most 20- to 29-year-olds in shaded years.

Fewer people in this culture are getting married and those that are getting married are doing so later in life and that is having a very predictable impact on human fertility rates. If fewer people are getting married and they are getting married later in life, then obviously fertility rates are going to go DOWN and that is what we are seeing. (Display chart)

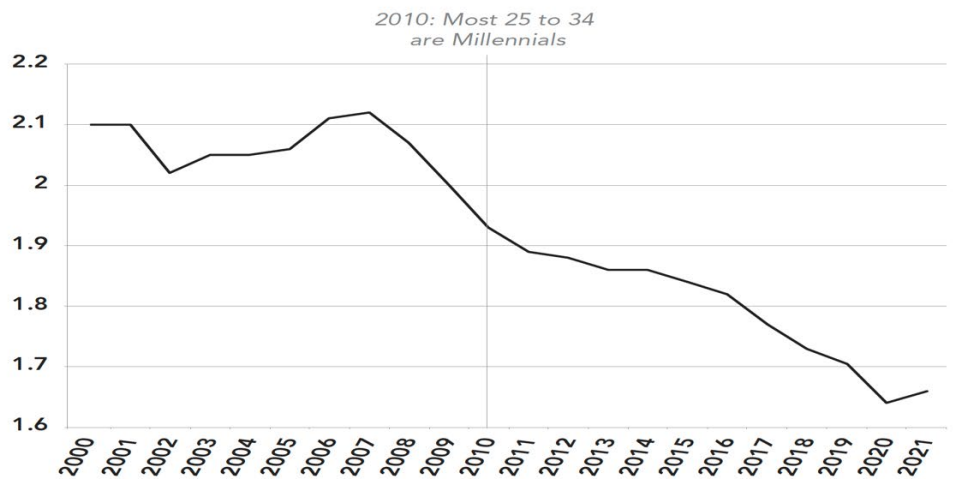


Figure 5.32: Total fertility (estimated number of children per woman), U.S., 2000–2021

Source: National Vital Statistics, CDC

There has been a dramatic decline in fertility amongst Millennial women and the prediction is that things will be significantly worse amongst Gen Z women, the oldest of which are now 27. In fact, Twenge refers to Gen Z as the least marrying generation in history – at least so far. One reason for that is the massive spike in LGBTQ+ identification, particularly among females, in this generation. (Show chart)

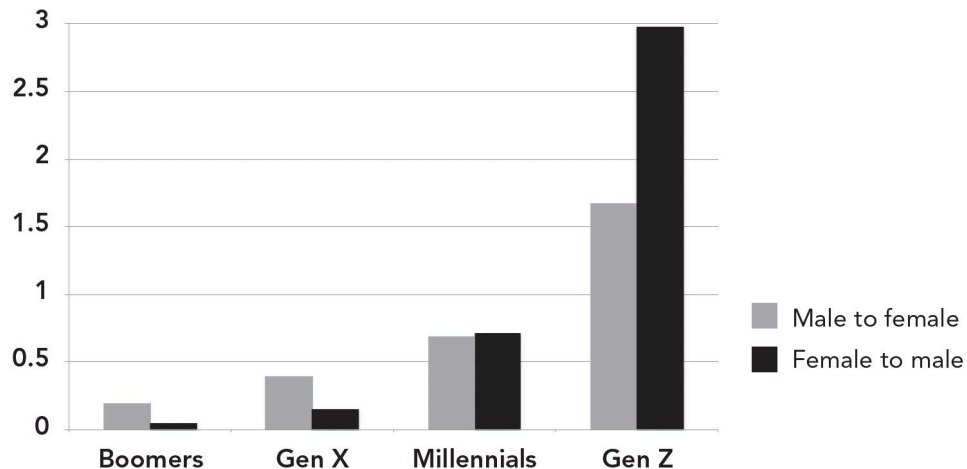


Figure 6.3: Percent of U.S. adults identifying as transgender, by sex assigned at birth and generation, 2021–2022

Source: Household Pulse Survey, U.S. Census Bureau

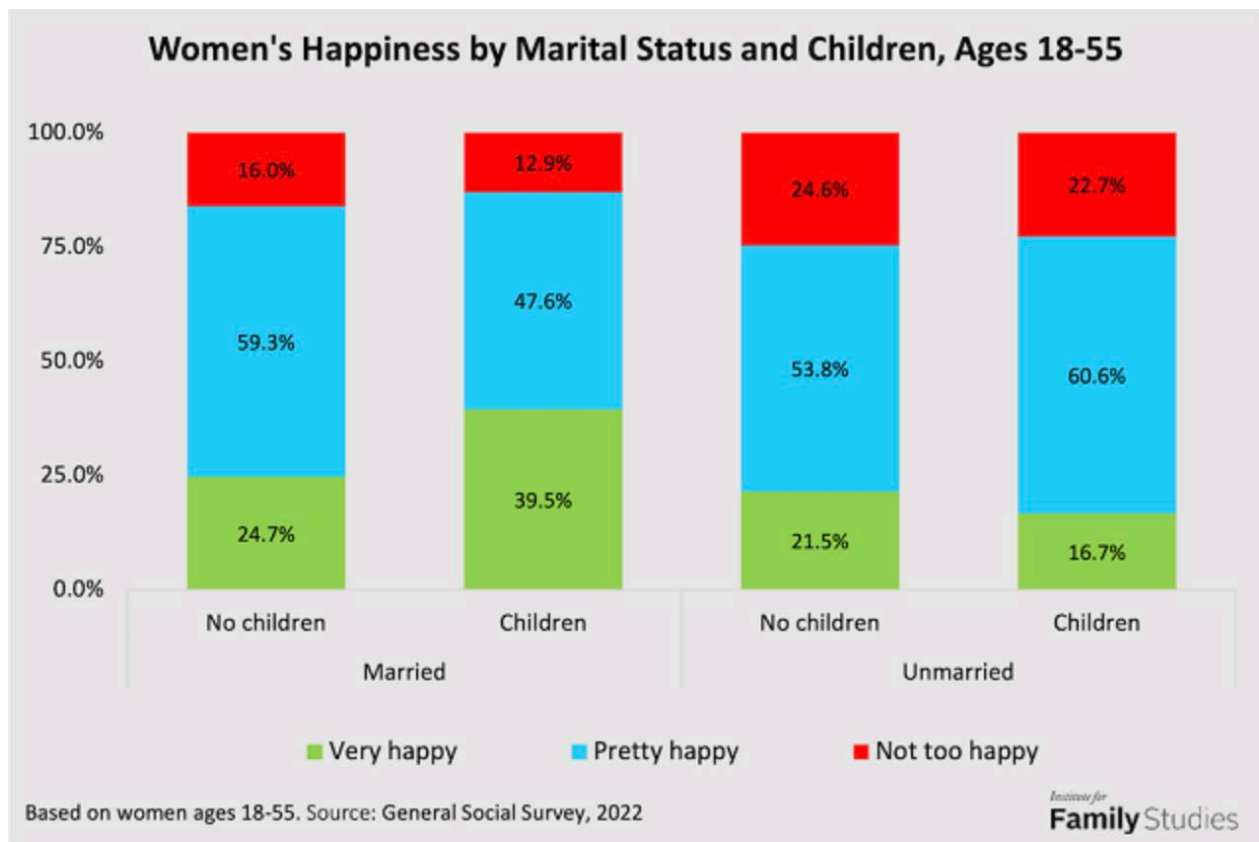
Notes: Data collected between July 21, 2021, and October 17, 2022. Terms are from the BRFSS survey, though they are increasingly considered outdated and are replaced with *transgender women* and *transgender men*, respectively.

According to Twenge’s research:

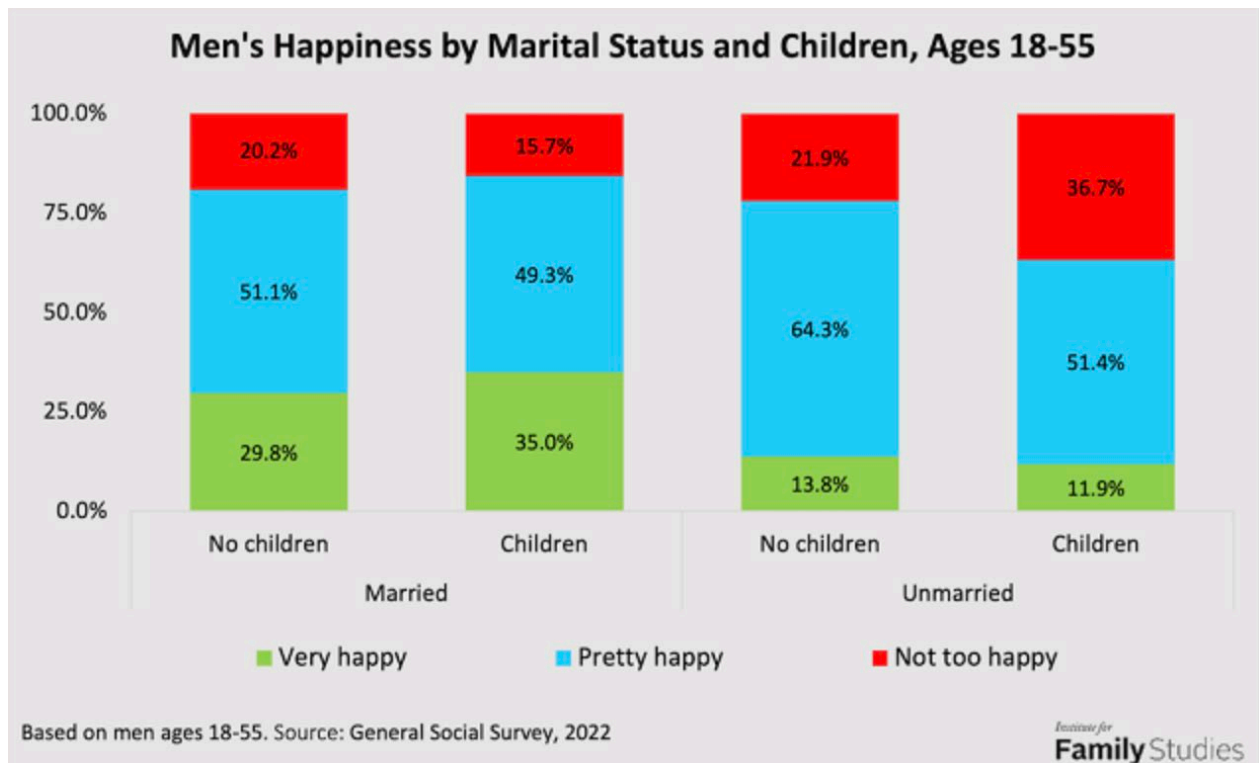
“By 2021, 1 in 7 high school freshmen identified as something other than straight.”¹

So, to state the obvious, MARRIAGE is in trouble right now in our culture, and that’s really too bad because study after study shows that MARRIAGE is good for human beings. The 2022 edition of the General Social Survey, showed that married women with children are the happiest people in America. (show chart)

¹ Jean Twenge, *Generations: The Real Differences Between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silents – and What They Mean for America’s Future*, (New York: Atria Books, 2023), 365.



Followed closely by married MEN with children. (show slide)



So marriage IS GOOD for human beings. Who knew? Well of course, GOD KNEW. God made us, God knows us and God loves us and therefore he gave us the institution of marriage; as we are about to see here in Genesis chapter 2. Hopefully you have your Bibles open now. We'll read the text and then we'll talk about marriage in the beginning, marriage after the fall and marriage among the redeemed. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." 19 Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

23 Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:18-25 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

First of all then, let's talk about marriage in the beginning.

Marriage In The Beginning:

The first thing we see in this story is that:

A. Marriage is the norm for human beings

It is not good for the man to be alone – verse 18. Aloneness represents a departure from design. Aloneness is not GOOD. Now, we're going to talk about singleness in two weeks, but as I said last week, even if you are called to singleness, you are not called to aloneness. Those who are single are still called to be part of the family; so there needs to be space and legitimacy afforded

to those who are called to singleness – we’ll talk more about that in two weeks, but to legitimize an exception, is not to eliminate a rule, and as a rule, it is the design of God for men and women to be married, and that certainly was the case in the Old Testament. Barry Danylyk, in his book on singleness, points out:

“that the nation of Israel was characterized by near universal marriage for those who were able to marry, because marriage and offspring had a fundamental role in the appropriation of the Sinai covenant blessings to the individual Israelite.”²

I’ll tell you this, in drafting out next week’s message on singleness, there is pretty much nothing to say until you get to Jesus. There is no real tradition of singleness in the Old Testament. There is Jeremiah – who was told not to marry because the nation of Israel was about to be defeated by Babylon and carried off into exile and that’s not a great time to get married. So we have the Jeremiah exception, but it cannot be denied that, in the Old Testament marriage was the general rule.

It is not good for the man – or the woman to be alone. We were made for each other, which takes us to the second thing we need to say here. According to Genesis 2:

B. Marriage is a form of intimate partnership

I’m taking those two words from the outer brackets of this story. I’m getting the word “partnership” from verse 18 and I’m getting the word “intimate” from verse 25. We talked a bit about the “partnership” piece last week. I mentioned that the Hebrew word translated in verse 18 as “helper” does not imply inferiority as if the woman was given to be the man’s maid or servant. In fact, the most common referent for that word in the Bible is God himself. The word simply refers to a partner we need to do what we were created to do. We need to be in partnership with God to do the things we were created to do and we need to be in partnership with each other. John Hammett and Katie McCoy make this point in their book on Biblical Anthropology, they note that:

² Barry Danylyk, *Redeeming Singleness: How The Storyline of Scripture Affirms the Single Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 56.

“In Gen 1:28, humanity is charged with the responsibility of multiplying and filling the earth. But in Genesis 2, Adam lacks the partner necessary for carrying out this responsibility. God provides for Adam, not another man, but a woman.”³

To state the obvious, it takes a man and a woman to be fruitful and multiply. But even beyond the biological mechanics, I think we could agree that it takes a man and a woman to raise a child. We’ll be talking more about that next week, but the point for now is that our DIFFERENCE was intended as a GIFT. The woman brought something to the man that he didn’t have. Her capacities, her chemistry, her biology, her nature, her gifts and her inclinations will form the perfect counterpart to his. As we talked about last week, the man and the woman are equal – but they are not the same. A man’s body has been optimized for production and protection. A woman’s body has been optimized for reproduction and nurture. You put all of that together and you’ve got the perfect team for having and raising little worshippers.

Verse 24 says: THEREFORE (as in, to make that happen) a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

Now, that’s a bit of an odd sentence, if you stop and think about it because who exactly was Adam’s father and mother? He doesn’t have a father or a mother – so why is verse 24 in your Bible? It is there to TURN THIS STORY into a general norm. Kenneth Matthews in his commentary on this passage says the Hebrew phrase in Genesis 2:24 (“this is why”) describes marriage as “the consequence of God’s charge for the human family to propagate and rule.”⁴

If you are going to do what God created human beings to do, obviously, you are going to have to have marriage. You are going to have to have PARTNERSHIP between a man and a woman. Marriage was designed as the ideal context for having and raising babies. It is a partnership FOR THAT. But it is not JUST “a partnership”; it is an INTIMATE partnership. Look at verse 25:

And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:25 ESV)

³ John S. Hammett & Katie J. McCoy, *Humanity in Theology for the People of God* (Brentwood: B&H Academic, 2023), 140.

⁴ Kenneth Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 1A:222.

That's intimacy. They SAW each other, they KNEW each other and they LOVED each other. That's beautiful! And that's the way MARRIAGE is supposed to be – thanks be to God!

The third thing we need to see in this passage is that marriage is intended to last a lifetime.

C. Marriage is intended to last for a lifetime

If God makes something then we ought not to break that something. Jesus makes that point explicitly, from this passage, in Matthew 19. The Pharisees asked him a question about divorce and Jesus said:

“Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? 6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Matthew 19:4-6 ESV)

He's quoting there from Genesis 2:24 and he is saying that what God puts together should stay together. Marriage is intended as a form of intimate partnership covering the entire span of human life on earth. That's why we use to say:

For richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, 'till death do us part.

We see in this foundational story that a marriage between a man and a woman is intended to last a lifetime.

That's the design, but as we all know, great violence has been done against God's design. We are fallen creatures. We are not now the people we were created and intended to be, so the second thing we need to talk about is marriage on the other side of the fall.

Marriage After The Fall:

What do we see there? Well, we touched on this briefly last week. Flip forward one page in your Bible to Genesis 3:16. After the fall, the relationship between the first husband and wife is going to be characterized by:

A. Desire and discord

God says to the woman, when explaining the consequences of their rebellion:

“Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.”
(Genesis 3:16 ESV)

The NIV has that as:

“Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” (Genesis 3:16 NIV11)

Either way, I think the main point is fairly obvious; as Derek Kidner said memorably:

‘To love and to cherish’ becomes ‘To desire and to dominate’.⁵

The original intimacy of marriage is now complicated by lust and resentment. The harmonious partnership has been disrupted by conflict and confusion. We are no longer pulling together, more often than not, we are engaged in a giant tug of war and human history certainly seems to bear that out.

The second thing we see in the Genesis narrative, as we move further and further east of Eden, is:

B. Polygamy and possessiveness

Flip forward, perhaps one more page in your Bible to Genesis 4:23. The Bible here quotes a man named Lamech saying to his WIVES:

⁵Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 76.

“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. If Cain’s revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech’s is seventy-sevenfold.” (Genesis 4:23-24 ESV)

Everything about that passage strikes the reader as ODD. How did we go from “male and female” to “male and females”. How did we all the sudden get a man and his WIVES? Where did that come from? It doesn’t come from the design, it comes from the fall; it comes from SIN. Tim and Cathy Keller in their book on marriage point out that:

“The book of Genesis radically critiques the institution of polygamy, even though it was the accepted cultural practice of the time, by vividly depicting the misery and havoc it plays in family relationships, and the pain it caused, especially for women.”⁶

Indeed. In this story - in Genesis 4 – we’ve got a couple of women, apparently being held captive by some goon named Lamech who threatens them and anyone daring to look at them with seventy-seven fold revenge. That is not a good development. In this departure from the design, women have gone from beloved partners to prized possessions. Make note of that, because EVERY DEPARTURE from God’s design with respect to marriage and human sexuality disproportionately harms women. Just remember that. There is no departure from this design that it is better for women. Every road away from this highway leads to exploitation and unhappiness.

The third thing we see after the fall, as we move further and further east of Eden is:

C. Divorce and dissolution

We learn about that in Deuteronomy 24. I won’t make you turn all the way there; I will just point out that in Deuteronomy 24 Moses lays down a variety of laws governing and limiting divorce, which had become very common in the culture at the time, to the great harm and detriment of women. Women were discarded by their husbands and replaced with newer models – there is indeed nothing new under the sun. And so Moses slowed the process and limited the process and required men to give women a certificate of divorce so that they could get remarried. But to be clear, limiting a process, is not the same as approving of a process, a point that Jesus made in Matthew 19. He said, speaking to those Pharisees, who loved their freedom to divorce:

⁶ Timothy Keller with Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage* (New York: Dutton, 2011), 16-17.

“Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” (Matthew 19:8-9 ESV)

Divorce may be necessary for the protection of women, in a world filled with unregenerate men, but in the beginning, it was not so.

The fall has degraded and diminished the institution of marriage – but as we’ve been talking about, grace restores nature. Grace LIBERATES and ELEVATES human beings so that we can BE AGAIN the people we were created and intended to be, which leads us to our final question: what should marriage look like among the redeemed?

Marriage Among The Redeemed:

Well, we’re familiar enough now with the contours of this discussion to anticipate that marriage among the redeemed should bear a substantial resemblance with marriage back in the beginning. As J.I. Packer reminded us last week:

“the man-woman relationship is intrinsically non-reversible ... This is part of the reality of creation, a given fact that nothing will change. Certainly, redemption will not change it, for grace restores nature, not abolishes it.”⁷

So grace is supposed to take us back!! Back to who we were created to be as MALE and FEMALE; back to who were supposed to be as HUSBAND and WIFE! So whatever was TRUE with respect to our DESIGN should be in some stage of recovery within the redeemed community. And indeed, as we read through the New Testament we become aware of that general trajectory. We see, for example in the teachings of Jesus a renewed emphasis on the permanence of marriage:

⁷ J.I. Packer, “Understanding The Differences” in *Women, Authority & the Bible*, edited by Alvera Mickelsen, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 299.

A. A renewed emphasis on permanence

I've already quoted Jesus' response to the Pharisees in Matthew 19, but it might be helpful to look as well at the response of the disciples, who overheard Jesus' response to the Pharisees. Jesus has just said, divorce was not the design, it was a concession to human sinfulness, and anyone who put away his wife for any reason other than her sexual immorality was effectively committing adultery. Jesus raised the bar so far here that the disciples were literally thunderstruck. They 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.” (Matthew 19:10-12 ESV)

So Jesus is saying: “This is the standard boys, if you don't like it, I suppose you could become a eunuch. But I am not lowering the bar to accommodate your present sinfulness.”

I like that!

And that's how it works in the Kingdom of God. Jesus doesn't LOWER THE BAR, rather, he gives more grace. He lifts us up! He makes us the sort of people who are capable of lifelong intimate partnership.

Grace restores nature, not abolishes it, thanks be to God!

The second thing we see as we survey the New Testament documents is:

B. An insistence on love and respect

The New Testament prescriptions press directly on the root sins that have harmed and diminished the institution of marriage. To men who are inclined to LUST there is a command to love. To

women who are inclined to resentment, there is a command to respect. That was the instruction given by the Apostle Paul to men and women in Ephesus, he said:

“let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.” (Ephesians 5:33 ESV)

Men, let me ask you a question: do you love your wife as yourself? In fact, Paul had set the bar even higher earlier in the passage. In verses 25-28 he said:

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. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. (Ephesians 5:25-28 ESV)

So to love your wife as yourself, has been defined as loving your wife as Christ loved the church. He is turning the natural selfishness of the man back upon him!! You love yourself MAXIMALLY!! You would do anything for you! You feed yourself so well, you are so concerned with your own welfare – well now, Christian brother, with healed heart, having been filled with the Holy Spirit – turn all of that energy and attention outwards toward your beloved wife. Become concerned with HER NEEDS. Become focused on HER GROWTH. Become committed to her SAFETY and WELL BEING.

Husbands: how are we doing with that?

Do you need more grace? Then repent of your selfishness – take your lusts and your greed and your silly obsession with toys to the cross of Jesus Christ and REPENT OF IT. And seek in that place supplies of the Spirit and further grace, and then use what you receive there to love and care for your wife as Christ did for the church.

And wives: how are you doing with that command to respect?

The Bible is an equal opportunity offender. It assumes that both men AND women are fallen and sinful, so again, let me ask you: how are you doing with that command to respect?

Do you resent your husband? Do you desire to do for him what you perceive that he is unable or unwilling to do for himself? Do you spend a great deal of time trying to CONTROL your husband? Do you dole out sex and affirmation like a carrot on the end of a stick to get him to do and go where you want? If so then take those sins to the foot of the cross and repent. And ask in that place for supplies of the Spirit and further grace that we might grow into the people we were created and SAVED to be, by one degree of glory to the next.

Now, that feels like a good place to end, but actually, if we are to be faithful to the text, then there is one more thing for us to say. We must also acknowledge that, as we read through the New Testament there is an increasing awareness of the temporality and eventual termination of the institution of marriage.

C. An awareness of temporality and termination

Jesus, in a conversation with the Sadducees drops a bit of a bombshell, saying:

For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. (Matthew 22:30 ESV)

Pardon? What does that even mean? It appears to mean that as wonderful, and glorious and fruitful as the institution of marriage is, it was never intended to last FOREVER. It had a purpose. It was conceived and designed so as to fill the earth with human beings – people who love God and care for Creation and when we have enough of those people, apparently, the practice and institution of marriage will cease.

That is NEW INFORMATION.

The Apostle Paul obviously reflected deeply on this new information, because what he says in 1 Corinthians 7 reflects a profound new understanding. Paul, in that chapter, seems to be saying that in the overlap of the ages – now that Jesus has come, but while we wait for him to come

again – marriage is GOOD and so too is singleness – provided that both are embraced for the sake of the mission. There is going to be an increasing need for single people who can do what married people can't do and who can go where married people can't go. Things are going to be a little bit different in the last lap. In the last lap we're going to need all the tools. We're going to need healthy, loving, respectful, fruitful marriages and we're going to need focused, intentional, missional singleness.

Both are good and both are temporary and both will soon be replaced by something better: an intimate relationship with our Creator through the person and work of Jesus Christ and a forever family made up of people from every tribe, tongue and nation on planet earth – thanks be to God!

Let's pray together.