

CHAPTER ONE

STAYING MARRIED IS NOT MAINLY ABOUT STAYING IN LOVE

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." 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. 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. 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. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 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." Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

GENESIS 2:18-25

There never has been a generation whose general view of marriage is high enough. The chasm between the biblical vision of marriage and the common human vision is now, and has always been, gargantuan. Some cultures in history respect the importance and the permanence of marriage more than others. Some, like our own, have such low, casual, take-it-or-leave-it attitudes toward marriage as to make the biblical vision seem ludicrous to most people.

AN INCOMPREHENSIBLE VISION OF MARRIAGE

That was the case in Jesus' day as well. But ours is worse. When Jesus gave a glimpse of the magnificent view of marriage that God willed for his people, the disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry" (Matt. 19:10). In other words, Christ's vision of the meaning of marriage was so enormously different from the disciples', they could not even imagine it to be a good thing. That such a vision could be good news was simply outside their categories.

If that was the case then—in the sober, Jewish world in which they lived—how much more will the magnificence of marriage in the mind of God seem unintelligible in a modern Western culture, where the main idol is self; and its main doctrine is autonomy; and its central act of worship is being entertained; and its three main shrines are the television, the Internet, and the cinema; and its most sacred genuflection is the uninhibited act of sexual intercourse. Such a culture will find the glory of marriage in the mind of Jesus virtually incomprehensible. Jesus would probably say to us today, when he had finished opening the mystery for us, the same thing he said in his own day: "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. . . . Let the one who is able to receive this receive it" (Matt. 19:11–12).

WAKING UP FROM THE CULTURAL MIRAGE

So I start with the assumption that my own sin and selfishness and cultural bondage makes it almost impossible for me to feel the wonder of God's purpose for marriage. The fact that we live in a society that can defend two men or two women entering a sexual relationship and, with wild inconceivability, call it *marriage* shows that the collapse of our culture into debauchery and anarchy is probably not far away.

I mention this cultural distortion of marriage in the hopes that it might wake you up to consider a vision of marriage higher and deeper and stronger and more glorious than anything this culture—or perhaps you yourself—ever imagined. The greatness and glory of marriage is beyond our ability to think or feel without divine revelation and without the illumining and awakening work of the Holy Spirit. The world cannot know what marriage is without learning it from God. The natu-

ral man does not have the capacities to see or receive or feel the wonder of what God has designed for marriage to be. I pray that this book might be used by God to help set you free from small, worldly, culturally contaminated, self-centered, Christ-ignoring, God-neglecting, romance-intoxicated, unbiblical views of marriage.

The most foundational thing to see from the Bible about marriage is that it is God's doing. And the ultimate thing to see from the Bible about marriage is that it is for God's glory. Those are the two points I have to make. Most *foundationally*, marriage is the *doing* of God. And *ultimately*, marriage is the *display* of God.

1. MARRIAGE IS GOD'S DOING

First, most foundationally, marriage is God's doing. There are at least four ways to see this explicitly or implicitly in Genesis 2:18–25.

a) Marriage Was God's Design

Marriage is God's doing because it was his design in the creation of man as male and female. This was made plain earlier in Genesis 1:27–28: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’”

But it is also clear here in the flow of thought in Genesis 2. In verse 18, it is God himself who decrees that man's solitude is not good, and it is God himself who sets out to complete one of the central designs of creation, namely, man and woman in marriage. “It is not good that the man should be alone; *I will make him a helper fit for him.*” Don't miss that central and all-important statement: God himself will make a being perfectly suited for him—a wife.

Then he parades the animals before Adam so that he might see there is no creature that qualifies. This creature must be made uniquely from man so that she will be of his essence—a fellow human being in God's image, just as Genesis 1:27 said. So we read in verses 21–22, “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. And the rib

that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman.” God made her.

This text ends in verses 24–25 with the words, “They shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” In other words, this is all moving toward marriage. So the first thing to say about marriage being God’s doing is that marriage was his design in creating man male and female.

b) God Gave Away the First Bride

Marriage is also God’s doing because he took the role of being the first Father to give away the bride. Genesis 2:22: “And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and *brought her to the man.*” He didn’t hide her and make Adam seek. He made her; then he brought her. In a profound sense, he had fathered her. And now, though she was his by virtue of creation, he gave her to the man in this absolutely new kind of relationship called *marriage*, unlike every other relationship in the world.

c) God Spoke the Design of Marriage into Existence

Marriage is God’s doing because God not only created the woman with this design and brought her to the man like a father brings his daughter to her husband, but also because God spoke the design of marriage into existence. He did this in verse 24: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

Who is talking in verse 24? The writer of Genesis is talking. And what did Jesus believe about the writer of Genesis? He believed it was Moses (Luke 24:44). He also believed that Moses was inspired by God, so that what Moses was saying, God was saying. We can see this if we look carefully at Matthew 19:4–5: “[Jesus] answered, ‘Have you not read that he [God] who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and *said* [Note: *God* said!], “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”?’” Jesus said that the words of Genesis 2:24 are God’s words, even though they were written by Moses.

Therefore, marriage is God's doing because God spoke the earliest design of it into existence—"A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

d) God Performs the One-Flesh Union

The fourth way that marriage is God's doing is seen in the fact that God himself performs the union referred to in the words "become one flesh." That union is at the heart of what marriage is.

Genesis 2:24 is God's word of institution for marriage. But just as it was God who took the woman from the flesh of man (Gen. 2:21), it is God who in each marriage ordains and performs a uniting called *one flesh*. Man does not create this. God does. And it is not in man's power to destroy. This is implicit here in Genesis 2:24, but Jesus makes it explicit in Mark 10:8–9. He quotes Genesis 2:24, then adds a comment that explodes like thunder with the glory of marriage. "'The two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. *What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.*"

When a couple speaks their vows, it is not a man or a woman or a pastor or parent who is the main actor—the main doer. God is. God joins a husband and a wife into a one-flesh union. *God* does that. The world does not know this. Which is one of the reasons why marriage is treated so casually. And Christians often *act* like they don't know it, which is one of the reasons marriage in the church is not seen as the wonder it is. Marriage is God's doing because it is a one-flesh union that God himself performs.

So, in sum, the most foundational thing we can say about marriage is that it is God's doing. It's his doing:

- a. because it was his design in creation;
- b. because he personally gave away the first bride in marriage;
- c. because he spoke the design of marriage into existence: leave parents, hold fast to your wife, become one flesh;
- d. and because this one-flesh union is established by God himself in each marriage.

A glimpse into the magnificence of marriage comes from seeing in

God's word that God himself is the great doer. Marriage is his doing. It is *from* him and *through* him. That is the most *foundational* thing we can say about marriage.

Now we turn to the most ultimate thing we can say about marriage. It is not only *from* him and *through* him. It is also *for* him.

2. MARRIAGE IS FOR GOD'S GLORY

The *ultimate* thing to see in the Bible about marriage is that it exists for God's glory. Most foundationally, marriage is the *doing* of God. Most ultimately, marriage is the *display* of God. It is designed by God to display his glory in a way that no other event or institution does.

The way to see this most clearly is to connect Genesis 2:24 with its use in Ephesians 5:31–32. In Genesis 2:24, God says, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." What kind of relationship is this? How are these two people held together? Can they walk away from this relationship? Can they go from spouse to spouse? Is this relationship rooted in romance? Sexual desire? Need for companionship? Cultural convenience? What is this? What holds it together?

THE MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE REVEALED

In Genesis 2:24, the words "*hold fast* to his wife" and the words "they shall *become one flesh*" point to something far deeper and more permanent than serial marriages and occasional adultery. What these words point to is marriage as a sacred *covenant* rooted in covenant commitments that stand against every storm "as long as we both shall live." But that is only implicit here. It becomes explicit when the mystery of marriage is more fully revealed in Ephesians 5:31–32.

Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 in verse 31: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." Then he gives it this all-important interpretation in verse 32: "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." In other words, marriage is patterned after Christ's covenant commitment to his church.

Christ thought of himself as the bridegroom coming for his bride,

the true people of God (Matt. 9:15; 25:1ff.; John 3:29). Paul knew his ministry was to gather the bride—the true people of God who would trust Christ. His calling was to betroth the church to her husband, Jesus. Paul puts it like this in 2 Corinthians 11:2: “I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.”

Christ knew he would have to pay for his bride with his own blood. He called this relationship the *new covenant*—“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20). This is what Paul is referring to when he says that marriage is a great mystery: “I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” Christ obtained the church by his blood and formed a new covenant with her, an unbreakable “marriage.”

The ultimate thing we can say about marriage is that it exists for God’s glory. That is, it exists to display God. Now we see how: Marriage is patterned after Christ’s covenant relationship to his redeemed people, the church. And therefore, the highest meaning and the most ultimate purpose of marriage is to put the covenant relationship of Christ and his church on display. That is why marriage exists. If you are married, that is why you are married. If you hope to be, that should be your dream.

CHRIST WILL NEVER LEAVE HIS WIFE

Staying married, therefore, is not mainly about staying in love. It is about keeping covenant. “Till death do us part” or “As long as we both shall live” is a sacred covenant promise—the same kind Jesus made with his bride when he died for her. Therefore, what makes divorce and remarriage so horrific in God’s eyes is not merely that it involves covenant-breaking to the spouse, but that it involves misrepresenting Christ and his covenant. Christ will never leave his wife. Ever. There may be times of painful distance and tragic backsliding on our part. But Christ keeps his covenant forever. Marriage is a display of that! That is the ultimate thing we can say about it. It puts the glory of Christ’s covenant-keeping love on display.

The most important implication of this conclusion is that keeping covenant with our spouse is as important as telling the truth about

God's covenant with us in Jesus Christ. Marriage is not mainly about being or staying in love. It's mainly about telling the truth with our lives. It's about portraying something true about Jesus Christ and the way he relates to his people. It is about showing in real life the glory of the gospel.

Jesus died for sinners. He forged a covenant in the white-hot heat of his suffering in our place. He made an imperfect bride his own with the price of his blood and covered her with the garments of his own righteousness. He said, "I am with you . . . to the end of the age. . . . I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5). Marriage is meant by God to put that gospel reality on display in the world. That is why we are married. That is why all married people are married, even when they don't know and embrace this gospel.

