

# Marriage Story: Connecting your Marriage to God's Story

## "The Redemption of Marriage"

### Session 3

#### I. Review of God's story

- A. Creation (Ought)
- B. Fall (Is)
- C. Redemption (Can)
- D. Consummation (Will)

#### II. Redemption

- A. Promise (Genesis 3:17, Genesis 12)

Redemption in Christ is envisioned from the beginning of God's story. Immediately after the fall, God promises that he will send the one who will crush the serpent's head. Later, God makes a covenant with Abraham promising him a land and a people. Through this people, Israel, God will bless the nations. To Israel, God gives his law which includes directives for his worship. All this points forward to the coming of Christ who fulfills the law by his personal obedience and fulfills the sacrificial worship practices through his death. For centuries, Israel's prophets predicted his coming, and the last prophet sent as his forerunner was John the Baptist.

- B. Fulfillment (John 1:29)

In Jesus, God himself comes to dwell with his people. He is Immanuel-God with us. The apostle John tells us that Jesus "tabernacles" among us as the incarnate God. At the beginning of John's gospel, John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the long-awaited Savior exclaiming, "...Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Jesus' death atones for the sins of his people, and his resurrection provides the crushing blow to sin, death, and the serpent (as promised).

- C. The age of the Spirit (Acts 2): the era of "can"

After his death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus pours out his Spirit upon his people, and this changes everything. In redemption, believers are given new hearts and a new power to obey his word and declare his good news to the nations. In union with Jesus, we are now being conformed to his image by the Holy Spirit. God himself lives in us, and he is transforming us to live for his glory in all our various callings. The coming of the Spirit signals the beginning of the renewal of all things. This has significant implications for our marriages.

### III. The Redeemed Marriage

#### A. A New Power (Ephesians 5:18-20)

1. Context: The immediate context of the most popular New Testament passage on marriage is the command to be filled with the Spirit. Key to walking carefully (Eph 5:15) is to be filled with the Spirit.
2. Our need: Our responsibilities in marriage are not merely difficult; they are impossible. Our hope for a flourishing marriage is found in the gospel and in the power of the Spirit. We need the Spirit to illuminate God's word, to convict of us sin, and to create God-glorifying desires within. The "can" of redemption is never to be imagined apart from the power of the Holy Spirit.

#### B. A New Purpose (Ephesians 5:31-33)

1. Conversion opens our eyes to a new purpose in all of life. Christ rescues us from the "futile ways" (1 Peter 1:18-20) of our unregenerate past. Christian marriage takes on a new meaning as we discover that our covenant companionship points to a reality beyond itself.
2. The mystery of marriage points to Christ and the church (v.33). Paul says that the meaning is profound because from the beginning the marriage of husband and wife reflected the future relationship between Christ and the church.

"Every time a bride and groom stand there and take their vows, they are reenacting the biblical love story, whether they realize it or not. The Son of God stepping down out of eternity, entering time, taking on flesh, pursuing and winning his bride as his very heart and body with his inmost, sincerest love so that he can fit her to be with him forever above—that dramatic super-reality is the breathtaking reason why human marriage exists. It is truly profound. And Christian married couples have the privilege of making the mystery of the gospel visible in the world today by living out the dynamic interplay of an Ephesians 5—quality marriage. We should not think that Christ and the church are the metaphor in this passage, but the reverse. Christ and the church are the reality of realities, and our Christian marriages are the metaphors." (Ray Ortlund, Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel, p. 100)

3. Marriage is a primary context for our sanctification.

“What if, however, you began your marriage understanding its purpose as spiritual friendship for the journey to the new creation? What if you expected marriage to be about helping each other grow out of your sins and flaws into the new self God is creating?” (Tim and Kathy Keller, The Meaning of Marriage, p.136)

4. Marriage is a witness to the gospel.

“For Paul, the practical demonstration of the gospel in our marriages comes down to love and respect... His love for her, with her respect for him, will display the eternal romance of Christ and the church, bringing the only lasting hope that exists into a brokenhearted world.” (Ortlund, p. 101)

### C. A New Pattern (Ephesians 5:22-30)

1. With a new power and a new purpose in marriage, the redeemed couple is given a new pattern of relating that reflects the gospel. Ephesians 5 gives wives and husbands a new perspective or orientation toward one another. In v. 33, he summarizes the husband’s orientation toward the wife as love and the wife’s orientation to the husband as respect. This doesn’t deny the wife is to love her husband or the husband is to respect his wife; rather, it defines the general orientation of each spouse toward the other.
2. Empowered by the Spirit, wives are called to orient themselves to their husbands through a voluntary, joyful submission as to the Lord (v. 22).

“Submission is respect that leads to serving. But in marriage, submission is also another aspect of love—to submit is to give yourself up for someone. To submit to someone is to make room for the other and his or her ideas. To submit is to listen and to follow. To submit is to put someone else first. To submit is to do what someone else asks, even when it is hard.... There is mutual submission in a marriage, and wives are to submit to and respect their husbands. According to verses 22–24, there is a sense in which a Christian wife is especially to shine in this grace. Something unique is going on. In fact, wives are to submit to their husbands, Paul tells us, ‘as the church submits to Christ’ (5:24).” (Chad and Emily Van Dixhoorn, Gospel-Shaped Marriage, p. 41).

The call to submission is not absolute. Wives are not called to subject themselves to abuse, nor are they called to submit if their husbands ask them to sin.

Wives are to lovingly affirm their husband's lead as they represent the church's response to Christ. Paul doesn't offer ground level examples but highlights submission and respect as the appropriate disposition of the wife's heart.

3. Empowered by the Spirit, husbands are called to orient themselves to their wives through sacrificial love. Husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loves the church and gave himself up for her (v. 25). They are also called to loves their wives as they love their own bodies which they nourish and cherish as Christ does the church.

*"Nourish"* means to nurture, develop, or promote the growth of.

"Marriage to a Christlike husband is, for a woman, the opposite of a dead-end life. A woman married to a nourishing man comes to the end of her days as an older lady, and as she is sitting on a porch somewhere in her rocking chair looking back on her life, she is praising God and thinking, 'Being married to my husband opened my whole life up. Yes, we suffered. Yes, we made mistakes. But in it all, my husband thought of me. He cared about how my life was going. What a great run we had, living together for Christ!' That is nourishing one's wife. (Ortlund, p. 97).

*"Cherish"* means to hold dear, to cultivate with care and affection or to comfort.

"So when a woman is married to a lovingly Christlike man who cherishes her, she feels warmth in her heart at being valued by her husband and held dear above all others, second only to Christ himself... her husband delights in her and prizes her, and she feels it deep inside with a heartwarming glow. That is cherishing one's wife." (Ortlund, p. 98)

4. The gospel calls us to die to ourselves and live for Christ. We have many opportunities to express this "death to self but alive in Christ" lifestyle in marriage.

"For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but

for him who for their sake died and was raised.” (2 Corinthians 5:14–15)

“As we shall see, each of these exhortations has a distinct shape—they are not identical tasks. And yet each partner is called to sacrifice for the other in far-reaching ways. Whether we are husband or wife, we are not to live for ourselves but for the other. And that is the hardest yet single most important function of being a husband or a wife in marriage... If two spouses each say, ‘I’m going to treat my self-centeredness as the main problem in the marriage,’ you have the prospect of a truly great marriage.” (Keller, p. 53, 65)

#### **IV. Marriage and the restoration of all things**

Marriage calls us to yearn for the renewal of all things. It points us to the day when all will be right, and we will experience life as it was meant to be lived in the new heaven and new earth. All our deepest longings will be fulfilled, and then some, when God unites all things in Christ, “things in heaven and things on earth” (Ephesians 1:10). In that day, the shadow of our marriages will be no more making way for the reality of Christ’s marriage to his bride.

“The first cosmos was created as the home of a young couple named Adam and Eve. The new cosmos will be created as the eternal home of the Son and his bride. It is not as though marriage is just one theme among others in the Bible. Instead, marriage is the wraparound concept for the entire Bible, within which the other themes find their places. And if the Bible is telling a story of married romance, no wonder that the demonic powers would forbid marriage (1 Tim. 4:1–5). Every happy marriage whispers their doom and proclaims Christ’s triumph.” (Ortlund, p. 16)

“What, then, is marriage for? It is for helping each other to become our future glory-selves, the new creation that God will eventually make us. The common horizon husband and wife look toward is the Throne, and the holy, spotless, and blameless nature we will have. I can think of no more powerful common horizon than that, and that is why putting a Christian friendship at the heart of a marriage relationship can lift it to a level that no other vision for marriage approaches.” (Keller, pp. 120-121)

#### **V. Making peace with the proximate**

While we wait for the return of Christ, we live in the tension of the “already but not yet” of Christ’s kingdom. Ours is the time between what “ought to be” and what “will be.” We walk out our marriages weighted down by the “is” as we grow to live more and more in the “can” of the new covenant. Our present experience of the Spirit is but a down payment on our coming inheritance. So what should we expect of our marriage in these “in between” times?

Author Steve Garber speaks of making peace with the proximate. That is, we don't have everything yet, but we do have something, so we must learn to be happy with the proximate. Today, all our marriages know suffering, disappointment, heartache, and sin. We aren't in heaven yet.

Garber writes, "When we find that all we hope for does not happen, that sometimes the worst things happen, what then? When we discover that our best hopes have been disappointed, what then? Some choose versions of stoicism or cynicism, deciding for very good reasons that 'I have had enough.' But then with surprising grace, some choose to keep at it, hard as it is... Always and everywhere, they do so understanding that they are making peace with the proximate. With something, even if it is not everything. With something rather than nothing. They choose proximate happiness, knowing that a good marriage to a good person is a good gift." (Steve Garber, Visions of Vocation, p. 200)

"But with the Holy Spirit's help, let us never forget that each of us is marrying a sinner and not a savior. The reality of the gospel will always be the best model for marriage, but your marriage may often fail to be a good model of the gospel. You will face moments, and perhaps even seasons, when affection and respect will not be what they should be, when saints are not loving, and sinners need more grace. So let us keep before us the love that Christ has for his church. He did not pursue those who were always warm and kind; rather, he followed after those who turned their backs on him. He did not come to those who were already righteous but to those who dared to insult him or ignore him. In short, Christ came to save sinners, and that is what we are, even in marriage. Perhaps especially in marriage. He lost his life so that we could find forgiveness. Of course, we are speaking to all of us here, because we are speaking of Christ and his church." (Van Dixhoorn, p. 65)

### **Discussion Questions**

1. In what area of your marriage are you most aware of your need for the Spirit? How can you grow in dependence upon the Holy Spirit in your marriage?
2. Wives: How is God speaking to you about your heart orientation of submission and respect toward your husband?  
  
Husbands: How is God speaking to you about your heart orientation of loving sacrifice toward your wife?
3. Without compromising or excusing our sins, how can making peace with the proximate strengthen your marriage? How is God calling you to extend grace to one another as you live in these days of the "already but not yet"?