

Gospel Love: Biblical Marriage and Infidelity

Session 4

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Genesis 2; Ephesians 5

Session Outline

1. Instituted by God (Genesis 2:15-25)
2. Counter-Cultural (Ephesians 5:22-25)
3. A Picture of the Gospel (Ephesians 5:25-33)

Theological Theme

Marriage was instituted by God and is therefore defined and governed by God alone, not any human government or organization. Marriage is ultimately a picture of Christ and the church.



Leader Guide

Gospel Love: Biblical Marriage and Infidelity

Introduction

- ❓ What are some ways followers of Jesus view the world differently than others?
- ❓ How does this apply to marriage? What are some purposes people might give for marriage? What purpose does marriage have in the church?

For those of us who are followers of Jesus, we can give thanks for the many good gifts we receive in this world from our Father in heaven. We enjoy them, use them, and depend on things such as food, shelter, clothing, and so on. All the blessings we enjoy come from the hand of our Maker and the intended use of those things is defined and limited by God alone. We should never let the things of this world or the voices of this world become so dear to us that they lose sight of the fact that we have been redeemed by God and He has given us His Word by which we are to live. This is especially true when it comes to marriage. Marriage is a gift from God. He instituted marriage and it is sacred. Though our culture may voice their opinions and seek to redefine marriage, followers of Jesus must never allow these influences to shape their viewpoints.

There is a wonderful thing that happens when we seek to honor Christ in our marriages. When we revere Christ as we should, we are conformed to His image. The more we treasure Christ, the more we hate sin and love righteousness, the less we look to their own good, the more they seek the good of our closest neighbor. Marriage is truly a blessed and fruitful state when husband and wife bow the knee to Christ and seek to obey the Word of Christ in all their dealings, especially those that have to do with marriage.

Session Summary

Is marriage merely a tradition open to change with the culture? The first two chapters of Genesis record complementary accounts of humans, showing how men and women are both formed in the image of God and His design for marriage. The marriage relationship is an

illustration throughout the gospel of Christ's love for the church. Love of a marriage is not only a reflection of Christ's love for the church, but also is a holy covenant. Ultimately, your marriage is not about you, but rather about proclaiming the love and glory of Jesus. How does your marriage show gospel love?

1. Instituted by God (Genesis 2:15-25)

One of the most important truths that a husband and wife can know is that the institution of marriage was created by God Himself. In Genesis 2 we find the account of God's work to establish marriage.

 What principles can we learn from these verses about marriage?

First, we see that man and woman correspond to one another. When Adam took a survey of all the creatures that God had made, he found no being that was suitable for him. This was because he was different in nature than they were. Adam was created in the image of God. All the animals God created were made according to their own kind, but Adam (and Eve) was created according to the image of God. God's design for marriage (and reproduction) is for a man to leave his father and mother and bond with his wife (v. 24). This foundational teaching, along with the whole testimony of Scripture, defines and limits marriage to one man with one woman for life.

This also means that it is not permissible to go outside of the defined lines of marriage. Although great pressure exists to conform to the world's views on marriage and relationships, we must stand upon the Scriptures and tell the truth about these sins no matter the cost. It is important to recognize that we are called to love all people, no matter their views, but an integral piece of true love is being truthful. Pastors should never give in to the culture by accepting sin as though it were not to maintain acceptance in the culture. Seeking the acceptance of the world is rejection of Jesus.

 How should our view of marriage change if we accept that it was created by God and He has the authority to give its purpose?

Marriage is a good gift from God for mankind. A man who finds a wife and a woman who finds a husband are blessed. We are to enter marriage based on biblical principles and the finished work of Christ on the cross. We should look at marriage with reverence because it is a sacred institution.

To many, this kind of attitude toward marriage and sexual purity seems prudish, archaic, and stifling. Has modern culture progressed to a better, more meaningful view of human relationships and intimacy? No, it hasn't. Sadly, our culture's so-called progressive views on these issues have resulted in cultural and familial decay. The primary difference between these two views of the family, marriage, and intimacy is that one is founded upon human reason while the other is based on the teachings of the Scriptures.

Marriage is a sacred, divine institution that is defined and regulated by God's Word. Furthermore, physical intimacy is a good gift from God when enjoyed in the proper context, which is one man and one woman in the covenant of marriage for life. Any form of sexual intimacy that falls outside of those boundaries should be avoided and condemned by those who follow Christ.

-  Application: Do the Bible or cultural leanings shape the way you understand and view marriage and physical intimacy? What fears do you have in going against what popular culture says regarding these matters?

2. Counter-Cultural (Ephesians 5:22-25)

The Scriptures not only make it clear marriage was instituted by God and marriage is a covenant relationship between one man and one woman for life, but we also find counsel concerning how husbands are to conduct themselves toward their wives and how wives ought to behave toward their husbands.

-  What did Paul tell the Ephesians about how wives and husbands are to live with one another in marriage?

Paul wrote, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church" (vv. 22-23). This biblical principle is extremely unpopular now. The growing feminist movement in the West has caused many to condemn such views of marriage as outdated and oppressive. Some see the command for wives to submit to their husbands as tantamount to considering a wife as a husband's property. But these views are based on the world's wisdom and the lies of the enemy instead of on the wisdom of God that the Spirit gives as we read His Word humbly. God designed the family to function in a particular way and that way is best because the designer is infallible. The husband is the head of the wife in that he leads, provides, and protects her. The wife's submission and respect are rooted in her love for and trust in him, as well as her reverence for Christ and His Word.

Paul also said, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her” (v. 25). Here we find the most difficult command a husband could ever receive. How could a man ever love his wife as Christ loved the church? Yes, the command that was given to the woman is difficult, but the command that was given to the man is impossible! This is why husbands need Christ. They need him for forgiveness of the sin of not keeping this law adequately, and to enable them to love their wife in a sacrificial, Christ-like way.

 Read 1 Peter 3:7. How does this verse help us know what it means for a husband to love his wife according to the Bible?

Husbands should live with their wives in an understanding way, showing them honor because they are fellow heirs of grace. The phrase “in the same way” is important. Peter was saying his teaching about husbands in verse 7 is an application of his general teachings about how to relate to one another in light of the gospel. The basis for how a husband should treat his wife is the Lord Jesus’s example. So, the “in the same way” that introduces verse 7 set the foundation for how a husband should treat his wife. The foundation is how Christ treated sinners and what He endured for our sake. The foundation is how Christ loved the church. This means that a husband should understand his wife’s needs, personality, weaknesses, and desires and respond to them biblically. A loving, Christ-like husband pays careful attention to his wife (as a pastor pays careful attention to the flock). A husband ought to spend time with his wife, study her, and communicate with her regularly and meaningfully. He should take biblical, appropriate, and concrete steps in response to the needs of his wife.

 Application: What areas of your marriage need repentance, prayer, and renewal in light of these verses? If you are not married, how can you support those who are?

3. A Picture of the Gospel (Ephesians 5:25-33)

Paul said, “To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband” (v. 33). However, the institution of marriage has a larger meaning. It is a picture of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It represents the relationship between Christ and the church. Paul wrote: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless” (vv. 25-27).

As Christ Loved the Church

How did Christ love the church? He gave himself up for her. Jesus dedicated his life to the establishment and welfare of the church. He ultimately gave his life for the church. To that degree, and in that quality, the husband is to love his wife. He is to give himself up for her. He is to dedicate his life to the physical, emotional, and spiritual welfare of his wife. Following the example of Christ, he is to give his wife not only all that he has but also all that he is. When a husband loves his wife so completely, the wife need never fear submission.



What similarities do you see between the way Christ and the church interact and the way a husband and wife are to interact?

Christ is the head of the church just as the husband is the head of the wife. A husband should lead His wife in studying the Word of God so that they both grow in knowledge of God. A husband goes to God on behalf of his wife in prayer day in and day out and lifts her needs up to the Lord. Also, a husband works hard to provide for the needs of his wife and protects her from any harm.

The church looks to Christ as her head and provider. She joyfully submits to Him and trusts in His rule in her life. She takes His Word as a great comfort and seeks to obey it fully. She sees it as a great privilege to submit to Christ.

A Christian wife, even though her husband is not perfect like Christ, views him in a similar way. She endeavors to joyfully submit to him and entrusts herself to him. She trusts in his words and seeks to obey him to the best of her ability. Her desire is for her husband, and she seeks to please him. She sees it as a great privilege to submit to her husband.

It is true that it can be very difficult for husband and wives to live in accordance with these standards. But we must seek to live in agreement with what the Scriptures teach about marriage. Those who are in Christ will desire to conform their image to God's Word so that their marriage will honor Christ and reflect the gospel.



How can a Christian husband carry out those roles in a practical way?

Christian husbands, think of it this way. You are the subject of mighty King whom you fear and love with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. The King has written you a letter, and you read it, hands trembling. In the letter he explains that you are to go on a dangerous journey to a new land, a better land. It's the King's own land, and He has prepared a place for you. "Beware!" he says, "the enemy is at hand seeking whom he may devour!" But take heart, the King has given you all that you need to resist this enemy and be victorious. And then, something surprising comes next in the letter. You must not only make it yourself, but he has given you another person to bring with you, and little ones as well. You are to make this dangerous journey for the good of your own soul and theirs. You are to be a representative of the King to them. You are to carry them safely through. And the way you are to do this is by the means that

the King has provided: pray without ceasing, cleanse her by the washing of water with the Word, address them in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, bring your littles one up in the knowledge of the Lord. You have been commissioned by the King. What would prevent you from being faithful?

- ❓ Application: How does your marriage compare with the biblical version of marriage? What needs to change? How will you respond?

Conclusion

Marriage is a glorious and sacred institution. It is the very metaphor chosen by God to represent the gospel. It is the institution used to describe the time when Christ will return and make all things right. The imagery of the marriage of the lamb is meant to express joy, love, and intimacy between Christ and His church.

- ❓ How have today's texts challenged your view of marriage? What are some ways in which the Biblical view of marriage contradicts the world's view of marriage?
- ❓ If you are married, what are some ways that you can improve your marriage and mold it to fit biblical standards? If you are not married, how can you encourage those who are to fulfill God's purpose for their marriages?
- ❓ What are some ways that your marriage (or that of someone close to you) reminds you of the gospel and the goodness of God? How might you use this to have a gospel conversation with another person?

Prayer of Response

Ask the Lord to help you adopt a biblical view of marriage. If you are married, pray that the Lord would strengthen and enable you to fulfill your role in accordance with the biblical standard. Pray that your marriage would be a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Additional Resources

- *This Momentary Marriage* by John Piper
- *The Meaning of Marriage* by Timothy Keller
- *Marriage* by Paul David Tripp

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



DxD This Week

Call to Action:

Carefully think about your marriage. Are you radically pursuing each other with Christ's relentless love? Take time this week to look at the way you and your spouse are communicating. Is the way you deal with communication breakdowns honoring to the gospel and Christ's love?

Group Emphasis or Project:

As a group, recognize relationships, anniversaries, and the covenant of marriage. Consider having a date night or group outing where couples can enjoy spending time together.

For Next Week

Session Title

- Gospel Relationships: Sexual Immorality and My Family

Main Passages

- Matthew 10:28-33; Romans 1:21-25; 1 Corinthians 6:18

Session Outline

1. Flee from Sexual Immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18)
2. Dishonoring of the Body (Romans 1:21-25)
3. Fear God (Matthew 10:28-33)

Memorize

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.

- Ephesians 5:31

Historical Context of Genesis

Purpose

Genesis lays the groundwork for everything else we read and experience in Scripture. Through Genesis we understand where we came from, how we got in the fallen state we are in, and the beginnings of God’s gracious work on our behalf. Genesis unfolds God’s original purpose for humanity.

Author

Since pre-Christian times authorship of the Torah, the five books that include the book of Genesis, has been attributed to Moses, an enormously influential Israelite leader from the second millennium BC with an aristocratic Egyptian background. Even though Genesis is technically anonymous, both the Old and New Testaments unanimously recognize Moses as the Torah’s author (Jos 8:35; 23:6; 1Kg 2:3; 8:9; 2Kg 14:6; 23:25; 2Ch 23:18; 25:4; 30:16; 34:14; 35:12; Ezr 3:2; 6:18; Neh 8:1; 9:14; Dn 9:11, 13; Mal 4:4; Mk 12:19, 26; Lk 2:22; 20:28; 24:44; Jn 1:17, 45; 7:19; Ac 13:39; 15:21; 28:23; Rm 10:5; 1Co 9:9; Heb 10:28). At the same time, evidence in Genesis suggests that minor editorial changes dating to ancient times have been inserted into the text. Examples include the mention of “Dan” (14:14), a city that was not named until the days of the judges (Jdg 18:29), and the use of a phrase that assumed the existence of Israelite kings (Gn 36:31).

Setting

The Torah (a Hebrew term for “law” or “instruction”) was seen as one unit until at least the second century BC. Sometime prior to the birth of Christ, the Torah was divided into five separate books, later referred to as the Pentateuch (literally, five vessels). Genesis, the first book of the Torah, provides both the universal history of humankind and the patriarchal history of the nation of Israel. The first section (chaps. 1–11) is a general history commonly called the “primeval history,” showing how all humanity descended from one couple and became sinners. The second section (chaps. 12–50) is a more specific history commonly referred to as the “patriarchal history,” focusing on the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants: Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob’s twelve sons. Genesis unfolds God’s plan to bless and redeem humanity through Abraham’s descendants. The book concludes with the events that led to the Israelites being in the land of Egypt.

Special Features

The book of Genesis is the great book of beginnings in the Bible. True to the meanings of its Hebrew and Greek names (Hb bere’shith, “In Beginning” [based on 1:1]; Gk Geneseos, “Of Birth” [based on 2:4]), Genesis permits us to view the beginning of a multitude of realities that shape our daily existence: the creation of the universe and the planet earth; the origins of plant and animal life; and the origins of human beings, marriage, families, nations, industry, artistic expression, religious ritual, prophecy, sin, law, crime, conflict, punishment, and death.

Extended Commentary

Genesis 2:15-25

2:15 The Hebrew word translated as placed literally means, “caused to rest”; this pre-sin state of rest anticipates the rest (“relief”; 5:29) that again would come to humanity because of righteous Noah, as well as the rest God again would give Israel following its episode of calf worship (Ex 32:1–21; 33:14). As a being created in God’s image, Adam, like God, was to be a worker. Without the taint of sin, work was an undiluted blessing. The verb translated here as “work” literally means “serve.” Adam’s second task in the garden was to watch over it. The verb is used elsewhere to refer to the action of God toward his people (Ps 121:3–4) or the work of a military guard (Sg 5:7).

2:16 The seriousness of God’s order is reflected in the fact that it is introduced by a two-verb phrase in Hebrew, rendered simply as commanded in the CSB. This formula was used frequently to express royal decrees (1Sm 18:22; 2Sm 18:5). God gave Adam both freedom and limits. The God-given freedoms vastly outnumbered the limitations. After all, Adam was free to eat from any tree of the garden except one.

2:17 The only limit God placed on Adam was eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which apparently imparted divine wisdom (3:22). Eating the forbidden fruit represented Adam’s rejection of God as the source of divine wisdom and his choice to pursue wisdom apart from God. The penalty for disobedience was stated especially forcefully in the original language, with a two-verb construction, “dying you shall die” (you will certainly die). Death would certainly come to Adam and all humanity after him; but the death that God warned about would be more than physical (3:19). Besides severing the cord of life, sin would shatter the harmonious relationship that existed between Adam and his environment (3:17–18), his wife (3:16), and God. Although Adam and Eve did not die physically on the day they ate the fruit, they died spiritually, and all their descendants have been spiritually dead unless they are made alive by God’s Spirit. See Jn 5:24–25; Rm 6:13; 7:13, 24; Eph 2:1–5; Col 2:13; 1Tm 5:6; 1Jn 3:14; Jd 12; Rv 3:1.

2:18 The theme of God providing for Adam’s needs (see note at 2:9) is picked up again here, as God declared that Adam’s being alone is not good. God created the man with a need to relate to one corresponding to him, and now God will meet that need.

2:19 Like man, animals were formed out of the ground, but they received neither the breath of life from God (v. 7) nor the image of God. By giving names to the animals, Adam showed that he ruled the animals and that he perceived the nature of each animal.

2:20 Adam’s understanding of the nature of the animals he named only highlighted the differences that existed between him and the rest of God’s creatures: no helper was found corresponding to him.

2:21 At what must have been a moment of loneliness in Adam’s life, God stepped in to create one who would perfectly meet Adam’s need. Because God took one of his ribs to use as his raw material, the woman would correspond perfectly—though not identically—to Adam. Like Adam, the woman possessed God’s image. The fact that she was not taken either from the man’s head or his foot may suggest that the woman was not to rule over the man (1Co 11:3), nor was the man to oppress the woman (1Pt 3:7).

2:22–23 Adam’s first recorded words express his delight with God’s handiwork and his recognition of the unique suitability of God’s last recorded acts in the creation accounts. As with no other work of divine craftsmanship, this one was singularly suited for the man, being bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. Adam expresses dominion by choosing a name for God’s final created being, but the name he chose suggests that he viewed her as his equal. The Hebrew term *’ishshah*, woman, identifies her as the feminine complement to *’ish*, the man.

2:24 God’s timeless design for marriage is declared here. The one flesh relationship certainly involves sexual union, but also includes a husband and wife coming together in spiritual, mental, and emotional harmony.

2:25 Because the devastating effects of sin had not yet ravaged nature or humanity, there was no need for clothing. Adam and Eve could live without the barriers needed to shield them from their environment and each other without a sense of shame. Later, in the time of the patriarchs and kings, clothing was associated with dignity. Accordingly, prisoners of war were not permitted to wear any clothing, slaves wore very little clothing, and higher social classes wore more clothing than anyone else in society.¹

Ephesians 5:22-33

5:22–24 Paul addressed wives first. They are to be voluntarily submissive to their husbands. No external coercion should be involved, nor should submission imply that the wife is a lesser partner in the marital union. The submission is governed by the phrase *as to the Lord*. A Christian wife’s submission to her husband is one aspect of her obedience to Christ. Submission is a person’s yielding his or her own rights and losing self for another. Submission is patterned after Christ’s example (Php 2:5–8) and reflects the essence of the gospel. Submission distinguishes the lifestyle of all Christians.

5:25 Paul turned to the duties of husbands. The society in which Paul wrote recognized the duties of wives to husbands but not necessarily of husbands to wives. As in Col 3:19, Paul exhorted husbands to love their wives; but Ephesians presents Christ’s self-sacrificing love for the church as the pattern for the husband’s love for his wife.

Husbands are to love their wives continually as Christ loves the church. The tense of the Greek word translated “love” indicates a love that continues. Love is more than family affection or sexual passion. Rather it is a deliberate attitude leading to action that concerns itself with another’s well-being. A husband should love his wife: (1) as Christ loved the church (vv. 25–27); (2) as his own body (vv. 28–30); and (3) with a love transcending all other human relationships (vv. 31–33).

5:26–27 Cleansing her with the washing of water: Paul explains more fully the result of Christ’s atonement for the church: it makes the church holy and pure. The purpose of Christ’s giving himself up for the church is the church’s sanctification and cleansing.

5:28 Since husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church, they give up their personal rights for the good of their wives. It is a solemn picture of covenant love.

5:29–30 On first reading, Paul seems to have descended from the lofty standard of Christ’s love to the low standard of self-love when he says no one ever hates his own flesh; but he reminded Christian couples of

their oneness, their “one-flesh” relationship. For this reason a husband’s obligation to cherish his wife as he does his own body is more than a helpful guide. His sacrificial love is an expression of the sacred marital union. True love is evidenced when husbands and wives have this spiritual, emotional, and physical oneness.

5:31–32 Paul appealed to Gn 2:24, which is God’s initial statement regarding marriage. The marriage commitment takes precedence over every other human relationship.

5:31 One flesh means closely joined. It hallows the biblical standard of covenantal heterosexual marital relations and excludes polygamy, adultery, and other sexual expressions. What is primarily a divine ordinance is graciously and lovingly designed for mutual satisfaction and delight.

5:33 Love . . . respect concludes and restates this section’s theme. The husband’s ultimate responsibility is to love his wife with a Christlike love.²

References

1. *CSB Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
2. *Ibid.*

Author Bio

John Piper (This Momentary Marriage)

John Piper is founder and teacher of desiringGod.org and chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary. For 33 years, he served as pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is the author of more than 50 books, and more than 30 years of his preaching and teaching is available free of charge at desiringGod.org.

Timothy Keller (The Meaning of Marriage)

Timothy Keller is the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, which he started in 1989 with his wife, Kathy, and three young sons. Dr. Keller’s books, including the New York Times bestselling *The Reason for God* and *The Prodigal God*, have sold over 2 million copies and been translated into 25 languages.

Paul David Tripp (Marriage)

Dr. Paul David Tripp is a pastor, event speaker, and a best-selling and award-winning author. With more than 30 books and video series on Christian living, Paul’s driving passion is to connect the transforming power of Jesus Christ to everyday life. He and his wife of 45+ years, Luella, live in Philadelphia; they have four grown children. For more information, visit PaulTripp.com or follow Paul on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.