

# The Blessed Marriage

God's Design for Dating & Marriage

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## SESSION I: "IN THE BEGINNING"

In Romans 1, Paul illustrates the degradation of a society as reflected through its sexual ethics. Historians have often suggested that behind the scene of the collapse of a society begins in their defiance towards divine authority, which in turn encourages and even legalizes immorality<sup>i</sup>. And marriage and the family lies at the very epicentre of this battle. For failed marriages deprives children (who are the future of the society) of a good upbringing; and the ripple effect of that would be devastating.

Why do I begin with this? To make this point at the very beginning of our talk: That marriage, contrary to popular opinion, is not all about the couple. This may come as a surprise to most, but marriage is not only about me; not only about my satisfaction, pleasure or even happiness. And let me illustrate this very very bluntly. If marriage is centred on our happiness, and if love is a mere feeling that can fade or even disappear, then we should never ever say the wedding vow. If love is but a feeling, then vowing to love our spouses in best and worst of times is reduced to a lip service we cannot even keep! Just as we cannot vow to any feeling; like I cannot vow to be always jubilant; we cannot and should not vow to love if we reduce it to mere emotion. We need to be reminded that God is not filled with warm fuzzy feelings towards sinners. The often quoted saying that "God hates sin but loves the sinners can be an oversimplification and a caricatured version of the Christian God, who the Bible says *"is a righteous judge, a God who displays His wrath every day"* (Ps 7:11). But the anger that God displays towards sinners does not hinder His love, and He demonstrates His love by sending Christ to die for us while we were yet sinners (Rom 5:8). God loves us despite our unloveliness; and this should inform us a great deal on how we are called to love one another.

Those who are not married often have utopian, unrealistic expectations towards marriage. But once the marriage ceremony and the honeymoon period is over, we often hear of a polar swing, of marriage suddenly becoming hellish and a dreadful thing. But we should always keep in mind that marriage is something that God Himself instituted; and because of that it will ultimately be good, pleasing and perfect when we do things His way.

We will thus begin by looking at marriage as God intended "in the beginning," that is, the blessed marriage He designed. I will use Genesis 1 & 2 as our main texts, and will argue that it teaches:

- **Marriage is GOOD!** And as such is intended to be beneficial for the couple.
- **Marriage is DESIGNED!** And as such has a pattern to be observed.
- **Marriage is PURE!** And as such must be honoured and guarded.
- **Marriage is NATURAL!** And as such unites those who belong together (compatible in the faith).
- **Marriage is INSTITUTED!** And as such has its roles and functions as originally sanctioned.
- **Marriage is PRODUCTIVE!** And as such multiplies the goodness it was endowed with.

### 1. Marriage is GOOD!

When we read of the creation story in Genesis 1 & 2, one of the things we will immediately notice is how each day of creation is declared as being good, good, good, good, good and very good. But in Genesis 2, we find a scene which is still included in the pre-fall story of creation, but God said something is "not good."

*"It is not good for the man to be alone"* (Gen 2:18). Why? Was Adam a defective creature in and of himself? Of course not! Anything that God created is the *"good and perfect things from above"* (Jas 1:17). Good and



perfect because the Creator is good and perfect. So why did God say that it was not good for Adam to be alone?

For the exact reason why all of creation is deemed good. Creation is good and perfect because it speaks of the goodness and perfection of God. Creation declares the glory of God (**Ps 19:1-6**) and witnesses His attributes (**Rom 1:20**). Therefore, somehow, Adam's loneliness does not correspond to God's being. So, it was not good for Adam to be alone, because God is not alone. When God made mankind, this was what He

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*Somehow, Adam's loneliness doesn't correspond to God's being.*

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said, "let Us make mankind in Our image, in Our likeness... So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them" (**Gen 1:26-27**). The creation of mankind is that which is most modelled after God's being. Though the rest of creation speaks of God; mankind represents Him in the most intimate manner. And one of the aspect of this likeness is that the husband and the wife must imitate the oneness of the Triune God. See how the verse itself shifts back and forth from the singular and the plural. Let us (plural) make mankind (singular) in our (plural) image (singular), in our (plural) likeness... so God (singular) created mankind (singular) in His (singular) own image (singular), in the image (singular) of God He created them (plural); male and female (plural) He (singular) created them (plural). Get the picture? God's triune nature is herein subtly revealed. His oneness is revealed in the singular words he used; but His triune nature is seen in the plural words. God is one in essence and three in persons. This makes possible for God to have relational attributes (eg. Love). For if God is only one and not triune, then He cannot be self-sufficient in love for He will then need His creatures in order to love. And so God makes mankind to be just like Him, He made them relational and social. This is also why Genesis 1:26-27 vividly states that God's image is male and female. When the man is alone, he cannot imitate God in His attribute of covenantal love. Only when the woman is created, and joined with the man in exclusive covenantal love in marriage that they could learn to imitate the exclusive love shared among the godhead. Marriage is good because it reflects God.

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*Saying that marriage is good is not the same as saying that marriage is easy.*

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Oh, one more point before we go on to the next point. Saying that marriage is good is not the same as saying that marriage is easy. Marriage is good for us, because through marriage we get to learn (or, more accurately, forced to learn) societal skills in the most brutal but most honest; most vulnerable yet most committed manner possible. And when the two become one, frictions is part and parcel of the process. So no, marriage is not always easy; but it is always good.

## **2. Marriage is DESIGNED!**

*"I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen 2:18b)*

Secondly, marriage is elaborately designed by God. It is not something civilization accidentally discovers or invents. Before Adam realized his innermost need for a partner, God had identified it first and intended it first. It wasn't Adam's plea that prompted God to create Eve; in fact Adam hadn't yet thought of asking God, for someone he has no conceptual knowledge about. Despite the breath-taking scene of the Garden of Eden that Adam was placed in, he slowly realized what God had already declared beforehand, that it was not good that he was alone.

Adam was asked to name the animals. We need to appreciate the fact that in the Bible, the act of giving names to something, someone, or even some place denotes the giver's authority. In order to give an appropriate name, one needs to fully understand the characters or identity of the one being named; or the hope for that

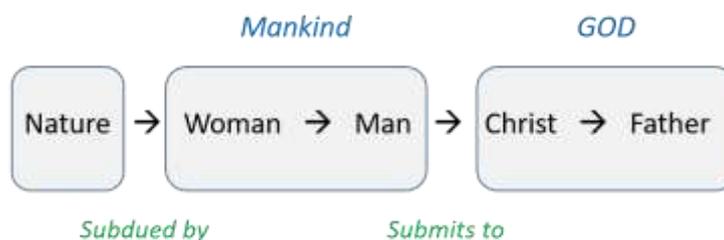


which was named. When God changes the name of a person, for example, it is always because He is revealing His plan for that person. So Adam naming the animals was no small feat; he needed to define their identities.

But it was also in understanding the identities of each animal that Adam began to realize something: that none of them was compatible for him. He wasn't able to communicate to the animals his deepest longings. Sure, they are cute and all, and some even know to wag their tails happily when Adam approaches them. But there was so much more in Adam that these animals just can't relate to – he was made in the image of God! And perhaps he also saw that each animal had a mate; a male and female. And so he started realizing a need he might not fully realize before. *“But for Adam no suitable helper was found” (Gen 2:20b)*. Strange that his naming project ends up with such a conclusion; but we see from context that it was exactly what God intended.

What we see here is that the longing for suitable companionship, and the covenantal union between a man and a woman is designed by God. And its roles have also been established from the very beginning. Adam came first, and then Eve. We know from the New Testament that this means that Adam was to be the head: *“But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor 11:3)*. Eve was made to be Adam's suitable helper (we will establish what this means). This way, God establishes the order of creation, and sets the *ordo* in place. And both man and woman are tasked with dominion over creation (**Gen 1:28**).

So we see this order:



Now, our fallen nature will cause us to misinterpret this most of the time. By saying that the head of the woman is the man; and the head of man is Christ will likely conjure up images of pyramidal hierarchy where the man holds a higher and more important status than the woman; and equality is shoved down the closet. And to be clear, such verses *have* been terribly misused to justify male chauvinism; which I in no way advocate.

To clear this the point of misunderstanding is actually quite simple; and the verse is also self-explanatory. Notice also that Paul mentions, “the head of Christ is God.” Does that mean that Christ is somehow inferior to God the Father? No! And since this statement will not be problematic for most of the readers who are guided by orthodoxy, I will not get into the depth of this doctrine of the Trinity. But the Bible affirms Christ's co-equality with the Father (eg. **Phil 2:6**). Yet, Christ submits to the Father, and fulfils the Father's will through His ministry. Therefore, submission has nothing to do with inferiority and more concerned with the different roles. Neither should woman's role as “helper” be seen as inferiority; for God is our helper (**Ps 118:7**). On the contrary, the need of a helper means that one is not self-sufficient.

We will get back to this topic on the fifth point, but as a close, do note how in the Fall, the *ordo* we had just laid out was turned upside down. In the Fall, Eve listened to the serpent; Adam listened to Eve; and Adam tried to push the blame to God. So, what we see is:

Nature (Serpent) ← Woman (Eve) ← Man (Adam) ← God



I know that this issue of the submission of woman is a sensitive topic; especially in today's culture. And I admit that submission has for the longest time been abused. And we will dive deeper into the topic as we progress. But in this starting stage, the challenge I want to put forward is for us to submit our understanding under the Word of God and not be a smart Aleck. Wisdom dictates that we *"trust in the Lord with all our heart and not lean upon our own understanding"* (**Prov. 3:5**).

And I don't know how the Scripture can be more clear than this:

*"A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner."* (**1 Tim 2:11-14**)

Now, I will not pretend that what Paul said was easy; and we will spend more time understanding that portion of Scripture. But what I am saying is, it is very clear. Paul objected against female headship and his reason was *creational order*: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve." And that fact does not change with time. This is not some cultural issue that can contextually shift in meaning or application. I will re-emphasize one thing though, for abusive male headship has undoubtedly caused the understanding of this verse to face more resistance than it ought to. Preaching male headship does not in any way belittle the status of women. On the contrary, what we shall learn is that male headship is supposed to magnify womanhood and the wonderful plan that God has for women in the Church. However, all we readers must approach this topic with full submission to a greater headship: the headship of our Lord Jesus Christ!

I will close this section with this exhortation. The fact that marriage is designed means the Designer alone knows what He intends to accomplish by placing things where they are. And while our understanding is still a work-in-progress, faith compels that we comply to Scripture. But we know enough that God blessed the institution of marriage, and that it is designed for goodness.

### **3. Marriage is PURE!**

*"Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame"* (**Gen 2:25**)

Shame is what we feel when we know that we have done something that we ought not do. And all of us put up a front when we are in public because we want to project a positive image and hide our deepest weaknesses, insecurities and doubts. In other words we do not appear to the society in our barest, most honest form. But in marriage, Adam and Eve were in their most open, transparent and exposed manner they could be (as symbolized by their nakedness) and they were not ashamed! They had nothing to hide to each other and were comfortable to show who they are in the most intimate form to one another.

You know what? This should be our vision for marriage. Not (just) the nakedness; but the honesty, openness, comfort and fulfilment we feel when we are with each other; bound and blessed by God's covenant of marriage. Your spouse should be the person you feel most comfortable with, to communicate your deepest and innermost desires, without fear of being rejected or belittled. S/he should be the very first person we run to with all our stories, with all our longings and with all our tears and fears. S/he should be our number one "BFF" (apart from God, of course) to whom we can share our most intimate moments. Now if this doesn't describe our marriages (and albeit to varying degrees, none of our marriages can live up to this pre-Fall ideal), it means we have something to work towards, and a more beautiful marriage to look forward to!



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*Purity is to be guarded from before marriage, so it can be preserved after marriage.*

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This is why the Bible places such important emphasis on marriage. *“Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral” (Heb 13:4)*. Purity is to be guarded from before marriage, so it can be preserved after marriage. *“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows” (Gal 6:7)*. What does this mean? God has designed nature a certain way, and marriage a certain way. And if one refuses to be obedient to God’s standard and way, he will surely forego the blessedness that God also intends.

You see, for marriage to be so intimate, so open and so transparent, it needs to be exclusive! Assuming I am speaking in a church context, I will only mention briefly how polygamy, pre-marital sex, adultery, and all the sexual immoralities are not an option. But exclusivity is also something that has to be preserved from before marriage. My personal observation is that spouses who used to date casually, and have had (even non-sexual) multiple partners prior to the one they marry, find it more difficult to be brutally open in their marriages. I don’t believe that trying out multiple partners means we are able to find the most suitable partner for marriage. On the contrary, it opens us into this habit of trying to find a spouse in the most self-centred manner; where I get to pull out all the list for a perfect spouse; and I get to specify all the attributes I think represent the perfect marriage for ME. It is quite commonplace for me to hear about someone putting up a list of what his/ her ideal partner will look; but I have never heard someone making a list of how to be the ideal partner. We forget that marriage is something two sinners commit themselves into, and compatibility is something we work towards, not something handed to us on a silver platter.

#### 4. Marriage is NATURAL!

“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;  
She shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”  
That is why a man leaves his father and mother and  
is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.  
(Gen 2:23-24)

Notice that when God brought Eve to Adam, He did not introduce Eve as the one He designed to be Adam’s partner. But when Adam saw Eve, he immediately exploded in jubilant exclamation and authoritatively named her *‘ishshah’* (woman), for she was taken out *‘ish’* (man). The whole ordeal is quite strange. God didn’t tell Adam when he was naming the animals that God was intending to create for him a partner. And when He brought Eve, it wasn’t mentioned as well that He was bringing her to him as his suitable helper. Yet, naturally, Adam recognizes that Eve possesses something the animals did not; such that Adam could relate to her at an intimate level. We are to be so unboundedly close to our spouse that even the act of sexual intimacy itself, under the covenant of marriage, is something the Bible calls pure (Heb 13:4) and natural (Rom 1:26).

Adam’s acknowledgment of Eve comes before God blessing their union; and is the basis for God’s blessing and institutionalizing subsequent marriages. Adam didn’t leave any father, any mother; so the statement did not seem to refer to him. But Adam and Eve’s union was a model for all subsequent marriages.

And this was the model God sanctioned: One man, one woman, leaving to create a new family of their own; bound to a lifetime of faithfulness through the covenant of marriage. Any distortion from this model results because of man’s sinful and hardened heart. You see, in **Matt 19:8**, Jesus’ objection for even the allowance of divorce was *“it was not this way from the beginning.”* In the case of the Pharisee’s question, divorce was a distortion from the permanence of Adam and Eve’s union; and therefore a falling short of the glory of God. Its



permittance, however, was nonetheless a provisional law to prevent *further* social disintegration. But other marital unfaithfulness falls even outside of such provision, and in the Old Testament are punishable by excommunication or even death. It is at this juncture that I must mention the evil of the current LGBTQ culture; that such culture attempts to legalize and even moralize actions which the biblical laws sought to eradicate. And it is the exact opposite of the natural marriage sanctioned in Genesis 2; and **Romans 1:26** calls such act “unnatural.” But assuming that the audience of this lecture are those committed to monogamous, heterosexual marriage, I will not prolong the discussion of the LGBTQ culture and I think it suffices just to say that the LGBTQ culture is evil and must be spoken against boldly by the Church of God by the speaking of truth in love.

But here’s something I want to spend a greater amount of time discussing; because it is something that people often enquire about. It is about our choice of partner: How to choose the right partner and how to be sure that we are with the right one.

To say that physical attraction between man and woman is natural doesn’t mean that our attraction towards one another isn’t marred by sin. In fact, the opposite is true. Because our very nature is marred by sin; this means that in turn our appreciation, our enjoyment, our values and ultimately our choices are now also naturally sinful. Men now become obsessed with finding the most outwardly beautiful mates and the most physically attractive females who are adorned outwardly; and women now become fooled with the pictures of fairy-tale romance than they are with finding a husband who is truly mature in his spirituality and accountable in all his works.

Now lest you misunderstand me, I am in no way saying that it is wrong for men to be physically attracted to his partner; in fact he has to be! And I am in no way saying that a woman is wrong when she is swept off her feet by an ideal partner and fall madly in love - she has to be! I am all in for romance in marriage, and all in for the excitement of love. What I am talking about, rather, is something much more foundational; and it is about how we get attracted to the right person.

There have been numerous times when someone has come up to me and say, “somehow I keep getting attracted to the wrong kind of person.” In some of those cases, it had been because the person has put up an impossible list of the idea partner. But in most cases, it is the more classic case of a woman fooled by bad-boy casanovas who just knew the right words but failed to live up to his outward shining armor. Or the more classic case of a man who found the prettiest woman he could be proud of only to realize later that she is just a spoiled princess who wants a manservant at her beck and call. And they say, “this happens every single time, it just frustrates me.” And then, they end up thinking, “there is just no good man out there,” or “there is just no good woman out there.”

The problem is rather simple, really. And it has to do with looking behind the psychology of our choices. You see, if you give a child the choice between a rolex watch and an iPad; if the child is normal he will choose the iPad every single time. Why? Because the child has no concept of the value of a rolex, yet can appreciate the immediate enjoyment from choosing an iPad. Or, if a child is offered a choice between his favourite junk food and a healthy home-made cooking. Sometimes, children even need to be forced to limit the kind of food that will cause them to grow up undernourished and obese! And that’s the same with us. Our choices are the result of our values and belief systems. And as long as that value remains unchanged, we may fall into the wrong choice every single time.

Ok, but how does the Bible help us with these? Well, it does this in a twofold manner.

- Firstly, **the Word of God changes our values** and the way we appreciate the world out there. **Romans 12:1-2** basically give us the summary of this process, whereby we as believers are by grace transformed by the renewing of our minds to escape conformity to the world and its evil desires. And Paul gives us a



vision that we sinners are to take by faith: that His will shall prove to be that which is truly *good, pleasing* and *perfect*. Our fleshly desires may not see that, and may not even want that; but what we will discover, if we choose to listen and obey, is that God wills what we will find beneficial, desirable, and even perfect. But we may not always understand why God commands certain things (like for example, in the modern world idealized by feminism, we may not understand – or even like – the fact that God commands women’s submission), but faith assures us that when we do, we will eventually discover that the command was given for our own goodness and even pleasure.

- Secondly, because of this fact that our sinful nature does not desire the things of God, **the Word of God demands that we initially deny ourselves** and carry our crosses. Just like the child who only wants to eat junk food needs to be disciplined to enjoy food that are healthy for him; our loving heavenly Father too disciplines us because He loves us in an exercise that may not be pleasant at the time (**Heb 12:7-11**).

And the Scripture only gives one commandment for choosing our partner; and one path for making ourselves attractive.

In choosing our partner, just this command was given, *“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God” (2 Cor 6:14-16)*. I think that’s straightforward enough, is it not? The reason God wants union between believers (as we have discussed previously) is so our family can be a channel for God’s glory; and be blessed to be a blessing. And since unbelievers do not share this burning desire that we are supposed to have to glorify God with our lives, our union with them would only devastate any chance of us achieving this blessed hope. Say we have a child, and we yearn to teach our child to be Christlike. But our spouse is not educated by God to be Christlike; and he surely has no intent to educate the child in a Christlike manner. We jeopardise any chance of glory that our family can have by disobeying this command. Oh, and by the way, equally yoked also means that both the husband and the wife must share the commitment for Christlikeness – or in other words both must be born-again Christians. This is not as simple as “change the religion in your passport and I’ll marry you” type of command.

There are many “tips and tricks” and words of wisdom that can be applied so that we are equally yoked. But the basic common sense in this command is this: If we are both heading the same direction, then further questions of compatibility may mean that some take longer than others, but we will get there. If one spouse is much less mature spiritually than the other, then the more mature partner may find it more difficult to convince the other of the simple matters of the faith. But as long as both are born-again Christians, the direction they are taking is unified by Christ. And the marriage, imperfect and even difficult though it may be, will be a work-in-progress that God Himself will work on to bring to Christlikeness.

Now, for making ourselves attractive, this command was given, *“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewellery or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight” (1 Pet 3:3-4)*. I just took out a portion of the Scripture that deals with beauty for the female, but actually the whole context talks about how both men and women are to *“follow in Christ’s footsteps” (1 Pet 2:21)*, which is why the command is exhorted with the phrase *“in the same way”* both to the female (3:1) and to the male (3:7). The male and the female is herein instructed to imitate the beauty of Christ. But let me first throw some cliches out of the way. This command does not mean that women are not allowed to adorn themselves with cosmetics and nice clothes; and this command also does not forbid women to be outwardly beautiful. Instead, just as righteousness is supposed to work itself from the inside



out, and not the outside in (eg. **Matt 23:26**), beauty too should come from the inside and work itself outwards. Inner beauty doesn't mean outer ugliness! And for husbands, the subsequent verses command us to be considerate heads of the family – and that means putting others ahead of ourselves. And, we are also commanded to treat women with respect – and this means honoring them. And the husbands and wives we are called to be speaks a lot about the kind of man and woman we should be attracted to. A woman beautiful from the inside out, whose inner beauty emanates in gentleness and submissive attitudes. And a man who is firm from the inside out, who are considerate to those less able than he, and who respects women and honors them and not treat them like sex objects. These are (1) the people we should learn to appreciate, and (2) also the kind of people we ought to strive to be, so we can be truly attractive.

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*Beauty is supposed to work itself from the inside out.*

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## 5. Marriage is INSTITUTED!

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. (**Gen 2:24**)

The Genesis account records God blessing Adam and Eve's union by saying, "that is why a man leaves his father and mother" (**Gen 2:24**). There are a few principles we need to be aware of from just this one statement:

- **"That is why – BENCHMARK OF THE INSTITUTION"** Adam's acceptance of Eve as his suitable helper became a model for subsequent marriages. God's statement must be seen as encompassing of all marriage because both Adam and Eve had no parents to leave. But just as Adam's obedience and disobedience became representative of all mankind, his acknowledgment of God's design in marriage was also representative.
- **"A man leaves – ONENESS OF THE INSTITUTION"** Why not "a man and a woman leave their fathers and mothers?" Because the leaving involves a formation of another new family, of which the husband is the head. But this formation of a new family also entails independency. I feel that this point is very important to note especially for the Eastern culture, because we don't tend to leave the institution of our parents' home. The fathers and mothers often retain their authority over their children's marriage; and even their children's children. How to educate the child, how to care for their health, what school is the best, what and when to give them toys, etc. And this is potentially unhealthy, because this way the husband is not encouraged to assume the role of headship, and cannot be held responsible for the spirituality of his new family. Of course, this does not mean that the new family will be completely detached from the old one, nor does this justify a disrespectful treatment of the couple's parents. The command to honor our parents is by no means nullified when we leave their homes! But what this means is that the new family is called to construct their new lives and decide for themselves how best to live out their faith. This also means that the couple's maturity is assumed. Psychological maturity (no crying home to momma!), spiritual maturity, even financial maturity! The man is tasked with providing for the new family (and not to do so is sinful – **1 Tim 5:8**), and the woman is tasked with keeping the home (**Titus 2:5**). Each require maturity and a leaving of the old institution.
- **"United to his wife – MEMBERS OF THE INSTITUTION"** Firstly, "wife" is in the singular. Polygamy is nowhere reflected in the blessed marriage. Secondly, the husband is "united to his wife." Not husband with husband. It is one male, one female. Again, this should be a well-known fact, except that the society we live in compel that I emphasize the otherwise obvious. Thirdly, "united." A man and woman is united as one flesh through the covenant of marriage. But unity is not the same as uniformity. The union of marriage means that the husband and the wife are *inseparable but not indistinguishable* from one another. Again,

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this strive to emulate the perfect unity of the godhead, where the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are equal in essence, yet only one God. Inseparable, but distinguishable.

**IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL ORDER.** And so, to say that marriage is an institution is to celebrate all of the above. A separate and independent family is formed, within which the rules and roles should apply. God guides every institution with differing roles, to maintain social order within the society. We can see these roles repeated over and over again in what the Germans call the New Testament *Haustafeln* (or, house codes). You can read them in **Ephesians 5:21-6:9**; **Col 3:18-4:1**; and **1 Pet 2:11-3:7**. These regulate the different types of relationships normally found in the home, in the organization, or in the country. A summary of these will be:

- Husbands to sacrificially love their wives; to honor and respect them
- Wives to submit to their husbands; to obey their husbands in the Lord
- Fathers to educate their children in faith; and not to embitter them
- Children are to obey their parents in the Lord
- Masters to be generous and fair to their slaves and to now they are accountable to God
- Slaves to obey their masters wholeheartedly
- Citizens to obey the governing authorities as those sanctioned by the Lord to restrain evil
- (Commandments for the Governments were excluded, because of they were presumed to be pagan. Nonetheless, they are answerable to God)

But here's the realistic way to read these commandments, given that we are living in a fallen world.

- Husbands to love their wives even when they are unlovely (just as Christ committed to love us and die for us while we were yet sinners)
- Wives to submit to their husbands even when they are unrespectable, and to obey them in everything that is not contrary to conscience
- Fathers to educate and discipline their children even (and especially) when they are rebellious
- Children are to honor their parents and obey them in everything that is not contrary to conscience
- Masters to be generous and fair to their slaves even when they weren't required to, remembering that they were treated with grace and mercy by their Master in heaven
- Slaves to obey their masters with integrity, even when they are harsh
- Citizens to be law-abiding in everything that do not prevent them from obeying the Word of God

So, just as citizens cannot despise and disavow the government just because there a few corrupt officials (for that would immediately reduce the nation to total anarchy; and a bad government is still better than no government); so too unlovely wives and unrespectable husbands should not be the reason to escape our duties in the home. On the contrary, those are the moments when the rules are needed. For it is not difficult to love a lovely wife; and not difficult to respect a respectable husband. It is when they don't deserve our love and respect that the commandment is most needed. And such commandment is needed at the very least to maintain *social order*, whether in the home or in the nation. A home where everyone thinks of themselves; where the husband requires the wife to act a certain way before loving her; and where the wife requires the husband to act a certain way before she respects him – that is a household made in hell.

I know that the above command is easier said than done. And the overwhelming reality of sin can be such that we will need to endure suffering to obey these commandments. Which is why the commandment as given to us in **1 Pet 2:11-3:7** is given with the very context of living in a completely pagan world. And Peter's exhortation even assumes suffering as he concludes the segment with these words: "*Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed... But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord*" (**1 Pet 3:13-15**).



Can you see why I had to begin the session by reminding that marriage is *not* first and foremost about our happiness. For if marriage is about us being fulfilled, pleasant and happy; about the warm and fuzzy feeling and the happily ever afters, how do you think such couple will react when they realize their marriage is no fairy tale? When it first dawns upon them that their spouse is not the angel they envisioned, our expectation for our marriage is the very thing that determines its standing or falling. If we marry only to be happy, we are quickly left with no reason to stay in marriage when we are unhappy.

But the Bible gives one comfort; and one strength in spite of the greatest trouble. That in any and all relationship, we are to do good to them “just as to the Lord.” Christ’s own love and sacrifice which compels us to live for Him can be the very strength we need to get us through. That way, a husband can love his wife who is acting unlovely by remembering that he is emulating His Lord, who has done the same for him. That way, a wife can submit to her husband even when he is being difficult by remembering that she is ultimately submitting to her Lord, who Himself had shown the ultimate example of submission when He laid down His life doing the Father’s will. Doing good by faith whilst fixing our eyes on Jesus – that is how we can exhibit God’s unconditional love at a place least deserving – for we ourselves have been the recipient of God’s abundant grace and mercy at the very time when we least deserve it.

## 6. Marriage is FRUITFUL!

“God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.’” (Gen 1:28)

Okay, this is the very last point for the day. God creating mankind in His image and creating them male and female is followed immediately by His blessing their union, and then by God giving them the cultural mandate to subdue creation through the process of multiplication. This shows how central the issue of marriage is to God’s plan. And as I shall explain, multiplication is how God plans to spread His glory over all the earth. This normally means (but not exclusive to) multiplication through child-bearing. The issue is the multiplication of God’s children and therefore His representative glory. And marriage achieves this through two ways:

### 1. Godly Offspring

God designed it in such a way that the institution of marriage would create suitable homes for rearing children. The doting husband and submissive wife; both committed to Christ-likeness – this is the home geared up towards educating godly children. This intent is clear in the **Gen 1:27-28** blessing, and is also vividly reminded during the immoral times of Malachi. “*Did He not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring*” (**Mal 2:15**).

God makes man and woman in His image, in His likeness. And when this couple who are like God bears children, their children also bear the identity of God’s image and likeness. Their multiplication and eventual spread over the earth achieves the good subjugation of creation under man’s representative rule. “*For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea*” (**Hab 2:14**).

I will argue this in a later session, but I can mention the summary here. True manhood and womanhood as instructed in the Bible is given in such a way that the parents can more properly represent God and the full spectrum of His attributes in the home. And such representation needs both the roles of the father as well as the mother. Imagine how impossibly difficult for one parent to represent both justice, as well as mercy; or to command respect and yet closeness at the same time; to establish authority as well as advocate responsible freedom. You get the picture. In order to bring God’s perfect attributes in the home through imperfect parents is not only hard work; it is practically



impossible. That is why God creates man and woman differently, with different characteristic tendencies and also different roles in the home. That is why, both biblical masculinity and femininity sets as its vision, Christlikeness – emulating Christ’s sacrificial lordship to the Church and His voluntary submission to the Father. Through the family, God teaches the husband to be Christlike. Through it, God teaches the wife to be Christlike. And through it, God ensures that the children receive education that is conducive for Christlikeness. This is the family’s fruitfulness.

*“Did He not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring” (Mal 2:15)*

## 2. Discipleship

The home is where discipleship begins. As we have just established, the design of the home is where each member is taught to emulate Christ. Is it any surprise, then, that the ability to manage a family becomes one of the signs of a mature spiritual leader for the Church? Both the elder (**1 Tim 3:4**) and the deacon (**1 Tim 3:12**) are required to manage their households well.

And so we see the underlying thread behind God’s mandates to mankind. The cultural mandate which calls for multiplication (**Gen 1:27-30**) and the great commission which calls for discipleship (**Matt 28:18-20**) has at its heart the multiplication and spreading of God’s Christlike children; and thus the filling of earth with His glory. So for the church leaders, if you want to build a healthy church, strive to defend the godly homes.

And just like discipline is to be exercised in the home, defending godliness necessitates the practice of church discipline. In 1 Cor 5, Paul exhorts the church at Corinth to sternly deal with a case of incest from within the congregation. Paul’s exhortation was to *“expel the wicked person from among you”* (**1 Cor 5:13**). Now Paul’s expression quotes from the book of Deuteronomy, where the exact phrase is repeated seven times (**Deut 13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 24; 24:7**). And the context in Deuteronomy was when the Israelites were just about to enter the Promised Land and build a culture there as God’s chosen nation.

I hope you are able to see what I am trying to point out: that God designs marriage to be a harbinger of His glory. Seen this way, a lot more is at stake in marriage than just our personal sense of happiness. Its ripple effect affect the rise and fall of a civilization. This way, a godly family is the seed of a Christlike church; and a Christlike church is the anchor for a just society.

## Conclusion

At our wedding, we say these words, “I, \_\_\_\_\_, take you, \_\_\_\_\_, to be my lawfully wedded (husband/wife), to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.” This commitment to a loving and faithful monogamous marriage is blessed and recognized by the church. But the Bible says that what joins my wife and I was not the decision that we made, or the vows that we said; it wasn’t even the church’s acknowledgment, or the nation’s certificate. The Bible made it clear that God is the one behind every union of the husband and the wife; and *“therefore what God has joined, let no one separate”* (**Matt 19:6**).

This was why at the start of the session, I challenged the notion that love is mere emotion. For if it were merely an emotion, then we cannot ever say that wedding vow. Feelings change depending on the situation, and that



is okay. The Christian person is allowed to be emotional – mourning a loss, jubilant when successful, excited at an opportunity, lamenting injustice. Those are emotions that the Bible warrants, and even emotions that the psalmists modelled. And these are natural responses to the changing environments. The warm and fuzzy feeling we have when we like somebody? Although that is part and parcel of falling in love, cannot be all there is to love.

Love, and especially that which we vow to in marriage, must extend itself from mere emotions to a heartfelt commitment. That is why biblical marriage is a COVENANT. It is a relationship we commit ourselves into, promising to abide by certain covenantal code (of unconditional love and faithfulness) for the duration of life (“until death do us part”).

Marriage is blessed by God, and designed to be good. But it is also instituted a certain way to bring about the multiplication of His glory. And to achieve that, the husband, the wife, as well as the children is taught to act in ways that reflect and represent the attributes of God. But the truly blessed marriage is ultimately doxological: we need to acknowledge and abide by these rules that comes **FROM** Him; and to proceed in our imperfect marriage **THROUGH** His perfect strength; so that our marriage can bring glory **TO** His name.

Soli Deo Gloria!

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<sup>i</sup> For example, see Jim Nelson Black (1995) “When Nations Die.” Within the book, Jim observes 10 signs of a decaying society; and notes that these fall under three aspects: Social decay, cultural decay and moral decay. And in fact, a Professor Roberto De Mattei, a prominent historian, claims that the fall of the Roman empire was due to the decline in sexual ethics, even in the spread of homosexuality. (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/italy/8438210/Fall-of-Roman-Empire-caused-by-contagion-of-homosexuality.html>)

