

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

September 16, 2007
No. 3376

God's Design for Marriage
Rev. Carl Haak

Dear radio friends,

Last week we began a series of messages on the truth of marriage and the family for the glory of God. We began that series by looking into Genesis 2:18-24, which is the most foundational passage in the whole Bible on the truth of marriage. We noted that the truth of marriage is urgent—urgent especially for us in this generation, where God's works and God's institutions are held in contempt by the world of unbelief, and in which God calls us as the disciples of Jesus Christ to hear and to receive His living Word.

If you recall, last week we saw from Genesis 2 that marriage is God's doing. That is, it is God's institution. It is God's institution because, first of all, it was God who made them male and female—man and woman. Why? In order that He might have a marriage. Second, we saw that it was God's institution because He personally gave away the first bride, He brought Eve to Adam and gave her to him. Third, we saw that it was God's doing because He spoke the design of marriage. He de-

finied what marriage was to be. Genesis 2:24—A man shall leave father and mother (it shall be a primary relationship in life) and shall cleave to his wife (that is, he shall hold dearly to his wife) and they two shall be one flesh. And, finally, we saw that marriage was God's doing because God Himself is the One who unites and joins us in marriage. Jesus said, when He expounded on Genesis 2:24, "What therefore God hath joined together." Those words were Jesus' exposition upon the words, "they shall be no more twain but one flesh." Jesus says that that means that God joins them together. Let not man, then, put asunder.

Now today we want to continue in this series and note the description of the marriage-bond a bit more carefully and then emphasize exactly what God's intention was with marriage, that is, that it be a display of what is closest to His heart.

First of all, then, we note that marriage is described by God in Genesis 2 as having these three elements. 1) According to God's Word, mar-

riage is the union of a man and a woman: "And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man" (v. 22). Same-sex marriages, the relationship sexually of man and man, woman and woman, is sin as defined by God. And to use the word "marriage" to describe that relationship is to blaspheme God.

The apostle Paul teaches us in Roman 1:26, 27 that, when man rejects God and makes himself out to be God or makes His own god, then God passes a just judgment upon man. And, according to Romans 1:24, part of that judgment of God upon men who set themselves to reject Him and will not bow to Him is this: "God gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own heart to dishonor their own bodies between them." He gives them over to immorality. A forsaking and turning away from the true God is visited with the judgment of immorality—the lust of sinful flesh breaks out. And then that lust of sinful flesh is also judged by God. This is what the apostle Paul says in verses 26, 27: "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men,

leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet."

Marriage, as defined by God, is the union of a man and a woman. Same-sex marriage is a sin. It is not the only sin in the world. It is not the unpardonable sin. It is a sin that the gospel of Jesus Christ calls men and women to forsake, to turn from, to cast aside, and then to bow in humble repentance before God and the Savior Jesus Christ.

2) We learn that marriage, according to what it is, is intended by God as the lifelong bond of a man and a woman until severed in death. Jesus said, a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. That is what Jesus said that God said in the beginning. He shall cleave, that is, he shall hold on to his wife. God did not use the plural. He did not say wives. He used the singular. Two wives for one man is one too many. A man can love all of his children equally much, but he can love only one woman at a time.

And Jesus drew the conclusion from Genesis 2 that, since God joins a man and a woman together, only God can sever them. It was Jesus who

said, "Let not man put asunder." Man severs that union. But Jesus says: "Let not man put asunder." So we read in the Word of God in Romans 7:2-4 that a woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he liveth; but if he be dead, she is free from that law.

Marriage is a lifelong bond. It is a lifelong bond of a husband and a wife, a man and a woman, until death, as we are going to see in just a moment, because marriage is a picture of God's faithfulness to us His church.

3) We learn that marriage, according to God's design, is the primary bond or relationship in life. A man (Gen. 2:24) shall leave his father and mother. Not that the relationship of parent and child, father and son, mother and daughter is over. But when God says "shall leave his father and mother," he means in the sense of what is first and primary. God intends that marriage be a union that is first and primary in our life. Not the guys that you used to hang out with, not focusing on someone else who is going to supply your emotional needs

*Marriage,
according to
God's design,
is the primary bond
or relationship
in life.*

and would be so understanding, but your husband and your wife. The two of you are in that primary bond of life. Your marriage is primary—something that identifies you, something that you are to care for first.

Why? Why did God do all of this? Why did God create and why did God give marriage? The answer is: His own glory! Marriage was given by God, as all things were made by God, for one purpose:

God's glory. He made all things for His own glory. "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things to whom be glory forever" (Rom. 11:36).

But how is marriage for God's glory?

The answer to that question is: marriage is for God's glory because marriage is the bond that displays God's beautiful covenant. In Genesis 2:24 God is speaking of a union: a man shall be joined unto his wife and they two shall be one flesh. A man shall cleave to his wife.

What kind of relationship is this? Is this a 50-50 relationship between a man and a woman? Why are they to hold to one another? Why can they not walk away from this? Why cannot they go from spouse to spouse to spouse? Why is adul-

tery sin? And why may not marriage be rooted in romance? Why can you not fall in and out of love and fall in and out of marriage? Why is marriage a lifelong bond? Because marriage is given by God to point to something far deeper, something true about Himself. It points to something more permanent, far more glorious! It points to a sacred covenant that God makes with us His people in Jesus Christ. Our marriages are sacred covenants. They are commitments to weather the storms of life together because we are called in our marriage to reflect God and His commitment and covenant toward us.

This becomes very plain in the apostle Paul's words in Ephesians 5:31, 32. In verse 31, as Paul has been speaking about marriage and the calling of a husband and a wife, he, too, quotes from Genesis 2:24: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh." And then in verse 32 he adds: "This is a great mystery [what I have been talking about—this joining of a man and a woman]: but I speak concerning Christ

*Marriage
is patterned
after Christ's
commitment
to His church.*

and the church." Now that is the most staggering and profound thing that could ever be said about marriage. In other words, marriage is patterned after Christ's commitment to His church. When God created man in the beginning as male and female and brought them into a union called marriage, He was patterning that after Christ

and His bride, the church—not the other way around. God did not first make marriage and then say, "Well, hm-m-m, how illuminating it would be if I would pattern My relationship in Christ toward My people after this marriage. I'll pattern Christ and the church after what I have done here in the beginning." No! That is *not* the way it is! But God said, "It was first Christ and the church. It is first Me, in My love to My elect in Jesus Christ. That is first. And now I'll make marriage to display that."

It was first Christ (Rev. 13:8), who was slain from the foundation of the world. It was first God's eternal grace flowing through Jesus Christ unto His elect, before there

was an Adam, before there was an Eve. And, in His own heart, because this is who He is (He is faithful, He is a God of covenant faithfulness), He designed marriage after the very relationship that abides in His eternal breast and heart toward us in Christ.

So, your marriage exists for the glory of God. Do you know why God gave you a wife? Do you know why God gave you a husband? To display to the world the truth about the faithful love of God. That is why. God brings us together not first of all for ourselves. Of course we enjoy blessings from the hand of our God and Creator. But God brought us together, first of all, to display His Son's grace and love to His church. God called us together in this bond of marriage in order that He might display Christ's sacrificing for His bride, in order that He might display His own precious love, in order that He might show that Christ loves with a forgiving love and never forsakes His own bride. The highest purpose for marriage is to put the covenant rela-

tionship of Christ and the church on display before the world, so that others may see it in concrete terms and reality.

The world does not know this. But this is the truth. This is why marriage exists. And if you are married, this is why you are married: to reflect Christ and the church.

Staying married is not, first of all, about yourself. It is not first of all about staying in love. It is not first of all about the other person. It is about keeping covenant as long as we both shall live—till death us do part. Good vows. Those are proper vows at the time of your marriage. Why do we say that? Because the vow that Christ made to us when He died for us and by His grace brought us to Himself, that vow is unconditional and He is faithful. And we say, "Lord, I want to represent that in my marriage."

Marriage is lifelong because the one most valuable

*The highest purpose
for marriage
is to put the
covenant relationship
of Christ
and the church
on display
before the world,
so that others
may see it in
concrete terms
and reality.*

thing in all the world that we must show (we were created and saved to show it) is the faithful love of God. In times of distance from your wife, in times of backsliding, this is where my heart must be pricked. Christ keeps covenant with me. Do we see how serious, how sacred, how solemn is our marriage? God is saying, "You are married in order that all the world may know that I am faithful. That all the world may know that Christ loves the church."

Well, there is a lot of application here. There is application for young adults and for teenagers. You need to prepare yourself for marriage. You prepare yourself for marriage not by the last fling as a single person. You do not prepare yourself by buying all kinds of things or owning all kinds of things. You do not prepare yourself for marriage by looking at movies or pornography. You may be assured that if you do that, you have sowed the seeds that will, apart from God's grace, destroy your marriage and bring untold bitterness into your soul.

No, you prepare for your marriage when deep down in your heart you live right now faithful to God. Faithful to God in your body, faithful to God in your thoughts. Girls,

does that young man love God? Well, he says he does, you say. OK. Is he faithful to God? Well, what do you mean? What does he do with you and what does he want to do with you? Is he faithful to God?

Those who are married—sometimes we want the "quick fix." We find that our hearts are filled with agony and it seems as if we cannot endure it for yet another moment. We find out that getting married was not very hard. It is staying married that can be very hard and impossible for us. God's Word is the power to change us. And I pray that this seed of God's Word may land, by the Holy Spirit, on the heart of a little boy of six years old or a little girl of nine or a teenager of fourteen or nineteen or a woman of thirty-three or fifty-two or eighty. Here is the Word of God: Marriage is about covenant keeping. It is about showing the faithful love of God. That is what it is about. That is what God calls you to do.

May God put grit into our souls—spiritual grit—so that we are not blown away by the billboards, by the Internet, by the movies of this world, but that in Christ we know a faithful love of God, personally, as sinners—the wonderful, faithful love of God to us, so that we are committed in marriage to

show a faithful love of God to each other, so that when the wind comes and the tornadoes of trouble blow we are not blown away. Though hell break loose, we are committed to love faithfully even as He loved us. To our passions and to our lusts, to our feelings and to our rights, we say, "You are not my God! My rights? What is right? What about me? You are not God. Me is not God. God is my God. Covenant is my life. God is on display in my marriage. The God who does not forsake me. The God who takes me back in repentance."

May God give us grace in our marriage. May God give us grace in this culture that destroys marriage, in this self-exalting land. May we not bow down at the shrine of our desires and our own emotions. But may we bow down at the foot of Christ and ask: "Lord,

give me a marriage that displays what it means that Christ loves the church. Give me a marriage that wants first to show Thy glory, a marriage as it was intended by Thee in the beginning."

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Thy precious Word, and we pray that it may be a good Word to our heart, that it may be a balm of healing, or recommitment, that we may focus now more clearly upon our calling. For, Lord, we are sinners. And we get off the track. And so many things become so vitally important, especially our own rights, to us. May we rather cast our rights aside and say that we have but one blessed privilege: we shall show forth Thy faithful love. Grant it in Jesus' name, Amen.