

**Marriage – The Profound Mystery**  
**A seven-part biblical study on marriage from the**  
**Assembly of Confessing Congregations Discipleship and Evangelism**  
**Commission**

**Study 1 – *From the Beginning of Creation* (Marriage in Genesis 1 and 2)**

- 1) Read Gen 2:18. It is not good for man to be alone (the first ‘not-good’ in history). We were created for relational oneness just as God is one God in relationship – Father Son and Holy Spirit. For human beings to be created in his image, they will live in covenant relationships. God is love and the one-flesh union of marriage reflects the communion within the Godhead. It is the way God is in his most central being! Think on what this means for you.
- 2) Men and women are complementary in relationships even outside of marriage. Unmarried people still live in fullness in relationships as they relate male to female. How do you see this complementarity working out?
- 3) Leaving of parents is the severance of the strongest human bond from the people who brought us life. Therefore marital union is above all other personal loyalties. It means that the primary loyalty of the marriage is to each other, and no longer with parents (or friends, children or anybody else). What dangers are there if this “leaving and cleaving” does not take place?
- 4) Being joined or united through the physically sexual union is not just a symbol. It is powerful and the marriage is renewed in ways far beyond the physical act of sex. This one flesh union is a fusion of a man and woman in a fully shared mutual experience with mutual honouring care. Do we fear such full union with our spouse in marriage?
- 5) Sexual union is for a man and a woman within marriage. Any other expression of sexuality is called sexual immorality (and sin). There is not sex within marriage and sex outside of marriage. Sex in marriage is marriage – everything else is sin! How does this contrast to the views of the world around us?
- 6) “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame”. Gen 2:25. This nakedness is first and foremost physical. They weren’t embarrassed about their bodies in front of the other. “No shame” in nakedness doesn’t just mean physically, it means to be ‘naked in spirit’. Completely exposed in thought, word and deed. No secrets, just honesty, openness, vulnerability and joy. Think on the marvel of God’s creation (not just the universe, but the nature of relationships as He made them).

## **Study 2 - *Paradise Lost* (Marriage in Genesis 3)**

- 1) They walked with God in the cool of the evening (Gen 3:8). This is a picture of the first couple in a perfect relationship with God and also each other. Their marriage was right and good as they obeyed and believed God. How do we long for such a relationship with our Father and others?
- 2) The serpent said to Eve that if she ate of the fruit, she would be like God....(Gen 3:5). The desire to be God (that we know better than Him) is at the heart of all sin. The serpent was saying (and Eve believed) that God is holding out on you! “He just tells you the way things should be, but really we know better than Him. Come on – be your own god.” How has this pride and rebellion affected every relationship we have ever had?
- 3) Read Gen 3:12-13. Notice the way that Adam and Eve immediately turn to self-justification and blame. They totally believe that they are right. God is wrong and so is everyone else! How do we fall into the trap of believing we are right and all our problems are caused by others (especially God!)?
- 4) Read Gen 3:16. It literally says, “You Eve, will desire to rule over your husband. But He will rule over you.” This is God’s judgement on their marriage. God hands them over to their sinful desire to rule over each other. Both will want to be the boss. Both will want to rule over and both will really think they know best. They will use their various powers, whether it be strength or manipulation or logic or sexuality to achieve this goal. How does this affect you in your life?
- 5) We live this side of the fall and thus we should have a realistic expectation of relationships. Gen 3 destroys any idealism about ourselves and others. How can we prepare young people for life and marriage in light of the ‘Fall’?
- 6) Because Jesus has reconciled and reunited us to God, we can be reconciled and reunited in human relationships. There is only one cure for the mess of the ‘Fall’. It is what Jesus has done for us through the cross. He took away our sinful mess (our pride, self-justification, desires to be lord). He made us clean, removed our guilt and shame, that we could live in pure relationships – with God and even with other sinners. Think on and marvel at the lavish grace God has poured out on us?

### Study 3 - God's Covenant Love (Marriage in the Prophets)

- 1) God in his covenant love says, "I will be your God and you will be my people." God in a sense is saying we are now bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. He will not think of Himself apart from us. As in the marriage vow, God is saying "I take you....and all that I am I give to you!" Can you believe that God loves us like this?
- 2) Read Isa 54:4-6 and hear the safety of marriage as created by God:  
*<sup>4</sup>"Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. <sup>5</sup>For your Maker is your husband—the LORD Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. <sup>6</sup>The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit—a wife who married young, only to be rejected," says your God. Our security is based in the faithfulness of God isn't it?*
- 3) This world would say to us that sexuality is just something you do with your bodies; nothing more than a physical act with a biological fulfillment. But in reality it is far more than that. It is a one flesh union. It brings a joining that goes beyond any physical act. Sexuality is taught in our schools only in the physical sense, and yet when kids try it as taught, there comes pain and shame that runs deep to the heart. It deeply affects the whole person. How can we give more care to the way we live and teach our young people? How open should we be with them about these things?
- 4) God chooses Israel, his people, knowing she will be unfaithful. In fact He chooses her because she will be! What does this tell us about God's plans for salvation throughout history?
- 5) The truth is that Hosea's story is only partially about Hosea and his wife. It is mainly about God and his people (Hos 3:1). It is his people who have rejected Him and been unfaithful, worshipping other gods. To say all have sinned is to say all have rejected God and all have been unfaithful. Why do we struggle to admit the fact that we have been unfaithful to the one true God?
- 6) We display the love of God as we love like He loves us. But the truth is we cannot love. We have no love of our own. God is love and love is of God. All love comes from Him. As the Holy Spirit flows through us we love with his love. God's love has no end. It is love that keeps on flowing in the face of our inability. What does love have to do with keeping in step with the Spirit (Gal 5:22-25)?

#### **Study 4 - The Greatest Love-Song Ever Written (Marriage in the Song of Songs)**

- 1) The Book called Song of Songs describes the attraction and intimacy between a man and a woman. It begins as they are courting, through to engagement, the wedding, and then through their married years. It is a book that some have felt uncomfortable with because of its imagery and yet it describes the freedom and joy – the gift of a sexual relationship between a husband and wife. It is very positive and destroys any ideas that we might have that a sexual relationship might be bad. In the safe context of marriage it is in fact “very good”. Why is it good to talk about a positive sexual relationship within marriage in Australia 2013?
- 2) The engaged woman in this poem is clearly smitten with love for this man. There is ‘chemistry’ between them. She wants to be special to him, exclusively: for him to be her ‘king’, and she his queen. How do we see these strong feelings of love as a gift of God?
- 3) The ‘vineyard’ is the relationship, and ‘the little foxes’ are the things that can get in the way of the relationship and do it harm. The man saw that these intrusions needed to be identified and dispatched as they arose, before they did any permanent damage. These ‘foxes’ are present in every relationship, not just in marriage. How might we identify and catch these ‘foxes’?
- 4) Every wedding is in a sense celebrated like the bride is a princess and the husband a prince. Whether it be a royal wedding or a shepherd and a peasant girl! What has God laid in the human heart that makes this glory real and fulfilling?
- 5) The man in the poem expresses his exclusive attachment to his wife above all others. What are the advantages of this joyful faithfulness?
- 6) *Close your heart to every love but mine; hold no one in your arms but me. Love is as powerful as death; passion is as strong as death itself. It bursts into flame and burns like a raging fire. Water cannot put it out; no flood can drown it. But if anyone tried to buy love with his wealth, contempt is all he would get* (Song 8:6–7).

The depth and strength of their marriage has been that it is ‘the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life’. It is this one-on-one relationship, to the exclusion of all others that enables a couple safely to explore and discover the height and depth and breadth and length of true love. Here they can know a love in life that is ‘for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death’. This is a priceless gift. What does it take to receive such a gift?

## **Study 5 - *The Bridegroom Arrives* (Marriage in the Words of Jesus)**

- 1) Read John 2:1-10. Jesus went to a wedding and celebrated. He blessed the wedding by providing wine. John 2:11 tells us that He reveals his glory through a wedding. What does this tell us about Jesus' view of marriage?
- 2) Jesus points out regarding marriage (Matt 19:4-6) that God has from the beginning created humanity as male and female. The only compatibility that is necessary is that there is a male and a female. When a man and a woman marry they become one flesh because God joins them, so they are no longer two but one. Thus, marriage is not just a human arrangement. How do you see God blessing marriage (Christian or not)?
- 3) Moses made a provision for divorce to 'limit the damage', but it was not this way from the beginning. Consider why Moses' law allowing for divorce does not really tell us anything about marriage?
- 4) What does the 'epidemic of pornography' we are experiencing today do to our understanding of masculinity and femininity? Read Matt 5:27-30 and consider what our response should be to it.
- 5) We see from Luke 20:34-36 that human marriage is not the 'be all and end all' of being a human. Rather it has its function in the present age, but in the resurrection earthly marriages will be overshadowed by the great family of God. Although life in the resurrection is difficult to imagine, think about how what Jesus has said will also be a relief.
- 6) Jesus is the great bridegroom, and the wedding at the end of history is the highlight of history. Why is it important to see that human marriage is grounded in the marriage of Christ and the church?

## **Study 6 - *The Profound Mystery* (Marriage in Paul's Letters)**

- 1) Read 1 Cor 6:13. The body is meant for the Lord (now). It is his, and we are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16). In 1 Cor 6:15 Paul says not be joined to a prostitute as we are in Christ and He in us. We were created for sex in the context of marriage and anything else is sin. How does this make a difference to our thinking?
- 2) In 1 Cor 7:3-5 we are told that the bodies of the husband and wife belong to each other – they are one flesh. What does this mean to those who are married and to how those outside of that marriage view them?
- 3) Bonhoeffer says that we should never relate to anyone directly but only 'through God'. This applies to marriage also. Thus the only path to true love between a husband and wife is through Jesus Christ. How do you think this works out practically?
- 4) Paul gives three examples of Spirit-filled submission in relationships out of reverence for Christ: Wives and husbands, children and parents, and slaves and masters. How does the Holy Spirit make such loving submission possible?
- 5) Read Eph 5:22-33. Christ's love for the church is the ground and measure of the husband's love for his wife. There is a great responsibility placed on husbands here. The husband is to have the same measure of love that Christ had for his church, not sparing himself for her; giving himself up for her. Christ's intention is that the church be glorious; a husband's intention is that his wife be glorified and praised (Pro 31:30-31). It is clear from Pro 31 that the husband being head of his wife does not mean stifling her. The husband is free to give great freedom to his wife, just as Christ glorifies the church. Submitting to each other means submitting to the needs of the other. This is mutual, and all out of reverence for Christ. To love your wife is to submit to her needs. In this passage, how do you see the responsibility of husbands and wives?
- 6) Paul quotes Gen 2 as a prediction/description of Christ's love for the church. The 'profound mystery' (In Eph 5:32) is referring to more than just Ephesians 5, but to the whole flow of Scripture about God's great plan for creation and humanity. Try to express this profound mystery in your own words.

## **Study 7 - *The Marriage of the Lamb and His Bride*** (Marriage and the Consummation of All Things)

- 1) That God would dwell forever with his people is the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises, “I will be their God and they will be my people” and “Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you”. How comforting is it to know that God will not forget these promises?
- 2) The ‘profound mystery’ of marriage is far more than just a man and a woman entering into marriage. Paul is talking about the marriage between Christ and the church. And in reality the marriage between a man and a woman is a reflection of this true covenant relationship. Why should we look to **‘the’** marriage’ and not human marriage as the true standard?
- 3) Jonathan Edwards said, “The sum of God’s purposes with respect to creatures, was to procure a spouse, or a mystical body, for His Son... and in keeping with His design to procure a bride for His only Son, God chose some of our fallen race to be reunited with Him through the Son, not only selecting them individually, but also electing them corporately—as a singular bride for Christ—so that, in Christ, a holy remnant would remain in the family of God and would participate in the extension of God’s glory in the world.” (Miscellanies, 1245). How does it change our view of God and history if we see this to be true?
- 4) God cannot and will not allow sin to remain and therefore in Eze 16:59-63, He brings judgement on his beloved bride through the hands of other nations. But throughout this judgement - God does not forget his promise. It stands firm; He will never leave nor forsake his people; his beloved. However God cannot allow this sin and adultery to go unpunished. And so atonement must be made for it. What does this mean about the importance of the atonement Jesus made on the cross?
- 5) The bride is washed and purified and made ready for the great wedding. The Rescuer or Saviour is the Bridegroom and He prepares his bride for a perfect marriage. He rescues his betrothed by making atonement for her sins. What does it mean to be saved?
- 6) Picture the scene of the princess imprisoned in the tower and guarded by the dragon. She is rescued by the knight in shining armour who slays the dragon and saves her from certain death. This scenario is embedded deep in the human heart. This is because it is of the essence of all that God is doing in history. History is ‘his story’ but it is our story too! Think on this love story of our great God who has rescued us from the power of death and brought us to the marriage as a perfect bride for his beloved Son! Is there any better story?

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