Core Seminars—Marriage

Week 2

**A Biblical Theology of Marriage Part 1**

*Creation (Gen 1 & 2)*

**Review: What have we done?**

Week 1: We talked about is God at the center of your marriage. We talked about how trust in God matters for your marriage. A right relationship with God; a vibrant faith; a deep love for Jesus – will transform the way you live with your spouse. Our sanctification – how we work things out in marriage – is rooted in our justification – our right relationship with God.

Today, and over the next three weeks, we’re going to cover a biblical theology of marriage-creation, fall, redemption in marriage. We want to think about the biblical storyline helps us to understand what God intends for marriage.

**Marriage and Creation**

We want to spend our time today thinking about biblical marriage from the first two chapters in the Bible. There are a few key ideas I want to establish by looking at these creation passages:

* Man and woman are equal in dignity and value but different in their roles.

### The complementary nature of man and woman.

### The imperative nature of leaving a family of origin and cleaving as “one flesh”.

Let’s start with **Gen 1:26-28**. **[Read the text.]** Three ideas are important for our discussion of marriage…

1. **Image-bearers:** To be an image-bearer means we are reflecting the image or likeness of another. In this case, man and woman reflect the character of God. Note that *both* man and woman are made in God’s image. “man” in vs. 26 and 27a is really the more generic all-encompassing term for “mankind” (*adam*); and it is spelled out in vs. 27c “male and female he created them.” One very important implication of both man and woman being image-bears is the fact that they are *both equal in dignity and value in the eyes of God*. Right here, in the first chapter of the Bible, it is important to equal dignity and value of man and woman before we get to the difference in roles later on.
2. **Dominion:** One part of being an image-bearer involves serving as God’s representatives in the garden of Eden. We see this in the text twice (vs. 26, 27) as mankind is labeled as image-bearer and then shortly afterwards is called on to “rule” (vs. 27, 28). The principle here is one of stewardship: God is the owner and creator of creation; and man and woman are appointed as his divine caretakers. To be God’s representatives means to give expression to God’s Lordship in the garden and in all of life. Yet, as we will see later, man carries the ultimate responsibility as the head of family.
3. **Procreation:** One way in which man and woman can “rule” and subdue the earth is to have children. “Be fruitful and increase in number” (vs. 28). We rule the earth by filling the entire planet with worshippers, i.e. image-bearers who reflect back to God his own glory.

# Let’s continue in Gen 2:15-25. [Read the Text.] One thing we are going to see is that the marital relationship has a particular structure to it.

* What’s the relationship between Gen 1 & 2? Gen 2 is a more details account of Gen 1. It’s like a movie flashback that explains things in greater detail.
* Gen 2:15 - Adam is entrusted with a task and the authority to carry out the task.
	+ Before the woman is on the scene, God puts man in the garden “to work it and take care of it.” This was more than doing minimal work and going home. As God’s representative, Adam was called to make the garden *flourish and grow* (hence, the words: “take care of it”).
* Gen 2:18 - “Not good for man to be *alone.* I will make a *helper suitable* for him.” What does “alone” mean? Two possible ideas: (1) Companionship; (2) Complementarity.
	+ We read our modern understanding of loneliness into the term “alone,” and deem Eve’s purpose to be providing fellowship. While she certainly does provide fellowship, there is more to it than just that…..
	+ God saw that man was unable to fulfill the task on his own, and he needed a partner who was *complementary* to him; someone who would balance his weaknesses and strengthen his strengths. We come to understand this complementarity further by the term used for woman in the second half of the verse—“helper suitable.”
	+ What does “suitable helper” actually mean? “Helper” suggests that she is to *assist or aid* the man in the task of fulfilling dominion.
	+ “Suitable” (ESV – “fit for him”) means she is complementary to the man in a way that the rest of creation was not suitable; Cf. What is the point of the story in Gen 2:19-20? See esp vs. 20 (“But for Adam no suitable helper was found.”). In naming the animals man comes to see that there is no suitable partner for him in all of creation.
	+ What does “helper suitable” *not* mean?
		- Being a suitable helper does not mean the wife is a slave to the husband (Prov 31);
		- It does not mean the wife never has an opinion, never gives advice (Prov 31:26: Acts 18:26: Judges 13:21-23);
		- It does not mean the wife becomes a wallflower who folds up and allows her abilities to lie dormant (Prov 31);
		- it does not mean the wife is inferior to the husband (Gen 1:26-27);
		- she is a partner; a team-mate; a co-laborer in the garden.
	+ In the context of this passage, what is the wife being called on to help with? The wife is called upon to come alongside of him and help him with the grand task of being God’s representatives in the garden. Marriage is not just about specific big, decisions, but isan entire *orientation* of the wife’s life. The wife is engaged *in every area of life* with the husband,helping him to be faithful to the massive calling on his life.
	+ While the man was oriented to the task of dominion (Gen 2:15), the terminology “suitable helper” suggests that she is oriented first to the man; not the task. That sets up a priority in her relationships: first her husband; then the garden. NT authors, as they interpret the creation texts, affirm this orientation of woman to man: cf. 1 Cor 11:8-9.

Implication 1: In Gen 2, we see the first indicators of God’s desire to given men the authority to lead in marriage. The task (Gen 2:15) is assigned to man and the prohibitions are explained to man (Gen 2:16-17) *before* woman was on the scene. Naming is a sign of authority, so man is given the responsibility of naming the animals (Gen 2: 19-20) and the woman (Gen 2:23).

Implication 2: Does the Bible say that a woman must be oriented to her husband and not ever work outside of the home? Not at all. There is nothing that precludes woman from working (Proverbs 31:16), but she must always make her husband, kids, and home first priority.

Implication3**:** A wife serves in the role as a helpmate, she is choosing to put herself under the leadership of a fallen man, with all of his strengths and weakness. Because she is a helpmate that does not ever give the husband an excuse to oppress his wife or do any type of evil against her. Verbal or physical abuse, or physical intimidation, or anything in this vain is wrong. And as elders, we condemn this type of behavior.

Implication4**:** Although the husband is called to lead that should not preclude him from serving his wife (at home, with kids, etc.). He is primarily called to lead, but this is a servant leadership. Cf. Eph 5 – Christ given up his entire life for his bride and husband called to model Christ.

Implication5: The marital relationship has a structure to it—not a hierarchy, so much as complimentary roles in which authority is exercised and help is both needed and freely given. Word picture: Not a 5 star general standing one level higher than a four star general, but a husband holding his wife’s hands and leading her forward. You might think that the label ‘helpmate; is a demeaning statement to the woman, and yet it says more about the husband’s need to be helped and wife’s extraordinary giftedness to provide that help.

Implication6: The husband’s leading and the wife’s helping is ***the shape*** of the marriage relationship and ***not just one aspect*** of it. If you as a husband are called to lead your wife, and you as a wife are oriented towards your husband, then this structure and orientation is going to affect every aspect of your married life. It is not just going to effect important decisions, but it will pervade all areas of your life—finances, parenting, sexuality, communication, etc.

Implication7: The shape of the relationships is not some idea that the pastor came up with. This is God’s design. “*I* will make helper suitable” (2:18). Who’s saying this? God. So don’t argue with me, argue with the text.

* Gen 2:21-23. God puts Adam to sleep and from his rib makes Eve. Man, with great excitement, see woman for the first time, and names her.
	+ “Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” – This language used elsewhere connotes blood relatives (Gen 29:14). In the OT, this is the language of a biological relationship.
	+ Blood relatives are the closest of all human relationships. This phrase (and the story of Eve’s creation) makes the point that the marriage between man and woman creates the closest of all human relationships.
	+ [What’s the point in the ceremony when you cross the line between singleness and marriage? Right after the pastor declares, “now Husband and wife.”]
	+ New loyalties and obligations are established by the union. As a single person, you were oriented toward your family of origin. But in marriage, *a new primary allegiance is created because a new family unit has been established.* This new union is so intimate that the only appropriate language to describe it is the language of biological relationship!
* Gen 2:24 - “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united [hold fast] to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”
	+ This is the famous “leaving and cleaving” verse.
	+ **Leaving:** None of us naturally construct a new family. Why is that? The cliché “blood is thicker than water” conveys this idea—we’ve spent a lifetime constructing loyalties with our family and making “flesh and blood” priority. (To demonstrate the cliché - story of mediating with families who fight with each other but bind together when someone comes against them.) It is not easy to leave our family ties behind. So, God essentially commands us to leave our family of origin. While there was no such thing as in-laws yet in Adam and Eve’s day, Moses saw the problem of leaving our natural family and was inspired to say something about it.
* **Be united/Hold fast/Cleave:** This describes the nature of the bond. In Gen 2:24, the NIV uses the term “be united”; other translations say “hold fast” or “cleave.” I like the terms “hold fast” or “cleave” because they give a picture of holding on and not letting go. This is meant to be a picture of permanence and fidelity of marriage. This is not a temporary bond in God’s eyes, but one that is meant to last. The term “hold fast” is used elsewhere (Deut 10:20) for practicing covenant faithfulness, i.e., keeping the promises that we have made.
* **One Flesh:** What does “one flesh” mean? In Gen 2:24, we read that man and woman become one flesh. Simply put, “one flesh” refers to two becoming one (Mark 10:9). It’s a statement of unity. Union, or oneness, or unity are all operative words here.

Implication1: “Leaving” involves putting your spouse ahead of all other allegiances (apart from God)—career, family, friends, hobbies, etc. First comes God, then comes your spouse, then comes everything else. In marriage, your spouse now has greater priority than your family of origin. You are shifting allegiances so that your family of origin becomes secondary to your new spouse. This separation can be hard for both parent and child, especially parents who are controlling and demanding OR a child who has a good relationship with one or both parents OR a person is emotionally, spiritually, or financially still dependent on his or her parents.

Implication 2: A part of the leaving process is to carefully examine your relationship with your parents to make sure you’re letting go of things that will hinder your marital relationship. Examples: Do parents still support you financially? Or, is there a close relationship with a parent (or both parents) that needs to change. The level of emotional intimacy with your parents cannot stay the same after you are married. If you are not careful, special relationships can end up being a threat to your spouse.

Implication3: The idea of one flesh also suggests that in marriage, there is re-orientation of priorities to make the spouse primary. After you get married, your posture towards the rest of life needs to change. Marriage is not just one area of life to be balanced with others. Marriage is the context in which you live all of life. You approach work, church, friendships, family, etc. as a married man and woman. Take career as one example: It is not the same to say that you approach marriage as a lawyer, teacher, architect, or whatever you do. Married people are not to balance career with marriage, but to *approach career as a married person*.

Implication4: Marriage is a common grace institution. The fact that marriage is established in creation shows us that marriage is good for all men and women, not just Christians.

Implication5: Monogamy. God’s parameters for marriage are one man and one woman (Gen 2:24) holding fast to one another. Polygamy and adultery are in the Bible, but they are the result of man’s sin, not God’s ideal. Note that God did not create several Eves for Adam. He created just *one* Eve because she was a perfect fit for him.

Implication6: Fidelity. In Fallen world, divorce does happen, but God’s intent is that a man and woman stay together. In a fast paced culture like D.C., we can make commitments and break them rather quickly. Marriage is a qualitatively different type of commitment—it’s a permanent obligation. For the single adult that makes the leap into marriage scary because of its permanent nature. For the married adult, it should be comforting because it means your spouse is not going anywhere. So no matter how hard things can get in marriage, your goal is straight-forward: Work it out!

Impication7: God’s ideal parameters for marriage are established in creation ***before*** the entrance of sin into the world. That has significant implications because it means there are “principles” and “standards” for marriage which God established in the created order, long before sin ever entered into the picture. What are these ideal parameters for marriage that God establishes in creation? Image-bearers who are equal in dignity and value; differences in roles; leaving family of origin; holding fast/cleaving/becoming “one flesh”; monogamy & fidelity.

Impication8: God is at the center of your marriage. If we see marriage biblically, we see God working throughout this story. God put man in the garden, gave him a suitable helper. God made woman and brought her to man and God made them one flesh. If you are struggling in your marriage, don’t just “duke it out,” turn to God to trust him. If you are doing well, don’t just pat each other on the back , turn to God and give him praise.

[PAUSE FOR QUESTIONS] [Point out the *Response to this Lesson* and give away a book!]

Your Response to this Lesson:

1. If you’ve never studied these passages, take time to do that in order to grasp a firmer understanding of what God did in creation.
2. What is your “garden” in which you must exert dominion? How are you doing in helping it to flourish and grow? Are you being a good steward of the small plot of land God has given you charge over?
3. If you married and still struggling with “leaving and cleaving,” talk to someone about it. Maybe you are not prioritizing your spouse over other things? Find a friend or a pastor who can help think through the problem.
4. Husbands: Take some time this week to encourage your wife about how she is a wonderful helpmate. Write a note; tell her in person. That type of regular encouragement can go a long way in the marriage. Help her to understand how she is especially suited to be a complement to you.
5. Wives: What parts of being a helpmate do you dislike? Starting praying to God that he will help you heart attitudes towards these things.
6. Are there things that are getting in the way of you and your spouse becoming “one flesh?” What stops you from having unity in your marriage? What can you do to get rid of these obstacles to unity?