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The Drama of Marriage — The Challenge

Ephesians 5:22-33

PowerPoint Presentation: None

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SermonAudio blurb:

I. Introduction.

- A. Marriage, it is what brings us together.
- B. Review:
 - 1. The roles and responsibilities described and commanded in 5:22-33 are vitally connected to vs 21, which is vitally connected to vs 18.
 - 2. Because of the incredible change occurring in our nation at this time it is necessary to establish a theology of marriage and parenting and even work.
 - 3. Before we can understand marriage we need to understand certain truths about both the male and female so we examined Genesis 1:26-31.
 - a. First, it was a particular act, an unique work of creation that separates utterly mankind from the animal kingdom.
 - b. Second, when we consider man and woman we need to understand that they are both image bearers of God.
 - c. Third, because both the male and female are uniquely created by God and they both are image-bearers, they are, therefore, equal.
- C. What is the greatest problem with marriages today?
 - 1. Not outside the church but in the church, Christian marriages.
 - 2. Is it divorce?
 - 3. Adultery?
 - 4. Finances?
 - 5. Communication?
 - 6. Time issues/busyness?
 - 7. Conflict resolution?

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- D. I would argue that at the core of most marriage problems with Christians is that it is a godless marriage.
1. Another way to say it is that to often the marriage, though between Christians, is an ungodly marriage.
 - a. By this I mean that it has something other than God and His Word at the center of it.
 - b. Little thought is given as to whether the actions, words, and environment is driven by a love for God, out of thanksgiving for the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - c. Is your marriage a godless marriage in reality?
 - (1) How can I instruct you to love your wife as Christ loved the church if this is not your desire?
 - (2) How will I ever convince you that to submit and to respect your husband honors God in an incredible manner if only the opinions of this age really matter to you?
 - (3) How do I encourage single people to diligently seek marriage, who desire to stay single; not so that they can whole-heartedly serve God, but because they look at marriage as not worth it because they see so many godless marriages around them?
 - (4) How do we prepare the next generation to prize and pursue a Christian marriage if they grow up in a home of a godless one?
 - (5) How do we model the glory of the gospel to our friends, neighbors and co-workers if the marriage we model is godless?
 2. What do I mean by “godless” marriage?
 - a. Quoting Enoch, Jude writes this of Jesus Christ, “Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.” (Jude 1:14-15)

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- b. Paul says this in one of my oft quoted passages, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” (Romans 1:18)
 - c. There are in these passages references of ungodly deeds and unrighteous deeds. There are sinners who are not just sinners but “ungodly sinners.” What is meant by “ungodly?”
 - d. At its basic meaning is irreverence or irreligious. It is a person who simply doesn’t consider God in the equation for whatever they are or do.
 - (1) So you can be a really moral, nice, and respectable person who is fun to be around and trustworthy. The kind of person who could watch over someone’s small children or be trusted to do an important job.
 - (2) But because these things are done without a consideration of God, nor is there a desire to worship God you are simply an ungodly person.
3. I think a lot of marriages with Christians become godless without the couple realizing it.
- a. Busyness and spiritual laziness slowly move you from keeping God and His glory at the forefront of what you do.
 - b. The constant barrage of social media begins to gradually change your perceptions and values.
 - c. And before long you have a marriage that is centered on many things, but not on God.
 - d. So you have a marriage that still is filled with many things, even good things. You talk about your job, about upcoming vacation plans and such. You talk about your relationship with one another.
 - e. But what is markedly lacking is to have God simply be at the center and as the foundation of your marriage.
4. Side note:
- a. For those with unbelieving spouses.

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- (1) The temptation is to give up or to blame the fact that your spouse is the cause of not having God at the center. But this is not true and you must battle this.
 - (2) For the believing husband it means you strive to model that love of Christ for his church as much as possible. It means you seek to understand her, nourish her and care for her.
 - (3) For the believing wife it means that you live with your husband not in fear nor bitterness but with a gentle spirit that models a hope that is not of this age. To delight in the good gifts of the Lord in the here and now and to be your husband's companion.
- b. To the single:
- (1) Do not hear these words and think that if you marry that things will not be different.
 - (2) If you are not godly now you likely will not be godly when married. So examine your life. Is it established upon the preeminence of Christ?
 - (3) As you look for a potential spouse, consider their lives and words. Are they a man or woman who longs to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord?
- E. I want to consider four ways a marriage, even one with both spouses who are believers, can be a godless marriage.

II. Causes of A Godless Marriage.

A. Spiritual immaturity.

1. 1 Corinthians 3:1-3.
2. Hebrews 5:12.
3. Romans 13:13.
4. Ephesians 4:14.

B. Unbelief and selfishness.

1. Hebrews 3:12-14.
 - a. Do you take care to protect yourself and your spouse from this? Notice how we are to encourage one another in this. So natural for that to start in your marriage and family.

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- b. The almost Christian.
 - (1) For some here the problem is that you are an almost Christian. That is, you would say you are a Christian.
 - (2) But the consistent choices you make indicate that you have no love for God, His people nor His word.
 - (3) I can only say this to you. If you consistently reject and ignore God and choose a life of practical unbelief in your marriage then you should have no confidence that you are actually a Christian.

- c. The occasional Christian.
 - (1) At times you act ungodly in your marriage out of simple ignorance. We just forget to consider God and His glory in what we do or say. It is part of being human.
 - (2) But more often, if we are honest we choose to put the glory of God aside for the moment so that we can actively be and do something else.
 - (3) In a sense we are saying, “I know what is right to do here, but I am tired or sick of it all so I am going to do something else.”
 - (4) Often this is because we are slaves to our emotions rather than the unchanging Word of God. So one day we are in great emotional conviction over something and determine to change for God’s glory. But the next day as we begin that process of repentance our emotions are that of fear, anxiety, or shame. So now we let those emotions corner us and control us.

- d. Examples of forgetting God in your marriage as the husband:
 - (1) I know I am to sacrifice for my wife, like Christ sacrificed his life for the church, but I choose not to do so. Rather than serve her, I’d rather fulfill my own comfort and desires
 - (2) Instead of engaging with my wife’s heart I seek to keep things safe and superficial.
 - (3) Even though I know I am wrong and have sinned instead of confessing it to her I give into my pride and refuse.

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- e. Examples of forgetting God in your marriage as the wife:
 - (1) I don't think my husband is capable of leading so I choose to take that lead rather than helping him do so.
 - (2) I let myself become frustrated and out of that I react in anger or meanness.
 - (3) Instead of trusting God and appealing to my husband I choose to nag him, though I seldom will call it that.
- 2. All of this is simply the result of not really trusting God and God's way for marriage.
 - a. For some of you the things I have said and will say will be new. No one taught you these things and they were not really modeled for you by your parents.
 - b. But for others there is nothing new that I have said. You know them but because you do not trust that God is true and faithful in what He tells us you instead choose a different way. Your way. The world's way.
 - c. You can usually know if you are the starting point rather than trusting in God if your reasoning or examples start with you or your spouse.
 - (1) If she would just
 - (2) I was really hurt by . . .
 - (3) He doesn't . . .
 - d. It is amazing what happens when you begin to examine how to approach your situation by asking what God calls you to be and do and then asking yourself if you trust His wisdom and goodness.
- C. Forgetting God's glory.
 - 1. This is tightly connected to the prior point regarding unbelief — not trusting God and His Word.
 - 2. The difference here is that of focus and attention rather than trust. Where is the focus in your marriage?
 - 3. It is easy and common to get so caught up in day-to-day situations and problems that gradually God's glory is no longer at the forefront. But the ultimate goal for your marriage is just the opposite.

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- a. The reality is that this is a real battle to remember. It is a reason why there should be consistent re-evaluation by each spouse as to how they are participating in this goal.
- b. Never forget Hebrews 3 where it reminds us of the deceitfulness of sin and how it slowly hardens the heart toward God and holiness.
- c. Realize the importance of coming to church and gathering to hear the Word preached.
- d. Remember the value of Christian fellowship and how our CG are designed to do that. And don't let the fact that no CG is perfect keep you from it. Rather, consider how you can help that group grow and mature.
- e. Remember Ephesians 4 where we are reminded that in spiritual immaturity causes us to be tossed here and there. Settle in your hearts where it is that you will
- f. Common statements by spouse seeking counsel that reveal an improper focus.
 - (1) I just want her to be happy.
 - (2) I will do whatever it takes to keep him or her.
 - (3) I don't know if I can trust her ever again.
 - (4) How can I ever respect a man like that!
- g. My constant question back is this. What do you want to achieve here? Is it to fix your marriage so that you both can be happy or is it to honor God in your marriage regardless if it brings you happiness?
 - (1) Only when this clicks in each mind does any lasting change occur.
 - (2) It is such a simple point and yet it is utterly life-changing when it settles into your soul. It completely changes how you approach each situation in the home.
 - (3) Either Ephesians 5:21-33 is true and marriage is a living picture of Christ and His Church or it is not. And if it is then we are all playing that out in some way.
 - (4) Either God meant it when Paul wrote, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God"

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(1 Corinthians 10:31) or He didn't. And if we glorify God in eating, how much more can we bring glory to Him in our marriage, our children and our labors?

4. This same issue is true for any who is single.
 - a. How often I have heard one say that they don't want to marry because of all the hassle. Or the other who is fixated on finding a mate to marry.
 - b. But instead what they first should do is establish a life that is God-honoring right where they are now. Establishing sound, Christ-centered decisions now. Spending money and leisure wisely now.
 - c. As they do this let them turn to God in prayer. Ask for wisdom in the pursuit or acceptance of a possible suitor. Ask that He might give them opportunities if it is His will and that they would be faithful to grab those opportunities.

D. A cubby-hole existence.

1. This is really just a hold-all point to try to capture the last thoughts that need to be expressed.
 - a. You can look at your life and your marriage as a whole, where everything is integrated and connected; or you can see it as a series of cubby holes.
 - b. We have money in a cubby hole. We are good with the money. We know how money works in this age. We are frugal and save. But we never ask where God fits into our money and how our money is to be used in our marriage.
 - c. We have children. We love those little guys so much. We have dreams and aspirations. We protect them and feed them. We set up accounts early on to save for their future education. We have them in soccer camp and volleyball camp. But we never really ask how any of them are born from a biblical, God-centered world view.
 - d. Careers. We work hard and we seek to make ourselves promotable. We work long hours so that we can get good things for the family and have great vacations. But we fail to ask what work is for and how best to honor God in the myriad of challenges that the workplace brings our way.

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- e. Our home life is in a cubby hole of its own. Don't be messing with my home time. It is holy and it is set aside for me and my own. But do we know what the home is for in light of the gospel and the needs of the Body of Christ?
2. My point is simple. It is easy for us to have a God-centered view on some things in the home and yet have other aspects that are completely cut off from God. They are essentially secular in their purpose and direction.
3. James tells us that we should be considering always how to transform our secular cubby-holes into Word informed activities and realities. "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves." (James 1:22)

III. Conclusion.

- A. "To whom then will you liken Me That I would be his equal?" says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high And see who has created these stars, The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power, Not one of them is missing. (Isaiah 40:25-26)
 1. This is our God and it will do all of us much good to remind ourselves, our spouses and children, and our brothers and sisters of this fact.
 2. A godless marriage can be fun. It can last a life time. But it cannot honor the Lord which is to be our heart cry.
- B. Four suggestions to help bring God into your marriage:
 1. Ask this question, "What about God?"
 - a. How have you considered Him and His glory?
 - b. How does His Word intersect with this situation?
 2. Begin to ask you and your spouse what trusting God would look like in various ways in your marriage.
 - a. Again this is going to be Word-informed.
 - b. To trust God in your marriage to your wife means that you will love her sacrificially even when she makes it incredibly hard for you to do so.
 - c. It may mean times of weeping in prayer but in the power of the Holy Spirit you will find the strength to continue.
 3. Be gospel-centered in your marriage.

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- a. You are both sinners saved by grace. Therefore, let grace reign in your decisions, concerns and problem-solving.
 - b. If you are with an unbeliever, remember that you once were far away from God and by His grace you were brought near. How, then, can you bring your spouse near you when possible?
 - c. Your love for one another cannot be what holds you together. Nor can it be your vows. That is a godless marriage. What binds you together must be first the gospel and all that it entails.
 - (1) A gospel life forgives quickly.
 - (2) A gospel life love deeply.
 - (3) A gospel life shows mercy and help.
 - (4) A gospel life bears the others burdens.
 - (5) A gospel life reminds the other of grace.
4. Establish, with no excuses, the means for the grace of God to flow in your marriage.
- a. Grace doesn't just happen. God has ordained ways in which we grow in His grace.
 - b. Be a couple that prays. Pray for each other and remember to lift up your marriage constantly in prayer. God gives us grace in our time of need.
 - c. Be in church.
 - (1) So silly sounding yet it is so important. We are not designed to be apart from our true family.
 - (2) If you are married to an unbeliever, do not let that stop you. Make this a non-negotiable.
 - (3) Learn to be on time, meaning 15-20 minutes early so you can talk to others and inquire as to their well being.
 - (4) Start this right away and never, ever break from it.
 - d. Join a church.
 - (1) Put yourself under the care and oversight of godly leaders who can then give watch over your souls.
 - (2) Make yourself mutually accountable to the others members.

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- e. Willfully pursue relationships with others in the church.
 - (1) Don't sit and wait for them. Make them by opening your home and freeing up your time.
 - (2) Sundays should be a time to stop and spend time with others.
 - (3) How many have had people at your home from this church in the last month?
 - (4) Men, find another who you can meet with once a month just to pray for each other and read the bible to one another. Women, do the same.
- f. Be people who read your bible. Know it, learn it. Attend the bible studies we offer. It is the means by which God has ordained you shall grow.