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God's Design for "Happily Ever After."

10/14/2012

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Genesis 2:24

"And they lived happily ever after." That is the ending of every fairy tale story and every Disney cartoon. And that is what every couple hopes for as they come to be wed.

Unfortunately, the throngs of unhappy couples and divorcees out there will tell you that "happily ever after" is just a fairy tale.

Call me a "Romantic" if you will, but I believe in "happily ever after." I believe that couples who marry are to experience a little slice of heaven in their relationship.

But I also believe that "happily ever after" will only come when a man and woman rightly understand how their marriage is supposed to be ordered.

After the service last week I got to talking with Mike and Raylene Hlavaty. Raylene mentioned that it was good to talk about the goal we are supposed to have in marriage. She said she believes that a lot of marriages struggle because they don't know what they are supposed to be aiming for.

I could not have said it better myself. That's exactly right. I would posit that most marriages do not have "happily ever after" because they do not know what God intends in marriage. They don't know what they are supposed to be doing. The marriages end or plod along because they fail to understand what God says here in this verse.

We have here God's plan for happy marriages. And there could be no greater Christian teaching on marriage. You may remember that Jesus referred to this passage in his life and ministry. When questioned about marriage, Jesus basically said, "Just go back to the original design." The Apostle Paul also referred to it at least twice in his writings.

In every way our Lord affirmed that God's plan for marriage is to be built on this blueprint.

As we come to our passage today I want us to focus our attention on the three principles God has laid down here regarding how a marriage is supposed to work.

And the first thing we should see is that every marriage must begin with a divorce!

I. It involves leaving father and mother

Our passage says that a "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother."

This is telling us that before a marriage occurs there is to be a separation that occurs. If we want our marriage to function properly, then God says that many of those ties we have to our homes and to our parents must be severed.

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One person put it this way, "The bond of marriage must be so strong that it actually severs one of the strongest relationships on the planet."^[1]

Now, on the face of this, we understand that leaving your father and mother means that a physical separation must occur. And I want to emphasize this: Kids, when you get married, you need to move out. Your parent's home is not your home anymore.

But there is more to it than that. Leaving your father and mother is not limited to finding a new address. It is possible to live on the other side of the planet and still be tied to your home.

We have to understand that God intends our relationship with our parents to change. It is obvious that it is never going to be broken completely. But it ought to be broken effectively. The parent child relationship has to undergo a metamorphosis.

As Wayne Mack says, leaving your father and mother means that you must no longer be slavishly dependent upon your parents for affection, approval, assistance or advice.^[2] As a child you draw those things from your parents. As a single person, your parents may still be the main source of support and counsel. And we understand that during such times, that is fine. That was the way God intended it.

But when a couple comes to be married, these needs and attachments to be reallocated. Your primary source of love, counsel, and support must now be found in your spouse.

You will relate to your parents differently. And parents, you should take note this too. Once your children marry, you cannot continue relating to them in the same way. They will be your son or daughter still, but the way you relate to them is to change.

Think about it this way. All growing up little Suzzie was daddy's little girl. He cared for her, consoled her, and counseled her from the time she was in diapers. The moment he walks her down the aisle and gives her away, that relationship must change. When in the wedding service he puts her hand in her soon to be husband's, that is a symbol of transference. He's saying, I'm committing my duties as her daddy to you.

That's what God intends. There is supposed to be a whole new family unit formed. She now has a new head of home whom she is to look to for these things. If daddy continues to be her source of consolation, then there will be problems. God did not intend that. Her new husband is most likely going to become embittered and resent her and her father. Holidays are going to be a little tense. And he's going to feel that way because she is essentially saying, "I don't trust him. I don't recognize him as the head of my home."

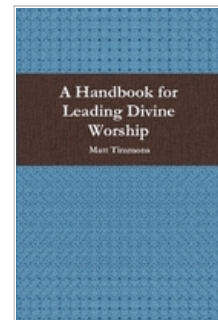
The same holds true on the other end. If a man is giving more credence to his mother's wishes than to his wife's, then there are going to be a number of problems that arise. If he's always at mom's beck and call, and not giving his wife's needs and desires precedence, then his wife will become embittered. She is going to feel alienated.

We must understand that God did not design the parent child relationship to last forever. God intends those ties to the home to change. And if we want "happily ever after," then we must make sure that there is a definite break in those ties.

And as those ties are broken, we are to recognize that new ties are created. God's design is not just that a man would leave his father and mother, but He intends a man to cleave to his new



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bride.

II. It involves cleaving to your wife

The passage says that the man will hold fast to his wife."

The word that is used here is used throughout the Old Testament. One instance is in the book of Job. In the midst of the afflictions that come on him Job he says that his flesh clings to his bones. You get the picture of a man who is wasting away. You've probably seen pictures of people who have lost a lot of muscle mass. Their skin looks like it is wrapped tightly around their bones.

The word is also used in Psalm 22 in reference to the agonies Christ experienced on the cross. One of the pains that Jesus experience was thirst. And Psalm 22 says, "My tongue clings to the roof of my mouth." It's the idea that it is so dry that it simply can't move. It is frozen there.

So the word that the Lord uses here has the idea of constant attachment. You might say that it is the Old Testament word for superglue.

And this is how we are to view our marriage. Contrary to popular opinion, marriages are not to end in divorce. They are not to be based on animal attraction or sentimental feelings that can wear out with time. Marriage is supposed to be an irrevocable covenant. In it you are supposed to pledge your constant faith and abiding love.

Unlike the parent child relationship, this is supposed to be a permanent relationship. According to Scripture, you are to be bonded to this person until death do you part. And, really, this person is to be the centerpiece of your life. You cleave to them in that you make it your whole life's aim to serve him or her until the very last.

That's not the way that it is usually viewed today. The modern mindset is typically, "I will stick with you until someone better comes along." Or, "You will be mine until I can't stand you anymore."

But marriage, as the Bible defines it, says, "I am going to cling to you with an unwavering devotion. No matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, nothing is going to deter me from being your husband (or wife)."

This is why I love the traditional wedding ceremony. The words that are recited in the old school wedding nail it. You promise to have and to hold her for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, as long as you both shall live. And as you slip that ring on her finger you say, "This ring is a token and pledge of my abiding love and constant faithfulness."

Those words express what is communicated here. Those words express what it means to cleave to your wife.

Again, I think Wayne Mack nails it in his book Strengthening Marriage. He says,

"When two people get married they promise that they will be faithful to each other regardless of what happens. The wife promises that she will be faithful even if her husband is afflicted with bulges, baldness, and bi-focals, even if he loses his health, wealth, and charm, and even if someone more exciting comes along.

"The husband promises to be faithful even if the wife loses her beauty and appeal, even if she is not as neat and tidy or as submissive as he would like, even if she does not satisfy his

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sexual desires completely, even if she spends money foolishly or is a terrible cook."

That is well put because it gets at the real understanding of what it means to cleave. There is the idea of permanent devotion to your spouse.

Again, I recognize that this is not the norm. People who marry today cleave to many things—their spouse not being one of them. They cleave to their parents, they cleave to their friends, they cleave to their children, they cleave to themselves and their own desires or pursuits.

This is why so many marriages end the way they do or are characterized by anger or frustration.

We must understand that the word of God says differently. God's intention is that we forsake all others and cleave to our spouse.

There is one other item that we must mention. You'll notice that the verse culminates in the very last part where it says, "And the two shall become one flesh." This tells us that marriage involves more than your leaving your father and mother and cleaving to your wife. Marriage involves a complete union of life.

III. It involves a complete union of life

Again it says, "The two shall become one flesh." And we are to understand that a fusion is supposed to occur.

At the most basic level this has to do with the physical side of the relationship. In 1 Corinthians Paul talks about becoming one with a prostitute.

And we should note how important the sexual union is between a man and a woman. The television will tell you that it's "just sex." But that is a great lie. Biblically speaking, it is (among other things) a form of uniting. It is giving yourself to someone and yielding yourself to that person in the context of the bedroom. The intimacy you experience there reaches a depth that cannot be fully explained with words. And that is why it is so essential to a marriage.

And this is why we believe that one should abstain from sexual relationships until marriage. I recognize that Hollywood glorifies sexual prowess and promiscuity is favored all around us. But this is why you young people ought to strive for purity. Sexual intercourse is far more than a physical act. It is more than merely a carnal pleasure. It is one of God's means of uniting two people.

That's why it must be reserved and only met in the context of the "leaving and cleaving." God meant it explicitly for the purpose of assisting that marriage union. And when it is rightly expressed, the relationship takes on a beauty and depth that cannot be fully articulated.

But, as I say, the physical element is only part of what is meant here. This oneness that is spoken of here goes beyond the sexual dimension. The oneness is a merging of the persons in every area of life.

This is something that is often misunderstood today. A lot of it has to do with the fact that so many people today live together prior to marriage.

Statistics tell us that 70% of couples today live together before marriage. This isn't good. That's because it is an attempt at oneness without the merging of life. The two attempt to remain two and keep a great deal of independence. People usually live together because there

is no real commitment to each other. So there is a sharing of sorts, but at the same time there is a great deal of reservation—a holding back of some form or other (most likely, more than one form or other!).

But that's not the way it is supposed to be. God designed the two to become one.

In marriage, there is to be a union of all life. It is not just a sharing of the bed; it is a merging of every dimension of your life. It is a merging of your goals and life pursuits. You come to share your thoughts and ideas.

Even your finances ought to merge. I do not recommend that couples have his and her checkbooks or "his and her money." There should be a fusion that occurs in that all that you do economically becomes one." Money is one of the main issues in a marriage. That's because it is so very much intertwined with your lives, wishes, and intents. If you have his and her money (his and her bank accounts) that is going to be symptomatic of a great deal else that has not coalesced in your marriage.

Conclusion:

I recognize that the depths of this have not been touched on. The reaches of these truths is something that ought to encourage further reflection and study. I simply hope that what has been said so far has provided you with a bit of catalyst for that.

I will close by saying this: If you understand what is said here, you understand why marriage is used so often in Scripture regarding our relationship to the Lord. And you see here something of a fulfillment of it in Christ's relationship to his bride.

In the fullness of time, Jesus left his heavenly home that he might be united to his bride. Of course, we know that as God He could never be completely separated from the Father. But as to his humanity, there is a sense that he was. And in his life and death, we see him cleaving to his bride. Through the thickest darkness and bleakest moments—even hell itself, he remained true to her. And as we are brought to faith in Christ we are united to him. We experience a union whereby all our old cares are set aside in order to yield the whole of our life to him.

We recognize that the principles here found in Adam and Eve establish the norms for Christian marriage. But we also recognize that, though this match was made in heaven, prior to the fall, we have in our marriages the awesome opportunity to replicate something of the glorious gospel of our salvation. We have here the principles that reveal that which leads into heaven.

To be sure, what is laid down here points us to the ultimate "happily ever after story." And may that be what challenges us to commit ourselves to these principles in our own marriages.

[1] Larry Christenson, The Christian Family.

[2] Wayne Mack, Strengthening Your Marriage.

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Comments

Eric Wagner

10/14/2012 10:09

"Marriage is supposed to be an irrevocable covenant." --Yes. God sees all human activity as covenantal, as well as His relationship with us. Just like an irrevocable trust which guarantees support for an institution, marriage covenants are of the same nature. People may divorce or remarry, but God sees the original covenant as irrevocable, and chaos is the result of not living in terms of this reality. "For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" ([Romans 11:29](#))

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