

Moses on Marriage

By Daryl Wingerd



Moses, the biblical author of Genesis to Deuteronomy, contemplating God's creation of man and woman, wrote perhaps the single most important sentence about marriage found anywhere in the Bible:

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

From this single sentence, as we trace its course throughout the Bible, we learn three profound truths about marriage from three different interpreters of God's creation narrative: Moses, Jesus, and the Apostle Paul.

From Moses we learn that marriage is **Primary**. By "primary" I'm differentiating it from being "secondary." When we understand that Genesis 2 is an expanded view of what happened in between Genesis 1:27 and 1:28, we learn that marriage was not "plan B" for mankind or something God devised later in response to man's sin. It was instituted *pre-Fall*, part of God's original and perfect creative design for the world. In fact, the marriage of a man and a woman was the crowning feature of what God reviewed in Genesis 1:31 when "he saw all that he had made, and behold, it was very good."

Later, based on Genesis 2:24, Jesus teaches us that marriage is **Permanent**. In Mark chapter 10, Jesus was confronted by some religious leaders who were out "to test him." Their goal was to set his teaching against something Moses wrote about divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 — a statement these leaders had twisted and misused to suit their own selfish and sinful purposes.

They asked Jesus, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" Jesus, in response, acknowledged Deuteronomy 24:1-4, but then refuted their misguided application of what Moses wrote there by quoting what the same Moses wrote in Genesis 2:24:

Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. (Mark 10:2-9)

His answer to their question about divorce, in other words, amounted to an unequivocal "No, it is not lawful for a man to divorce his wife."

Based on Jesus' interpretation of what Moses wrote in Genesis 2:24, marriage is a permanent union created by God—a union that may not be torn apart by man for any reason.

Third, according to the Apostle Paul, Genesis 2:24 informs us that marriage is a **Picture**. It is God's way of foreshadowing in creation something beyond human marriage. In Ephesians 5:25-31, after exhorting a husband to love his wife "as Christ loved the church," to love her as he loves his own body, nourishing and cherishing her "just as Christ does the church," Paul quotes Genesis 2:24: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." He then immediately continues in verse 32, "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."

According to Paul, through the institution of marriage as recorded by Moses in Genesis, God was communicating to us in advance about the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Marriage is a God-inspired glimpse into the mystery of Christ redeeming and being joined to the church — his bride — in a permanent union. It displays God's plan to save his people through his Son — his incarnation (leaving his father in the glory of heaven), his death on the cross (the sacrificial demonstration of his love for his bride in order to redeem her from sin and win her love and faithfulness to him), and his resurrection and ascension into heaven where he now rules over all things, making ready for the final wedding ceremony and the glorious reception dinner the Bible calls "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9).

The next time you attend a wedding, the next time you contemplate the significance of your own marriage, I hope you will remember these three beautiful truths: Marriage is *primary* — God's original and perfect design for mankind; marriage is *permanent* — God's work of joining one man and one woman together in a lifelong union; and marriage is a *picture* — God's way of proclaiming in advance his redemptive purposes for mankind through his Son, Jesus Christ.