

INTRODUCTION

Today I'm going to talk about "God's Definition of Marriage." This is the most popular trending topic today since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that same-sex marriage is legal in all 50 states. However, I'm not just speaking today in reaction to this ruling. Most of you know I teach God's Word verse-by-verse. For over a year, we've been studying the Gospel According to Mark. After the series, "Heal our Land," I'm back in Mark and it just so happens that this passage addresses the topic of God's Definition of Marriage. God's timing is always impeccable.

America is divided over the idea of gay marriage. Jimmy Carter served one term as President in the 1970s. I confess I voted for him when I was a seminary student, because he claimed to be a born-again Christian. But he has some strange beliefs. In an interview with the Huffington Post last week he said: "I believe Jesus would approve gay marriage, but that's just my own personal belief. I think Jesus would encourage any love affair if it was honest and sincere and was not damaging to anyone else." (Interview with Huffington Post, July 7, 2015) Well, it's my personal belief that Jimmy Carter should have stuck to peanut farming! Jesus addressed the topic of marriage in Mark 10.

Mark 10:1-12. "Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them. Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?' 'What did Moses command you?' he replied. They said, 'Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.' 'It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,' Jesus replied. 'But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.' When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, 'Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.'"

From this point onward in Mark, Jesus' enemies are trying to confront Him and get Him to incriminate Himself by saying something that will cause the multitudes to leave Him. In this passage, they ask Jesus about marriage and divorce. They asked Him if a man could divorce his wife. Jesus refused to be drawn into their trap, so He answered their question with a question. "What did Moses write?" These Pharisees knew their Bibles, so they reported that in Deuteronomy 24 Moses had said a man must give a certificate of divorce to his wife before he sent her away. But Jesus didn't want to go back just to Moses. He chose to go back to the very beginning, to the very first marriage of Adam and Eve. Using this passage as our background, I want to make two observations about marriage.

I. GOD'S ORIGINAL DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE: One man and one woman united until death

God holds the patent on marriage because He invented it. His original design was and always will be one man and one woman for life. Let's notice what Jesus said again: "At the beginning of

creation God 'made them male and female.' For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." (Mark 10:6-9) There are at least two reasons why God originally designed marriage.

A. God designed marriage for companionship and intimacy

When God looked into the Garden of Eden and saw that Adam was all alone, He said, "It is not good for man to be alone. His life is incomplete. So I will create for him someone who will complete him." So God put Adam asleep and took a spare rib from him and turned it into a prime rib: A woman." I love the language in Genesis; it says God brought the woman to Adam, like the first Father giving away a bride. And Adam said, "Hot diggity dog!" Well, not exactly; he uttered a Hebrew interjection we're not sure how to translate. Maybe he said, "Whoa, man!" So she was called woman. God performed the first wedding to give Adam someone with whom he could share companionship and intimacy.

B. God designed marriage to populate the planet

One of God's first commands to Adam and Eve was, "Be fruitful, and multiply." (Genesis 1:28) God is good. He said, "I want you to make babies, and I'm going to give you a pleasurable way to do that." And the Bible says the man and the woman were both naked and felt no shame. Our personalities have a shame meter installed. We're born with it. Sex is one of the things that sets off the shame alarm. The only sex that doesn't activate the shame meter is sex between a husband and wife. Oh, anyone can disable the shame meter, and tell themselves that any sexual activity is okay.

Having children is a legitimate purpose of marriage. By having children we extend ourselves into future generations. God mentions this again when He is weighing in on divorce in the last book in the Old Testament. "She is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the Lord made them one?...And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth." "I hate divorce," says the Lord God of Israel. (Malachi 2:14-16)

Before we move on at this point, I want to celebrate marriage. There are many married couples here today who followed God's design and you have stayed married through the good times and the bad times. There are widows or widowers here today who stayed married to your mate until death separated you. So I want to honor you today. If you are a couple here today married for fifty years or more I want you to stand up. I also want any widow or widower who was married for more than fifty years before your mate died to stand as well. We want to celebrate your faithfulness! Now if you've been married or were married for sixty years or more keep standing. God bless you! These are the marriage champions and we thank God for you.

II. HUMANITY'S CORRUPTION OF GOD'S DESIGN

When you read the first few chapters of Genesis you see all kinds of evil and wickedness, and much of it had to do with the perversion of God's plan for one woman and one man. Just before

God destroyed the world with the flood the Bible says, "God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways." (Genesis 6:12) Let me mention three ways sinful humanity has corrupted God's perfect design for marriage.

A. Humanity has corrupted marriage through the practice of polygamy

When you read the Old Testament, it's obvious some of the men had multiple wives. King Solomon wrote, "He who finds a wife finds what is good." (Proverbs 18:22) Well, he had too much of a good thing because we read in 1 Kings 11:3 that Solomon had 700 royal wives and 300 concubines. Can you imagine having 1,000 wives? That meant Solomon also had 1,000 mothers-in-law!

But seriously, the Bible says Solomon's many wives turned his heart away from God.

Polygamy was never God's original intent for marriage. The first man to have more than one wife was Lamech. "He took two wives." (Genesis 4:19) God didn't give him two.

The only unique situation where God prescribed multiple wives was in the case of Levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25:5. In this case a widow could marry her husband's brother for protection and to continue her husband's bloodline. But polygamy was never commanded by God, it was a practice that reflected the sinfulness of the hearts of humanity. By the New Testament period, it is clear God's standard of one woman and one man had been restored because this was the specific requirement for pastors and deacons.

B. Humanity has corrupted marriage through the practice of no-fault divorce

I think the term "no-fault divorce" is the classic oxymoron. An oxymoron occurs when words cancel each other out, like jumbo shrimp, or cruel joke, or affordable health care; Microsoft Works, or humble Texan. Divorce is always someone's fault; it's usually both partners' fault. But there's no such thing as a no-fault divorce.

When the Pharisees asked Jesus about divorce He said the reason Moses gave that rule was because of hardness or sinfulness of the human heart. Then He went back to God's bottom line design for marriage. "What God has joined together, let no man separate. Period." Divorce is a corruption of God's perfect plan. In the parallel passage in Matthew 19:9 Jesus adds that if a man divorces his wife for any reason other than sexual immorality, remarriage constitutes adultery. Marriage is a spiritual union that can only be broken by a physical cause, death or sexual immorality. The other cause for divorce is found in 1 Corinthians 7:15 where Paul says if a Believer is married to an unbeliever and that unbelieving spouse leaves, the Christian is not bound in such circumstances.

Dr. Michael Brown is considered a scholar and a prolific author. He has written: "No-fault divorce in the heterosexual church has done more to destroy marriage than all gay activists combined."

No-fault divorce has sabotaged God's perfect design for marriage. Up until the 1970s it was rather difficult to get a divorce in the United States. A party had to show "cause" for divorce, like adultery or abuse. In 1960 the divorce rate in the U.S. was about 9%. Since the advent of no-fault divorce laws, the divorce rate spiked in the 1980s at 24% and is now at about 19%. That lower number is because more and more couples are living together without getting married, so divorces aren't reported in these relationships

The no-fault divorce laws made it possible for married couples to divorce without any previously required "cause." Today, a couple can petition for divorce for the simple reason of "incompatibility." Listen, I've been married for 41 years and I'm the first to admit men and women are naturally incompatible. You've heard of the book *Men are from Mars and Women are From Venus*. It's worse than that. Men are from Pluto and Women are from hades...I mean Mercury. Men and women are by nature different, and I say, "Vive la différence."

God's perfect plan for marriage has always been one man and one woman for life. Divorce disrupts this plan. I know many of you have gone through the heartache of divorce. At Green Acres we recognize that divorce is a traumatic life experience and we are here to show you God's love and grace. I've heard Pastor John Piper say the pain of divorce is worse than the death of a spouse. Divorced people aren't second class Christians; you are wounded soldiers in God's army. That's why we have an active Divorce Recovery Ministry. If you've gone through divorce, and you have remarried, then make this marriage the one that follows God's original design.

C. Humanity has corrupted marriage through the practice of same-sex marriage

Homosexual behavior is nothing new. It was practiced in Sodom and Gomorrah. It was practiced in the Greek and Roman cultures. Emperor Nero married two different men. Later when Christianity spread into the Roman Empire, same-sex marriage was outlawed.

It's interesting to note how public opinion in America has changed concerning same-sex marriage over the past twenty years. A chart tracing public opinion reveals that in the 1990s about 75% of Americans opposed gay marriage and only about 12% approved it. Today those numbers have changed to the point where about 60% of Americans approve it and about 35% oppose it. In fact, when Senator Barack Obama was running for President in 2008 he said, "I believe marriage is between a man and a woman. I am not in favor of gay marriage." I guess he changed his mind.

When asked about this in 1999 Hillary Clinton was even stronger. She said, "Marriage has historic, religious and moral content that goes back to the beginning of time, and I think a marriage is as a marriage has always been, between a man and a woman." She has since changed her tune. What an example of relative truth. What was true for them ten or twenty years ago is no longer truth.

The reason I believe same-sex marriage is a corruption of God's design is because I believe the Bible teaches that same-sex behavior is sinful. Many people in the LGBT movement point to some obscure passages in Leviticus that also include stoning disobedient teenagers. But anyone

who understands the entire Bible knows all the ceremonial laws of Israel passed away when Jesus died on the cross. That's why we can eat catfish and pork today.

But the New Testament is clear in many places that homosexual behavior is sinful. It's interesting that when our Founding Fathers were composing the Declaration of Independence in the first paragraph they wrote, "Among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and Nature's God entitle them." They spoke of general laws of nature and Nature's God. In Romans 1 we read the Bible's Declaration of Truth about homosexual conduct. "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie...God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another." (Romans 1:25-27)

I agree with Franklin Graham who recently wrote: "Long before our government came into existence, marriage was created by the One who created man and woman. The court did not define marriage, and therefore it is not entitled to redefine it. Our government has made a choice that directly contradicts God's laws and standards. The only solution is a change in human hearts. There is no hope for this nation from any political party: Republican, Democrat, tea party, independent, or any other. The only hope for America is God."

So, what are some of the take-away truths we can gather from what Jesus had to say about marriage? Let me suggest three truths.

Take-Away Truth #1: We can demonstrate compassion without condemning or condoning the conduct of others

Those who disagree with us about same-sex marriage are our neighbors and sometimes our family members. Jesus said to love our neighbors. Some of them are hostile to Christians and label us as bigoted, narrow-minded homophobes. They see us as their enemies. Jesus told us to love our enemies and to pray for them.

Jesus hates sin, but He loves sinners. On one occasion they brought a woman before Him who had been caught in the act of adultery. The Pharisees challenged him, "Moses said to stone such a woman what do you say?" Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."...All the men dropped their rocks and left. Then Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." (John 8:9-11) Who of us can throw stones at anyone who practices homosexuality? Drop your rocks. Notice Jesus didn't condemn her, but He didn't condone her behavior either. He said, "Go, and leave your life of sin." God hates sin, but He loves sinners. That must be our attitude toward those who practice homosexuality and endorse same-sex marriage.

Our Biblical arguments will never change the mind of one homosexual. They have answers for every point. But when we show them the unconditional love of Jesus, they have no rebuttal. If

you know of someone who disagrees with you about this matter, don't talk TO them, talk WITH them and listen honestly to why they believe what they do. You must earn the right to share your opinion with them. You can love them without condoning their behavior.

Take-Away Truth #2: Sexual purity always wins over sexual anarchy

America doesn't have a homosexual problem; we have a human sexual problem. If you consider yourself a Christian, God expects all of us to practice sexual purity. The Bible says, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God." (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5)

Christopher Yuan is a single man who practiced homosexuality with many partners. He never found fulfillment. He got involved in drugs and was sent to jail. He found a Gideon Bible in a prison trashcan and took it out and started reading it. God claimed his heart and Christopher became a Christian. He still deals with same sex attraction, but he has chosen to live a life of celibacy. His story can be found in his book *Out of a Far Country: A Gay Son's Journey to God*. Yuan writes: "My identity as a child in God must be in Jesus Christ alone, not in my sexual identity. I had always thought that the opposite of homosexuality was heterosexuality, but I realized that the opposite of homosexuality is holiness. God was telling me, 'Don't focus upon your sexuality, but focus upon living a life of holiness and living a life of purity.'" (*Out of a Far Country: A Gay Son's Journey to God*)

If you are a single person, God wants you to honor Him with a life of sexual purity. Teenagers, God wants you to honor Him with abstinence until you are married. Married folks, God wants you to be true to your mate. Your identity should never be found in your sexual preferences. It should be found in Jesus Christ.

Take-Away Truth #3: We will lose some cultural battles, but the ultimate victory belongs to God.

When some Christians heard of the Supreme Court's ruling they despaired and thought, "This is surely the end." No it's not. Let me compare this to the Roe v. Wade decision in 1973. Was that the end of the pro-life movement? No, it was a wake-up call and there have been millions of people who have been energized and mobilized to stand up for the unborn. Has it worked? Abortion is still legal, and the number of abortions peaked in 1981, but they have been declining. And last year there were the fewest abortions performed in America since Roe v. Wade.

Let's not wring our hands at this ruling; let's use it as a catalyst to mobilize a generation of pro-marriage Christians. Let your voice be heard, but make sure you speak the truth in love.

God is still on His throne. Truth is still truth. Do you think God sat in heaven and said, "Oh no, not the Supreme Court! How could you do that?" I doubt it. Psalm 2 tells us that while the heathen rage and the nations imagine vain things, He who sits in the heavens laughs. God knows the end. I've read the last chapter, and in the end, God and His people win.

In the Revelation, John heard voices from heaven proclaiming, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."
(Revelation 11:15)

I'm not one of those "ain't it awful?" preachers. Some American Christians are moaning and groaning about how bad it is for us. Let me give you a quick reality check. We have brothers and sisters around the world being beheaded for their faith and we're upset about the Supreme Court ruling? We're worried about losing our tax-exempt status when I read in James K's newsletter of the teenager Muslim girl who became a Christians and her father broke every bone in her hand to convince her to renounce Jesus—and she refused. We're not suffering, and the Gospel is thriving around the world in the face of persecution. Even if we lose a few battles, I can assure you, in the end, we know who wins the war!!

So never despair, saints. God is still God and truth is still truth. Let's show the world that the only hope for anyone is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ!

OUTLINE

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God designed marriage

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B. To populate the planet

"Be fruitful, and multiply." *Genesis 1:28*

II. HUMANITY'S CORRUPTION OF GOD'S DESIGN

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B. No-fault divorce

C. Same-sex marriage

TAKE-AWAY TRUTHS

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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