

I think we underestimate, sometimes, how important marriage is to God. Just take a look at the creation account and you'll see what I mean. Genesis 1-2 give us, really, the Bible's only clear picture of what a sinless world looks like. Oh, we get little smatterings of it here and there elsewhere in the Bible. In the Psalms. In the Prophets. In Jesus' parables and St John's Revelation.

But if you really want to know what the world was supposed to be, look at it “in the beginning” and you'll see what God intended. And in the process, you'll also see the world that God wants us to be working towards in our daily lives. And the world that God intends to give us once again on the last day. So those first two chapters of Genesis are really phenomenally important.

And of all the different aspects of this perfect, sinless world that God could have chosen to highlight for us, marriage is the one that gets the most coverage. The creation of Eve and the relationship between Adam and his wife consume fully half of everything God reveals to us about that perfect world.

Which makes it kinda frustrating that Christians seem to have so many questions and doubts and frustrations about how marriage is supposed to work. The facts of the matter are really laid out quite clearly for us. If not in Genesis 2, then in our Gospel lesson, Mark 10. And if not in Mark 10, then in any number of different locations in the Bible. Misunderstanding God's testimony on marriage is really an error for which Christians have no excuse.

And yet, we still make those errors. We still fall into the world's way of thinking about marriage. A way that is, by and large, completely the opposite of what God tells us.

CBS aired a perfect example of that this week on their morning show, where they interviewed Drew Stever, a transgender pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, who serves Hope Lutheran Church in Hollywood, CA. According to Pastor Stever, “It's hard to relate [the Bible] to modern-day times because it wasn't written for 2024. It was written for then.”

Regarding this preaching that tosses out the authority of God's Word as something archaic and irrelevant, Pastor Stever's parishioners were also interviewed and said, “Pastor Drew just brings such a light and life and just encapsulates everything we've always believed in in learning to really spread a message that is just love.” Just love. Not love, as it is defined in God's Word. Not love, as it is shown to us in Jesus Christ. Just love... whatever that is.

This is the exact problem we have in America today. Americans are very, very focused on loving one another. And that would be great, except that we've reduced love to the base, sinful urges of our flesh. The lines between love and lust have been erased. The lines between the love shown between friends and the love shown between husband and wife have been obliterated. We are a society obsessed with love, but we don't have a clue what love is.

Which is why we have such difficulty dealing with a topic like homosexuality and homosexual marriage. Because, on the surface, it looks like such a harmless, even Christian thing. God is love. Marriage is love. Homosexuals love each other. Why is this a problem?

Well, it's a problem because it's forbidden in God's Word. Now, the response to this is that it's only forbidden in the book of Leviticus. And Leviticus is also where we get ceremonial laws like, “Don't eat shellfish,” and “Don't wear clothes woven with two types of fiber.” We're perfectly willing to say that Christ has freed us from the burden of obeying those laws. So why not homosexuality?

Except that Leviticus is NOT the only place in the Bible where homosexuality is forbidden. It's also forbidden in Romans 1, where St Paul tells us that homosexuality represents a complete rejection of God's Law. And not just His Revealed Law. Not just the Bible.

His Natural Law, too. According to Paul, even if you WERE to throw out Leviticus, you should STILL know that homosexuality is sinful. Because that knowledge is written on your heart. And if you don't know that, then it's PROOF of just how far you've fallen.

Furthermore, not only does Paul reiterate the law against homosexuality, but, in a way, Jesus Himself does as well. Read our Gospel lesson, *"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."* Male and female. Father and mother. Man and wife. There is no room for homosexuality in Jesus' words. There is no room, in fact, for transgender ideology in Jesus' words.

And trust me when I say that it was around. The Greeks and Romans and Egyptians and Persians knew all about homosexuality. They knew all about men dressing as women and women dressing as men. That's exactly why it's in the book of Leviticus. That's exactly why Paul has to address it in Romans and elsewhere in his letters. And yet Jesus clearly says that we were created male and female in order to be man and wife. Period.

And yet, to be fair, Jesus is not directly discussing homosexuality here. He's talking about divorce. A topic the church is possibly even more afraid to talk about than gay marriage. Because Jesus' words here about divorce are just as harsh as Paul's words about homosexuality. You see, the Pharisees have come to Jesus to test him. Probably to trap him.

Divorce was just as much a hot button topic for the Jews then as it is for us today. And so they ask Jesus, "Is it lawful to get a divorce?" It's supposed to be a trick question. If Jesus says yes, then they'll say, "But God hates divorce! He said so in Malachi 2." If Jesus says no, then they'll say, "But Moses was OK with it! He said so in Deuteronomy 24." But, as He so often does, Jesus finds the third answer. *"Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment."*

In other words, "Sure. You can get a divorce. It's perfectly legal. But when you do, it's only proof of what an unrepentant sinner you are." You can get a divorce. But it's only proof of how you failed to submit to your husband. You can get a divorce. But it's only proof of how you failed to sacrifice for your wife. You can get a divorce. But it's only proof of how you failed to forgive each other has God has forgiven you.

A divorce is not a loophole or an escape clause or a mulligan. In most cases, it's a sin. And even in those few cases where it's not, like adultery or abandonment or abuse, it's still proof of sin somewhere in the marriage. In fact, in many ways, marriage is a decent litmus test for sin. You wanna know whether an activity is sinful? Well, does it work in marriage? Does a marriage involving this activity look like Adam and Eve's marriage?

Homosexuality? Nope. Polygamy? Nope. Divorce? Nope. Abuse? Alcoholism? Pornography? Adultery? Greed? Hate? Lying? Selfishness? You put any of these sins into a marriage and you'll see that marriage suffer as a result. You put any sin into a marriage and you'll see that marriage become ungodly. It will become a marriage of the world and not a marriage of the Word. Because it's no longer defined by God's Word.

And that's not an accident. We often times refer to marriage as a metaphor for Christ's relationship with the Church. But it's actually more than that. More than a metaphor. Marriage was intentionally constructed to look like the relationship between Christ and the Church. It's like they're two cars with the same kind engine in them. Two movies with the same script. Two flowers from the same plant.

Both are built on a foundation of sacrificial love and humble submission. Both offer us a union as close as two joined into one. Neither can tolerate for very long the effects of sin eroding the relationship. But both find their healing and strength in the power of repentance and forgiveness.

It's more than a symbol. More than a metaphor. To know marriage is to know what it means to be the bride of Christ. It's to know why a man would ever accept guilt for a crime he didn't commit in order to protect the one He loves from death. It's to know what it means to join together in a marriage feast that celebrates a life lived together forever. When God gave us marriage, He didn't just give us one gift. He gave us two gifts. The gift of a spouse and the gift of hope. Hope in a Lord who loves His Church even more than a spouse.

That's why marriage was created. That's why it's encouraged. That's why it is such an incredible blessing of God to mankind. And frankly, that's why marriage is worth protecting and defending.

Marriage is a gift of God. It is not something to be discarded. It is not something to be improved upon or modernized or reinterpreted. It is something to be passed down. To your children and your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren. In exactly the way it was handed down from God Himself to our first parents, Adam and Eve.

Not because it always works perfectly. Like every other good gift of God, it can be corrupted by sin. But even in its corruption, it shows us something important. It shows us a God who loves us so much that He would willingly lay down His life to give us a gift that He knew we would dirty with sin. Just so that He could give us a taste of what He feels for us. Just so that he could wash us clean again. Amen.