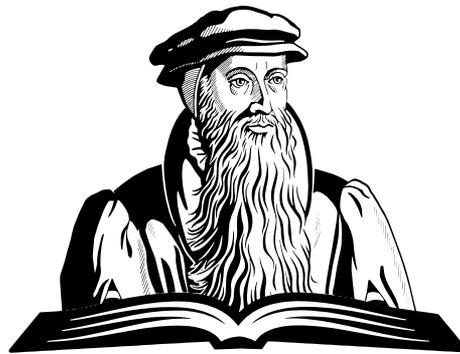

VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: BIBLICAL MARRIAGE

LECTURE 1: PRIORITIES IN A CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Lecture Presenter: Robert D. McCurley M.Div.



The John Knox Institute
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Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module

BIBLICAL MARRIAGE

8 LECTURES

ROBERT D. MCCURLEY M.DIV.

- 1. Priorities in a Christian Marriage**
2. The Unity in Marriage
3. Headship
4. Servant and Shepherd
5. Godly Wives 1
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7. Communication
8. Finances and Physical Relationship

Lecture 1

PRIORITIES IN A CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 1

What exactly is a biblical marriage, and how does it differ from other types of marriage? How does the Bible inform and govern a believer's relationship to their spouse? Does God provide us with a model to guide us? What does the Scripture teach about God's design for marriage and His priorities in marriage? What are the specific roles that the Lord assigns to husbands and to wives? How do we apply all the practical implications to the details of our daily lives? The purpose of this course is to study what the Bible teaches about marriage and to equip you with a deeper understanding of how to apply these truths. After laying the biblical groundwork, the scope of these lectures will be very practical, providing examples of how to implement biblical principles to the relationship of husband and wife. So, if you wish to understand better what God's Word teaches about marriage, these lectures aim to benefit you.

This first lecture introduces God's priorities for a biblical marriage. What makes a Christian marriage truly Christian? This may surprise you, but it is not simply a result of two professing Christians marrying each other. For a marriage to be truly Christian, first of all, it must be patterned after and governed by the Holy Scriptures. In other words, a Christian marriage must be a biblical marriage. Secondly, it must have the Lord Jesus Christ at the center of the marriage. He has first place in the relationship between husband and wife, and His presence alone provides the grace to glorify God. Thirdly, the gospel must shape and permeate the marriage relationship. Now that means that there is hope for those tempted with hopelessness.

For believers who are struggling in marriage, the Lord imparts hope for two reasons. First of all, God's Word is sufficient to address all our problems. In second Timothy 3:16-17 we read, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." Secondly, there is hope because God's grace is sufficient for all our needs. Christ said to Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." The believer's greatest need stems from his or her sin, and God has made provision for sin in His grace. Romans 5:20 states, "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." In the gospel, God's Spirit produces growth and change.

If you are married or if you are preparing for marriage, please recognize that this class is for you and not just for your spouse. In other words, profiting from this class is dependent upon being a doer of the word, and not a hearer only, as we read in James 1:22-25. You'll remember at the end of Christ's Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus describes the difference between a house built on sand and a house built on rock; and He says that the storms come, the rains come down, the wind blows, and so on, and there's a difference between the two houses. The one that is built on sand collapses under the turbulence of the storm, whereas the house that's built on a rock stands firm and steadfast. Well, Christ went on to say in that passage, "Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock." It is easy to listen, to acknowledge truths, but then to go on without applying the truth and without implementing change. Consequently, I would strongly encourage you to go through these lectures with an open Bible.

The title of this course is Biblical Marriage, and I'll be directing your attention to many Scripture passages as we proceed through the lectures. But, you should also pray over the material, seeking the Lord to open your eyes and to search your hearts and to apply His truths by the Holy Spirit. If you are married, you would do well to go through your notes together, looking up the Scripture passages and discussing how they apply to your specific needs.

First of all, in this lecture, we're going to consider the foundation of biblical marriage. Marriage exists for the magnifying of God's glory. Now this is true of even the smallest details of life, as we read in 1 Corinthians 10:31, where the LORD reminds us that whether we eat or drink, whatsoever we do, all of it is to be done to God's glory. But how much more so is this true in marriage. In Ephesians 5:31-32, we read, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church." In other words, biblical marriage sets before the whole world a model of Christ and the church, which displays the grace of God and defines marriage by the self-denying work of the cross.

Many themes, such as sin and grace, forgiveness, God's wrath, unity, and love are central to understanding biblical marriage; but marriage is also a temporary calling. Jesus tells us this in Matthew 22:30 when He says, "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven." So that means that marriage is one way to serve Christ and to exalt His praise, but it is not guaranteed in this life, whether due to sickness, death, or even celibacy, as we see in I Corinthians 7. Also, as with all God's gifts, we must always hold it loosely. The Lord gives, and the Lord takes; He both bestows and withholds according to His own will. Christ in the gospel of grace is the Christian's greatest gift. Having said that, marriage is a wonderful gift from the Lord. Hebrews 13:4 says, "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled." We find similar things describing marriage as a gift in I Timothy 4:3 and in Proverbs 5:18-19.

As with all of God's gifts, marriage must not become a self-serving idol. Love for Christ must surpass love for any spouse. Jesus puts this very strongly in places like Luke 14:26 and Luke 18:29-30, as well as elsewhere. That leads us to the conclusion that you will love your spouse best by loving Christ most. Jeremiah 2:13 warns us, "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." Whenever your spouse replaces Jesus, you forsake the fountain of living waters in exchange for a broken cistern. This can become a source of marital strife. Think of the practical implications.

When you put your spouse in the place of Christ and you expect them to supply what only the Lord can supply, then you will be hypersensitive to fluctuations of their love and become easily provoked when your spouse does not meet your expectations. If your endless supply of satisfying waters flows from Christ, then you will rejoice when Christ uses your spouse to express His love to you without putting your spouse in Christ's place. And when your spouse hurts or disappoints you, and Christ is the object of your joy, then your source of happiness will remain uninterrupted. As you can see, the condition of your marriage to Christ will directly influence the outworking of your marriage to your spouse. If your relationship with Christ is not strong, your marriage will not be strong. It is a beautiful Christ-magnifying display when both spouses are living faithful to their Lord. Even if your spouse is unwilling to pursue Christ to the same degree as yourself, you can live an abundantly blessed life full of love and joy and peace, and you can bring glory to God if your marriage to Christ is what is preeminent.

Secondly, we should consider God's design for marriage. God's primary design for marriage is companionship. We see that at the beginning of the Bible in Genesis 2:18 where it says, "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." Likewise, for example, Malachi 2:14 describes a wife as "thy companion" and "the wife of thy youth." We see that same theme in a variety of different places within the Scriptures. So, whether a couple has children or not, they are able to fulfill this primary purpose of companionship.

But, the Bible also provides at least three secondary designs for marriage. That would include, first of all, procreation. Again, looking back to the beginning of the Scriptures, Genesis 1:28 says, "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it." So procreation is also a purpose. Closely connected with that we have a second example, which would be the propagation of a covenant

seed in the church. Malachi 2:15 says, “And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.” A third example would be preventing lust and fornication. Paul addresses this in 1 Corinthians 7; he says in verse 2, “Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.” And again in verse 9, “But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.” All of this is summarized in [the] Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 24, paragraph 2, where we read, “Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife;” - so there is the picture of companionship, but then it goes on - “for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the church with [a] holy seed; and for [prevention] of uncleanness.” There [are] the three secondary purposes that we have outlined.

Thirdly, in this lecture, we need to consider the first priority of marriage, and this priority flows very much from the purpose that we found in the Scriptures. The first priority of marriage is unity, or you could say, oneness, or togetherness. We know that this is the case because it is true, first of all, of the supreme model of marriage, namely Christ and His bride, the Church. You look at the end of the Ephesians 5:30-32. In the covenant of grace, Christ comes with a marriage proposal through which believers are brought by saving faith into union with the Lord Jesus Christ. That saving union produces communion with God in time and eternity. So, we see in the supreme model of marriage that unity or oneness functions as the chief priority. Secondly, unity and oneness in marriage is specifically prescribed in Scripture. You think of 1 Peter 3:7, where it says, “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel,” - listen to this phrase - “as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.” Again, we see this described elsewhere, both in the Old and in the New Testament. Unity and oneness is also illustrated physically in the consummating act of marriage, and Jesus confirms this in referring to Genesis 2:24-25 when He says in Matthew 19:5-6 these words, “And said, for this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

Well, if this is the chief priority, how do believers, whether husbands or wives, cultivate this biblical unity? This becomes exceedingly important for us. How do we cultivate this unity? And the Bible teaches that there is a relationship between unity and trust and openness. So if you think about wholehearted trust, wholehearted trust is the foundation of unity in every relationship. For example, the believer’s relationship with Christ is built on trust or faith in Him. You see it illustrated in common Christian friendships. A good example would be David and Jonathan, which you can read about the beginning of 1 Samuel 18 and the beginning of 1 Samuel 19. But more to the point, trust is also central to unity in marriage itself. Proverbs 31:11 describes the godly wife, and it says, “The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.” Trust is guarded in marriage by openness and honesty, so if both husband and wife are being frank and open and honest with one another, it will deepen and strengthen their trust of one another.

Loving your spouse is required of both husbands and wives. So if you look at the end of Ephesians 5, you’ll see three different times. Beginning at verse 25 and then 28 and 33, husbands are told explicitly to love their wives. Colossians 3:19 says the same thing. But it’s also true of wives. In Titus 2:4 we’re told that the older women “may teach the [younger] women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children.” And so, this cultivation of unity is dependent on the pursuit of biblical love. Well, that means we need to define our terms. In considering the biblical definition of love, we learn, for example, that it does not assume evil, and it does not impute motives. I would encourage you to go back and read that well known chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, for some of the ways that God defines true love. If you assume anything, you’re to assume the best. Otherwise, you are to ask. Countless problems could be avoided by simply recognizing that you did not know what your spouse was thinking or feeling, despite your persuasion to the contrary. That is, you don’t think evil, and you don’t impute the motives that you think prompt them.

What else do we learn? We learn that love is not something that just spontaneously happens. Love is a commitment to give one’s life for another. Why are some people excited about the prospects of marriage? Is it so that they will be cherished or respected or have the exclusive affection and attention of someone? Or is it to give up their life in the service of someone else? Do we choose a spouse on the basis of who makes us feel good about

ourselves, or on the basis of godliness and a like-minded pursuit of God's glory together? Well, in considering love, you can contrast it with lust. Love and lust are opposites. Lust is consumed with getting, whereas love is a commitment to giving, sometimes irrespective of how we feel or our emotions. Lust says, "I want for myself." Love says, "I will sacrifice for my spouse." So to mortify lust, we must dethrone self; we're to find our joy in bringing joy to our spouse. This is what Christ calls us to. He calls us to self-denial.

Notice the relationship of love, for example, the relationship of love and giving in Scripture. If you go back to that passage in Ephesians 5, it says, 'Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for her.' Or think of John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son," or Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God," – listen – "who loved me, and gave himself for me." So love is defined by giving. We should make it a habit to be constantly looking to give of ourselves to one another. In the case of your spouse, you need to be thinking about giving your time and thought and serving and your ear, your speech, a willingness to convey what is on your mind to them.

There [are] all sorts of ways in which we can sacrifice and give to one another. Think of 1 Corinthians 13, because it also teaches that love does not seek one's own things in verse 5. We should not love in order to be loved back. Imagine the marriage where each spouse is devoted 100% to doing everything in their power to bring joy to the other and 0% to watching out for themselves. Well, that is the kind of self-denial to which God is calling you in marriage. Listen to how Paul describes Timothy in Philippians 2:20-21, "For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." If both spouses pursue this as a goal, it will result in rich edification.

But, this also is a majestic display of the glory of Christ and His gospel. Christ withheld nothing; He gave all for His bride. In Philippians 2:4-5 it says, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Paul then goes on to describe Christ's condescension and His sacrifice. The church is called [upon, of course], to withhold nothing as well. The church is to give all in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ; we're to give all for our heavenly husband. 2 Corinthians 5:15 says, "And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." If the essence of love is giving to others, then we need to learn how to express love effectively.

In other words, it is essential that you know how others like to receive love, not just how you enjoy expressing it most yourself. And, this is another form of self-denial and finding your joy by producing joy in the object of your love, in the case of marriage, your husband or your wife. This is also an aspect of knowing your spouse. In a future address or lecture, we will look at that more closely; the Bible calls husbands to know their wives and wives to know their husbands. And so we need to know, how is it that they appreciate receiving love? This is important because love can be expressed in thousands of ways, not all of which are equally meaningful to everyone. For example, it can include serving; so this [would be] physical acts of helping or doing projects or tasks or other things. That often is an expression of love meaningful to some. Another example would be physical contact: touch and holding hands and so on. Or, it could be giving gifts: generosity, surprising someone with a card or a note or something similar. Another way of expressing love is merely through verbal expression of appreciation: telling someone your admiration for them or expressing verbally your love for them. Another example is spending time together, and that may or may not involve speech, for example, or acts of service. It may be going places or just sitting together, and that time with one another means a great deal. Loyalty and faithfulness, of course, is another expression of love, and there are many, many, many others. The call to self-denial must move from a theoretical concept to a practical reality in the marriage relationship. It means thoughtful reflection. It means studying your spouse. It means purposefully pursuing ways in which you are giving of yourself to produce joy and edification in your husband or your wife.

Well, in conclusion, in this lecture we have established from Scripture the priority of unity in marriage. In the next lecture, we will explore what the Bible teaches about how to maintain this unity by resolving conflicts that arise from sin. In the lectures that follow, we will turn our attention to the specific roles and responsibilities that God has assigned to husbands and wives.