

- ***READ Genesis 2:15-25*** Aside from the gift of life and salvation, I don't believe there is a greater gift given to mankind by our gracious God than that of marriage. From the very beginning, our Lord was concerned about His most precious creations well being. After He took Adam and put him in the garden to tend and keep it, God recognized that there was still something that was missing from the life of the man Adam. Even with all of the animals there with him, the Lord recognized that Adam needed a true partner with which he could live this life with.
- So we know the story of what came next. God caused the deep sleep to come upon Adam and the first surgery was done to remove a rib from man so that woman could be formed from it. When Adam came to and saw this new being, we can deduce that he said "whoa, man!" which is obviously where the word woman originated from. All joking aside, Adam recognized the the the amazing gift he had been given by God to be joined to this woman, and they became one flesh and marriage was established from there on even until today.
- God knew that it was not good for man to be alone in this life. Every married man here knows the blessings that his wife brings to his life, and I would feel confident that the wives would concur that their husbands are blessings from God. We ought to be continually thankful that God designed for this relationship to be a key component to this life, and that gratitude ought to be shown and expressed daily to God and to the spouse that He has blessed us with.
- Our God is so good to us in giving us the closest relationship of marriage, but with this great gift...I would suggest that it comes with great responsibility. I would go a step further and suggest that the responsibility begins even before we have actually said I do. This morning I would like for us to consider the need for approaching marriage with wisdom. Because before we ever walk down the aisle or make our vows, there are some questions that we need to ask ourselves and be certain we can answer well.
- Many of us here this morning are already married, and I hope you can look back and say that you could answer these questions well. And then for those many who are not yet married, I hope that these questions are strongly considered because they can and will go a long way in determining how well your marriage will progress once you decide to make that commitment. God's wise teachings in Scripture can help us to set ourselves up for success in our marriages, we just need to be sure to ask the right questions and be able to answer them the right way. We'll take these three questions and ask why they need to be asked, and then we'll consider how we can answer these questions well.

I. Am I ready to be married?

A. This must be asked because marriage isn't something to be taken lightly.

1. Aside from our decision to obey the Gospel, the commitment we make in marriage is the most important commitment that we can make in this life. Our voluntary decision to marry another person and commit our lives to them should not and can not be taken lightly, even though so many today treat marriage as if it isn't that big of a deal.
2. The rampant divorce rate, the way marriage is spoken of and portrayed on TV, and our hook up and live together while unmarried culture do nothing but water down what is to be a sacred relationship and institution in the eyes of God. God gave us marriage to not just benefit us, but to glorify Him when it is done well. Our failure to recognize it as such will only anger Him.
3. We must recognize that marriage is given from God. **(Genesis 2:21-25)** We must recognize that it is for life. **(Matthew 19:6)** We must be willing to ask questions to decide whether or not we are willing to enter into this covenant relationship that means so much to God. He hates those who enter in flippantly and then divorce. **(Malachi 2:16)** Just as God would disapprove of the one who commits himself to God and then quickly leaves or lives poorly, so does He disapprove of the person who flippantly approaches marriage and either exits quickly or performs poorly as a spouse.

B. So if marriage is a one shot deal and matters this much to God, then I really need to firstly consider whether or not I am ready for it.

1. **Am I ready from a maturity standpoint?** Am I truly willing to dedicate myself fully to another person? Will I be able to handle the natural stress that comes with living with another person? Will I be able to handle the extra responsibilities that come with marriage? If I am a person who wants total freedom and little responsibilities then marriage isn't for me at this time.
2. **Am I ready from a financial standpoint?** Especially for the men, will you be able to support your new wife? Will you be able to handle any sort of debt that might come with your spouse? Monetary arguments are some of the leading marriage killers. Don't set yourself up for failure if you're not financially able to support yourselves in marriage.
3. **Am I ready from a spiritual standpoint?** If I acknowledge that marriage is from God, then I must recognize that He also lets me know how I will be expected to carry myself in my marriage. The most comprehensive text detailing what He expects is found in **Ephesians 5:22-33**. Simplified, God expects for husbands to lead and love their wives, and wives are to follow and respect their husbands. But even beyond those foundational elements, am I spiritually mature enough to follow what is said in **1 Peter 3:1-9**? If my spouse is not faithful, will I still perform my duties well? As a husband, will I live with my wife in an understanding way? Will I be committed to treating my spouse in the ways in which are described in **vv.8,9**? These questions must be asked and answered well if we want to approach God's blessing of marriage with godly wisdom.

II. Do I have the right to be married?

A. Again, if we recognize marriage as being a divinely given institution, then we must submit to God's design and dictations of what a lawful marriage is.

1. Some would strongly scoff at the idea that we would even need to consider whether or not we have a right to be married. "Of course I have the right to be married! I'm a human and an American and the government says that I can be married as many times as I want to be." Who is this person regarding as the authority on marriage? I would say this person is thinking that government is the entity that decides marriage matters, but that is far from the truth. In the beginning, God established marriage long before any human government ever came on the scene. God sets the rules for marriage and not the government.
2. Therefore, when considering marriage, we don't need to ask whether or not the government will allow us to get married, but we need to be asking whether or not God permits us to be married to the person we are seeking to join ourselves to. We see in **Matthew 14:1-4** that John the Baptist stated that Herod's marriage to Herodias was not lawful. They had no right to be with one another because Herodias was the lawful wife of Herod's brother Phillip. Not all people have a right to marry one another whenever they so choose.

B. So here are some questions we need to ask in regards to whether or not we have a right to be married.

1. **Have I or my prospective spouse ever been married previously?**
 - a) Remember, these aren't questions that many people would ever even dream of considering because so many are under the impression that marriage is something that anyone can do at any time for any reason. The idea that marriage has certain conditions placed upon it by God would be strongly scoffed at. The two greatest conditions put on marriage by God is that **1)** it is for life and **2)** you can't just marry anyone you please with no questions asked. So when considering marriage, we would do wise to go into it knowing exactly what we are getting ourselves into.
 - b) We need to know first and foremost if we have a right to marry this other person and the simplest situation to be involved in is that neither of you have been married before. In this situation, each has a clean slate and can be joined to one another in marriage. However, if one or both of us have been married before then we need to ask some further questions.

2. **If I/he or she has been married, was my/his or her divorce lawful?**

- a) Going back to **Matthew 19:1-9**, we see Jesus being asked about marriage and divorce. Jesus lays marriage out very clearly and plainly. A man and a woman can leave father and mother and be joined to one another in marriage. The leaving of father and mother shows me that they were previously unmarried. Then Jesus goes on to say that when they are joined as one flesh in marriage that no man is to separate them in that relationship. They are to stay together for life. However, Jesus goes on to say that if a marriage is broken up for any reason other than adultery, then that divorce is unlawful and God is greatly displeased, especially if either or both remarries. Those marriages would be adulterous.
- b) Therefore, we can take from what Jesus says here in this text, and what is said by Paul in **I Corinthians 7:10,11** as he restates what Jesus says in **Matthew 19** that once we marry, we are bound to that spouse. The only thing that can legitimately break that bond is either death (**I Corinthians 7:39**) or adultery being committed and the innocent party puts the guilty spouse away. In this case, it seems, according to the text, that the innocent party would be free to remarry, but the guilty party would have no such right because he or she did not honor the original marriage and commitment that had been made.
- c) So if I want to get married, then I need to consider whether or not I or my prospective spouse have been married. If I or he or she have been previously married, then I need to determine whether or not that marriage was broken in a lawful way or not? If it was lawful then I can remarry, but if it was for some other reason that adultery, then I would have no right to marry that person, and if I truly want to do what's right then I will remain single or be reconciled.

3. **If I/he or she have been married, is my/his or her former spouse still living?**

- a) I know there are some who do not hold to the idea that this matters, but I am convinced at this point in my understanding of God's marriage laws and conditions that it still matters. When I make a lawful vow of marriage between myself and my spouse and I do so before others and God, then I am bound to that person as long as they live. God's design is for only death to separate those who are married. This means that my lawful spouse is still my spouse even if the marriage is "ended" through some other means than adultery.
- b) Case in point I would offer would be that of David and Michal in **II Samuel 3:14**. David and Michal had been married some years earlier, but during David's run from Saul, Michal had been given to another man named Paltiel in marriage. However, when David comes back on the scene, he recognizes that Michal is still his wife regardless of who she was "married" to in the eyes of others. The only way that lawful marriage would have truly been over would have either been through adultery or the death of either spouse. Reference again **I Corinthians 7:39** where Paul says that once the husband is dead the wife is free to marry whomever else has a lawful right to remarry. If I am getting married, I need to be sure that any previous spouses I might have had are either legitimately put away or they need to have passed on from this life so that the marriage bond no longer exists.
- c) It all comes down to whether or not I want to submit to God's conditions for marriage. Either I submit in wisdom or I deny out of arrogance. The choice is mine in the end. If I don't have a right to marry this other person then I need to either remain unmarried or seek reconciliation with my previous spouse if that option is still available.

III. Will this person help me get to heaven?

A. This question must be asked if we have the proper perspective about this life.

- 1. If I am convinced that this life is a proving ground and a place of preparation for the next life, then I will do whatever is necessary to get to the next life in the best way possible. Let me suggest that who we decide to marry will go a long way in determining our spiritual health and wellness in this life because there is no one who will influence you more in this life than your spouse. It is the closest relationship on earth, and it will influence us for eternity.

2. So, if my focus is eternal in nature, then I will put temporary pleasure or satisfaction on the backburner when it comes to my decision making. Especially, when it comes to a decision as important as who I will marry. More than likely, each of us can probably think of someone we either knew or maybe even dated in the past who we really got along well with and probably could've really enjoyed a fun marriage with in this life...if faith and eternity didn't matter.
 3. But the reality is that disciples of Jesus are willing to make those temporary sacrifices of temporary pleasure because we have something grander in mind. We are not just looking for a spouse that we can enjoy a happy and fun marriage with, but we ought to be looking for a spouse who will help us *"press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 3:14)
- B. Further, let me suggest this goes beyond simply asking whether or not this person is a Christian.
1. I know we often stress significantly, and for good reason, that we ought to only truly consider a Christian when it comes to who we marry. I think that is good and sound advice and wisdom, because if the person isn't a Christian then how can they help get us to heaven? How can that be done if their goals are not our goals? But you know someone will respond with, "But, Nick! I will influence them to good and to become a Christian! I will be able to do that once we're married!" How many times has that been said, yet the influence flowed much more strongly in the other direction? Please listen to me when I quote Mark Roberts when he says that "marriage is not an evangelism project!" You don't know whether or not you will save your spouse! You don't know if you will be influencing them, or if you will be the one being influenced! Don't take that risk in the name of love, happiness, or earthly satisfaction. That isn't using sound and godly wisdom. Don't make the same mistake as Solomon when he allowed unfaithful women to lead him away from God. (I Kings 11:6-8; Nehemiah 13:26)
 2. But at the same time, don't say "I do" simply because this person is a Christian in name. We all know individuals who have become Christians. They have confessed faith in Jesus and they were baptized. However, that same person could very well be the weakest Christian you know because they are just not fully invested or serious about their faith in this life. Sure, they might wear the name of "Christian", but is that really all that matters when it comes to choosing whether or not they are the type of people that we would be willing to trust to get us to heaven?
 3. It's not just about the name they where, but it is about the life they live. If this person is weak in his or her faith, then why would we want to entrust them with our souls. Why would I want to marry a woman that is not dedicated to Christ if I am wanting to raise kids dedicated to Christ? Why would I marry a man who is not dedicated to Christ if I am wanting him to lead me to be closer to Jesus? It is good that we have these goals, but we need to join ourselves to individuals who will help us reach these goals. Don't become one of the horror stories of faithful men and women who focused too much on earthly happiness that they sold their soul's eternal destiny for it. Use wisdom and recognize that we need to marry only those people who will help us get to heaven. Of course, we need to get along with them, as well. Of course, we need to be attracted to them, as well. But make sure that we keep first things first and focus on what is most important instead of allowing temporal pleasures to rule our reasoning.

Again, aside from deciding to follow Jesus...who we marry is the greatest decision we will all have to make in this life. In make these decisions, we need to allow godly wisdom to lead us. We need to think as God would have us to think. We need to consider the Lord's will on the matter so that He will be with us and bless us in one of the greatest gifts He has given us in this life in marriage. May His wisdom rule over us as we ask these all important questions, and may we answer them well so that our marriages may be successful and, most importantly, pleasing to God. Thank God for marriage, and may we do it well.

PRAYER