

Series: God & Man & Woman #791

Title: Genesis 2.24, Part 9

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world! When we were last together (on Friday) I did something risky. In our final gathering of the week – just before our two-day break that is the weekend – I shared with you a new question and began to answer it. And now what are the chances that you remember the question and the first part of the answer? What are the chances *I* do? Ha...ha. A lot of time has passed since Friday. That was the risk.

To lessen the risk of forgetfulness, let's begin this week with a quick review of what was said last time. Our text is Genesis 2.24. This reads, "24 **For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.**" And our third question is this: what is marriage? With this statement God defines for us marriage from His point of view. And so we ask what is marriage from God's perspective? And I answered: **marriage is one man as one flesh with one woman for one lifetime**. Or, if you prefer marriage is one woman as one flesh to one man for one lifetime. That is the best, most succinct way to say what Genesis 2, verse 24 means.

If you are man you will likely capture my definition of marriage this way: **marriage is one man as one flesh with one woman for one lifetime**. But if you are a woman you'll likely prefer starting with yourself. Marriage is one woman as one flesh to one man for one lifetime. Either way you say it, you got it. And I base my definition on how I interpret this verse.

I then began to explain, to break down into parts this definition of marriage, and we started with the word *one*.

There is exclusivity here: *one*. There is one man and there is one woman and there is one flesh. We find that "**a man,**" that is one man, is joined to "**his wife...**" Notice that man is singular – "a man" – and the woman is singular – "his wife," not wives (plural). Wife. W-I-F-E. (Not W-I-V-E-S.) The verse does not say, "a man be joined to his wives." So we have one man and one woman.

Furthermore, notice that the flesh is also singular, "**one flesh.**" So that I can explain this, let's capture in our minds an imaginary husband and wife. And let's give this couple names. Our man's name is Peter and our woman's name is Jane. Peter and Jane.

Becoming one flesh with only this one woman Jane is only this man Peter's one-time God given calling. That's how Peter interprets becoming one flesh with one woman. God says to Peter, "I want you to become one flesh with this one woman Jane for your one lifetime." Peter agrees and marries Jane. Becoming one flesh with one woman is one married man's one-time God given calling.

Now consider Jane. Becoming one flesh with only this one man Peter is only this woman Jane's one-time God given calling. That's how Jane interprets becoming one flesh with one man. God says to Jane, "I want you to become one flesh with this one man Peter for your one lifetime." Jane agrees and marries Peter. Becoming one flesh with one man is one married woman's one-time God given calling.

I hope this is clear to you. If not, do not give up on me. This is the way my mind works. Yours may work a bit differently. You're likely smarter than I am, so hang in there. Please stick with me and this will all become clear to you. But surely you have picked up on this emphasis I give to *one*. Marriage is an exclusive relationship. I definitely believe God defines marriage this way: one man becomes one flesh with one woman for one lifetime.

We can immediately rule out polygamy. Marriage is monogamy. Polygamy is the practice of having more than one wife or more than husband at the same time. Monogamy is the practice of having only one husband or one wife at the same time. God commands monogamy. According to God marriage is monogamy not polygamy. "A man" to "his wife" and "they shall become one flesh." And that is exactly what we have in the first man and the first woman. Adam (the man) is married to Eve (his wife) and, as we continue to read the Bible, we see that they become one flesh.

Oh! I can hear the questions now, “Read the rest of the Old Testament, Mark. You’ll have to agree a lot of those marriages were polygamous! What about divorce? What about when a spouse dies and the living spouse still has a long life to live? What about re-marriage? What about when someone gets married before they become a Christian but their conversion radically changes how they behave in marriage and their spouse does not convert and leaves the marriage? What then, Swallow? What can the abandoned, Christian spouse do? What about one spouse abusing another in the marriage? Should the one being abused really stay married for life?” And many other questions will come to life as you consider what I have said thus far.

At the risk of frustrating you – I really do not want to frustrate you. And at the risk of making you think I am dodging these good and valid questions – I do not like to dodge any fair question. Let me say that I am going to avoid the temptation answer these now. We’ll look at most of these as we move along. If you want my perspective on these questions, tune into God Is. I intend to be practical. We cannot talk about marriage without acknowledging that marriage is a very down to earth, pragmatic reality. You know this. I know this. So our discussion will not be one of escaping to a theological library and debating as two seminary students would.

I am a pastor, so I am used to dealing with marriage *practically*. I am aware that saying marriage is **one man as one flesh with one woman for one lifetime** does not match many people’s experience. And even Christian people’s experience.

In fact, here we come to two ways in which marriage from God’s perspective does not match most marriages from our experience. I said *most*. Your marriage may very well match God’s ideal. By the grace of God, mine does. But I am speaking to a broad audience.

Staying within Genesis 2.24 and this definition of marriage I want to talk about this. The first mismatch between what God commands and how people live is that many people do not have one-flesh marriages. And the second mismatch between what God commands and how people live is that many people do not have one-lifetime marriages. So, let’s talk about this. I told you we would be practical!

Today we have time to get started on the first mismatch between what God says and how we live: many people do not have one-flesh marriages. In your Bible highlight the words “one flesh” in Genesis 2.24. What does that mean?

Becoming one flesh describes the consummation of the marriage. It does describe sexual intercourse in physical intimacy, *but* one flesh also applies to sharing emotional, mental, and spiritual intimacy. One flesh is the expression of the inseparable union of husband and wife. The Bible also uses “one flesh” to describe the inseparable union between Jesus Christ and the church. Remember that we’ve just finished our discussion about Christ being married to the church. Well, the union between Jesus and His church is one flesh. That’s clear in Ephesians chapter 5, verses 31 and 32. Read Ephesians 5.31 and 32.

God’s command is that one man enter marriage with one woman and both that man and that woman have never had sexual intercourse with another man or woman. According to the Bible, you can only be of one flesh one time. And that is upon marriage. Someone might ask, “Where is that in the Bible?” Why, it’s right here in our verse. Notice the intentional order of Genesis 2.24. First the man leaves his father and his mother, then the man is joined to his wife (marriage), and *then* the two become one flesh.

“²⁴ For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.”

They two do not become one flesh until after they are joined together in marriage! God is clear on the order for one flesh. This verse is written this way intentionally. God is the God of order and we find that right here in Genesis. First the man leaves his father and his mother, then the man is joined to his wife (marriage), and *then* the two become one flesh. First the woman leaves her father and her mother, then the woman is joined to her husband (marriage), and *then* the two become one flesh. Becoming one flesh happens *after* the wedding, not before.

And tomorrow we will see this means what may seem obvious but I will say it anyway. Sex before marriage and sex outside of marriage is always *wrong*, because it is always *sin*, because God says so. Being one flesh is designed by God to be a one time intimacy. So, someone might respond to today's message, "This is so old fashioned! Wow. Swallow needs to understand what's going on today. Sex only for marriage? Is he crazy?" I'll respond to this tomorrow not for Mark Is, but for *God Is*!

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