

Marriage Check-up



Remembering the End of the Story to Fight Sin in Marriage

Ephesians 5: 25-27; 1 Thessalonians 2: 19-20

Good morning! We are continuing on our sermon series on marriage. We are going to be talking about marriage and sin; how sin affects marriage, how it got there, and how we deal with it.

Thinking about this, I was thinking about a guy named Desmond Doss, a WW2 hero. He saved from fifty to one hundred lives. What was amazing about it was that he did it without a weapon! He did it without a gun. He had a religious conviction not to kill or murder anybody anymore. He was an infantry medic and would go into the battle scene and pull these people out with bullets literally zipping past his head. They made a movie about him called Hacksaw Ridge. I remember watching that movie and seeing this guy and realizing it is a true story. I thought there was absolutely no way he can survive! No way, it's impossible. Yet at the same time, even though there is a war going on, a battle going on, I know he does. I know he is going to live a long life because I know the end of the story. So I am conflicted because it's so tense, but then I keep thinking I know the end of the story. I think that is so important as we think through marriage. We can have battles because of sin, we can have issues because of sin, but we have to keep our eyes on the end of the story. If we do that, it will be good.

Scripture

Ephesians 5: 25-27:

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”

Wow, that is an example of a marriage. I really believe the number one goal a husband should have in a marriage relationship is to one day present his wife as holy and without blemish before the Lord.

Now every single chapter in 1 Thessalonians has something to do with the return of Jesus. In chapter 2 of dealing with the return of Jesus, Paul tells the Church what he is going to boast in. So you are Paul, what would you boast in? Out of all the things he has done, what would he boast in?

1 Thessalonians 2: 19-20:

“ For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at His coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.”

One of the things I am going to try and communicate this morning is that should be our goal in marriage. That one day, one day when Jesus comes back, we can hand them our brides, He can look at our marriage, and we can boast.

As we think through marriage and sin, I think it's important, we've been talking about it the last few weeks, but again, a bit of foundation of the gospel and of marriage. So when we look towards the beginning in Genesis 1:26-28, it says, “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living

thing that moves on the earth.” When we look at that passage, I think it’s important to realize that male and female, Adam and Eve, have three things:

1. Structure
2. Function
3. Relationship

In structure, they are created in the image of God. In function, they are called to take care of the earth, subdue it, have dominion over the earth, and they are called to be fruitful and multiply. In relationship, they have a relationship with each other, male and female, and they have a relationship with God. So in the Garden, the structure, function, and relationship was perfect; no sin, right? But then what happens? The Fall occurs. Now, Adam and Eve are still created in the image of God, but now the structure has sin on it. The function; can they still work, can they still have kids? Yes, but now, it is painful and difficult. The relationship; now this perfect relationship of Adam and Eve has been tainted by sin. Instead of being a blessing, it can now be a curse because of sin. Now, there is no more relationship with God, but they are still created in the image of God.

So here is an example of what this looks like and how it plays out. When I was sixteen years old, on my sixteenth birthday, and I wanted a car, my dad gave me a little gift. I thought it was going to be a key. I opened it up and it wasn’t a key. He gave me a car, but it was a matchbox car. He said, “This is your car and there is a lawn mower in the garage, and you can drive that for this year.” That was probably pretty wise on that part. At seventeen, I finally get my car. It was a brand new Ford Mustang, and I was pumped, excited! The structure: it was red, tires, wheels, the interior; I loved the structure. The function: I put the key in the car and go, and it would get me from point A to point B. Then there was relationship. I loved that car; there was a relationship with that car. So, I had that car for six days, I had washed it like two or three different times just taking care of that car, when I am coming home from Bible study in my accountability group, of all things, at a small country church. I decided I was going to go pretty quickly in this car. I was on a gravel road, and I take a corner too quickly and I go flying into a ditch. All of a sudden, that car is total. The

structure has been changed. It is still a Ford Mustang, but it's been changed; the function has been changed. It isn't driving me too well from point A to point B anymore. The relationship has changed. I want no relationship with that car now. The structure, function, and relationship all had changed because of the wreck, but it is still a Ford Mustang.

That is the way it is with us. The structure has been changed, the function has been changed, and the relationship has been changed. We are all born a complete mess, all born a total wreck because of sin. Yet, we are created in the image of God. That is why we can see people do great and amazing things, people that are brilliant, strong, and beautiful. It all comes from being created in the image of God. Yet, all those people, you and me included, are a complete disaster without Christ. Does that make sense? So here is the good news. The good news is that Christ came. Christ died for the world. He paid the price, and when He calls us, we come to Him and the result is that we become children. We become valuable; we become His. He redeemed us, He bought us; He paid the price. We are now His possession. Get this; because of this, we are valuable.

We had the Superbowl last week. Tom Brady won his fifth Superbowl ring, unbelievable! At the end of the game, his jersey was stolen. It's missing! They can't find it. Now, they think if they can find it, the jersey will be worth over \$500,000, just for a football jersey! Why is that jersey so valuable? It is because of whose it is and what he did in that jersey.

You see, we are so valuable because of whose we are, and that is God's, what He did for us by dying on a cross for our sins. Because of that, we are more valuable than we could possibly imagine. Yet at the same time, guess what? We are still being sanctified. God is still getting underneath that hood of ours and working on our heart.

So when you marry somebody, or if you are married, there are three things that you need to know. You married somebody that is created in the image of God. And that is probably why you were drawn to that person, because of their strength, their beauty, and their personality. That comes from them being created in the image of God. If you married a Christian, you married somebody that is valuable beyond measure because of who owns

them. Hopefully, you were drawn to them because you saw the Holy Spirit working in them, because they are a child of God, and because you see their faith. Even though they are created in the image of God, even though they are a child of God, they come from being a complete total wreck and God is still working on them. That is who you married. So in one way, your marriage is just awesome. Wow, she is beautiful, wow, he is a hunk, wow, I can't believe their face...whoa, they've got some work going on. Every single one of us has all that. That is what makes marriage so good, created in the image of God, so amazing from a spiritual standpoint: two children of God, and yet so hard with two people that are a complete mess.

How do we deal with this? How do we think through this? I think it is one of the main reasons, if not the main reason God put marriage together for His glory, but also to sanctify us. God wants to expose us. God wants to use each spouse to help become more like Christ through His covenant relationship. As we think through fighting for our spouse that they become more like Christ, I think there are two things that are really important. We live in fear and we live in freedom while we look towards the future. Frances Chan, in his book, You and Me Forever, makes this statement that is just so good. I am paraphrasing, but he says so many people just talk about the next five to ten years, but when it comes to him and his bride, he's thinking about the next ten million. I think it is such a shift that if instead of thinking of five to ten, we think of ten million, it is a totally different thought. But as we think through the next ten million years, there should be fear and freedom.

So where does the fear come in? Let's use an example. Let's look at sexual immorality. This sin is everywhere in our culture, everywhere! It is being attacked, whether you are single or married, sexual immorality is everywhere. But if you are married and committing sexual sin against your spouse, this sin will affect him or her more than anybody else on the face of this earth. This sin affects your family. There are so many consequences, and we need to feel the weight of this, living in light of the future. We need to feel the fear of committing this sin. So let's look at some passages with warnings against these sins.

Proverbs 2:16-19

"So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words, who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God; for her house sinks down to death, and her paths to the departed; none who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life."

Proverbs 5:8

"Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house..."

Proverbs 7:21-23

"With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life."

Galatians 5:19-21

"Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

These passages are saying that if you continue in this sin, it might just cost you your earthly life and your heavenly life. It gets even deeper and heavier. We read a passage in 1 Thessalonians earlier. Remember every chapter is dealing with the return of Christ. So listen in that context; if you want to know the will of God in your life, he is getting ready to tell you. If you want to become more like Christ, he is getting ready to tell you.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-6

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God;..."

Wait a second, who is he talking to? Is he talking to the Church or a lost world? He just made it clear that he is talking to the Church. He is saying do not commit sexual immorality! Don't be like the lost world. You get that, right? He is talking to the Church; this is what is so humbling and scary. We are saved by grace through faith, but listen as we continue to read in this passage:

"...that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you."

Wow...not to a lost world, he is telling the Church that if you continue in this sin and do not repent, the Lord will be an avenger. You have been warned. Let's continue on in other passages that just absolutely breaks me. A couple of weeks ago, these next couple of passages were so literally on my heart I could not sleep. I just felt like I was having a moment where it was just literally too much. Now the first part I like, but the second part I don't like.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God." So here comes the Lord! He is coming back! Remember, he just warned a few verses earlier that the Lord will be an avenger if you are falling into sexual immorality. Now, he is talking about the Lord coming with a cry of command. It sounds like an archangel, like a sound of a trumpet. It is not peace like language. He is coming to declare war, battle! This unbelievable scene comes on, so here He is; hear His voice. He is proclaiming He has returned, and what do we hear? *"And the dead in Christ will rise first."* What will that look like? Unbelievable! Then he says, *"Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air,..."* Oh what an amazing scene! We are finally with Jesus, we are finally here with Him, and what does it say? *"...and so we will always be with the Lord."* Wow, we are finally there! We are with Him! It's over! He is with us forever! But then in the next chapter, what does he say?

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3

"For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman," Then this last phrase absolutely breaks me. This is the phrase that I could not sleep with. This is the phrase that I can't take it. I am thinking about people that are lost. I'm thinking about college students that are doing great things for the Lord, and they continue to fall into this sin. I'm thinking about my own life; how important it is to fight in my marriage. He's talking about when the Lord comes and those who are left, when he says, *"and they will not escape."*

The question I have been asking myself for the last month is, do I genuinely, really, believe in hell? And if I do, people who are committing this sin are in danger. I do believe you are saved by grace through faith, yes. Do I believe that you can lose your salvation? No. Do I believe God will ever let you go? No. But I believe these passages make clear that if someone continues to fall into this sin, it could lead you right to hell. But when I think through that, (and I'm not thinking ten years or ten million years) I think about a couple of things. One, ladies, if this is the main struggle in your husband's life and you are the one person who can meet his needs sexually, what would it be like for you on the Day of Judgment when you see him not escaping? The headache or you being so tired; is that worth not trying to help him now that you see him not escaping? Men, that sin that is so hard to overcome, and it's just attacking you everywhere. What would it be like on the Day of Judgment as you say, "Here's my bride, holy and without blemish," and then the Lord looks at your computer screen? The Lord looks at you thought life. You can be doing great things for the Kingdom of Christ, and at the same time be on a dangerous path that might lead yourself and your family straight to hell. We should feel the weight of that.

Jonathan Edwards talks about the doctrine of hell and about how we just can't be indifferent about it. He says if you see a house on fire and a family in it, you don't just say, "Oh, there's a house on fire and there's a family in it." No, what do you say? "THERE'S A HOUSE ON FIRE, THERE'S A FAMILY

IN IT; DO SOMETHING!" Satan is throwing fiery darts of lustful arrows into families all over the place! Sin is attacking and going everywhere! This is what our attitude needs to be, "OUR HOUSE IS ON FIRE; DO SOMETHING!" We need to feel the weight, the fear, and the danger of this sin and of sin in general in marriage. We need to fight it. And we need to fight it in light that eternity is on the line, not ten years, ten million years.

But here is what is so good; you feel the weight, you feel the fear, and I hope you really do, but there is also freedom. That freedom allows us to fight sin. How so? Because when you are married, it exposes you and that is good. Before I got married to Brandi, I did everything in my power to look good physically for my wife. I did P90X, sit-ups, crunches, push-ups, pull-ups; I did everything trying to look good. I wanted to look good physically for my wife. The day after we get back from our honeymoon, I got food poisoning. I'm in the bathroom and she is in the bedroom. I was just lying on the floor of the bathroom, and I won't give you too much in images, you can just go from there. It's not a good scene! I'm lying there lying on the floor and then the couch, sick as a dog, thinking that P90X didn't prepare me for this! This isn't good. My wife has seen me at my absolute best and worst in all areas of my life. She has seen me at emotionally high levels. She has seen me break down emotionally and weep. She has seen me do spiritual things that are great. She has seen me sin more than anyone else has on the face of this earth. She has seen the good, the bad, and the ugly with me. Do you know what the amazing part is? She is still with me! She still loves me. That is not because of my works; it is because she has a commitment to Christ, and because of the commitment that she made in this covenant with me. That is freeing, that is completely freeing.

As we think through this, I think that is so important. Do you really believe your identity of who you are in Christ? If you do, that allows you to really experience freedom. The thought is, is your marriage right now living like the marriage before The Fall, or after The Fall. After The Fall, what did they do with their sin? They hid it; they tried not to expose it. Before The Fall, they were physically, emotionally, and spiritually naked and there was no shame. The goal is to be so free with our spouse, giving so much grace

to our spouse that instead of having shame, fear, doubt, and insecurity, we expose the good, the bad, and the ugly, and we truly love each other physically, emotionally, and spiritually with no shame.

What makes that hard at the same time is to really do that well, we have to be like Christ. We have to be like Christ, to have a Christ-like example in the home. If you are going to be like Christ in the home, what do we have to do? We have to be willing to take up our cross. That is hard, right, but it's good. 1 Peter 2:21-25 is a passage to think through with a marital or pre-marital couple. *"For to this you have been called..."* Every Christian has been called. What have we been called to? *"because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example..."* So what have we been called to do? Suffer *"so that you might follow in His steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When He was reviled..."* He made a sarcastic comment; He made a jab back...NO. He did what? *"When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly."* The entire time, He was hanging on, depending, and trusting that His Father would do the right thing. I love this next part. It gets really good, *"He Himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."*

Here is the thought. When you hang on that cross in the marriage relationship, when you suffer for your bride, for your husband, when they have a sarcastic comment to you or comment to try and get under your skin, when they aren't respecting you, when they're not loving you, when they're not really living out their role, the thought is to go right to the cross. You hang there, experience the pain; you suffer. But as you suffer like Jesus, you pray to Jesus, you cling to Jesus, call out to Jesus, and get in His Word all the time. The goal here is by *your* wounds, by the wounds of the cross, your spouse may be healed. That is what we are fighting for.

You think this is just an example of the cross; it doesn't apply to marriage. What does he immediately talk about right after this passage? He goes right into talking about marriage relationships. 1 Peter 3:1-2 says,

"Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the Word,..." These husbands aren't following Christ. They are not obeying the Word. What does it say?"...*they may be won...*" with you putting them in their place? They may be won with a sarcastic comment? They may be won by you having an attitude? No, it says they may be won *"without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct."* What does he say to the husbands in verse 7? *"Likewise, husbands, live with your wives..."* in a way that you are going to show them that you are right, they are wrong, and should bow down and worship you? Is that what it says? No. *"...in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered."* I would argue that every single one of us in a marriage relationship have probably at some point in time has had our spouse say or do something where we just want to sit there and scream at them. It's like, how dare you? Don't you know who I am? Don't you know my needs? Don't you know my situation? You deserve to be punished right now! We have an attitude or we don't go to bed, or all these different things. We are just having a pity party, and it's all about me. That is not grace. That's not grace. But when we get our eyes off of ourselves, on the other person, and on the Lord, that is grace, and that leads to healing.

Let me give you an example. Our son, Graham, is four, going on five. But when he was three or four weeks old, Brandy and I still have no idea what we were doing. We were tired and not sleeping. Every single day is a victory if the kid is still alive the next day. We literally checked his room five or six times to see if he was still breathing! So we couldn't sleep, we were on edge trying to feed the kid, trying to figure out how to change a diaper, how to live a life where everything has been completely changed! We loved the little guy, but we were on edge. One time, I had worked all day and came home with everyone crying. I felt like I needed a break. I feel like I deserved a break. Well, a friend called and wanted to meet me in Paducah, so I go into the bedroom and said, "Brandy, I might be going to Paducah." Immediately she was quiet and didn't say a word. I just knew she wasn't happy. But in my mind, everything with me in that moment thought *don't you know what I need right now!* Of course, I had Christian

justifications. *I need accountability, I need fellowship, I need...don't you know who I am, don't you know my situation!* If I had said that, if I had lashed out, I would have taken someone who is created in the image of God, who was feeling a complete total wreck, and would have done more damage to the wreck. So what did I do? Well, as someone who can't sit still, I go into the other room and I start pacing a circle, around and around. I am still thinking to myself, *doesn't she know, doesn't she understand!* So I am getting ready to call her out, but I know I have to have self-control before I do. I have to be under the control of the Holy Spirit. I continue this conversation in my mind and heart on how to approach her on *her* sin when it hits me, and the conversation changed: *you are an idiot! You are so selfish! It is all about you. You are the one who needs to be called out. Get over yourself! Your wife is working her tail off, she is the one up at 2 or 3 o'clock feeding the baby, you're not! Get over yourself! It doesn't matter; your friend will be there a few weeks from now. Get over yourself.* So I go back into the bedroom. I know she is wondering what I'm going to say, and I almost break down. I look at her and say, "I'm sorry. You need me, and I don't need to go hang out with my friend. I want to do everything in my power, I can hang out with my friend another day, what is important is taking care of you and taking care of this baby." Of course, she starts weeping and crying! It led into this unbelievably great conversation, and she said, "I want you to go with your friend; I'm just tired, exhausted, and worn out!" By handling that in a grace-centered way, getting our eyes off of ourselves, the result is that I really genuinely wanted to stay and help her. She really genuinely wanted for me to go and get a break. We both wanted the Lord to be glorified!

That is something really small, but those small steps led to us exposing ourselves, freeing ourselves to take away the shame, bear my soul to my wife and her to me. We were able physically, emotionally, and spiritually to live in such a way to take the shame away. As the shame goes away, we become more like Christ because we realize all this is happening because of Him. If shame is going away and the relationship is getting better, we start thinking about the future. And if it's this good now, if we just treat each other in a grace-centered way, what will it be like ten million years down the road? Some of you are thinking, "You don't know my situation."

"You do not know my spouse! I have tried to lead her." "I have tried to submit to him." "I have done everything in my power to try to do what's right, to do exactly what you are talking about and she still doesn't respect me! She still doesn't follow me!" "He is still not leading! He is still apathetic! He is still sarcastic! He does not step up! I've done everything I can, and he still won't do it!" That is what some of you are thinking in your heart. You think I have my nice little family, but I don't know your situation. No, I don't. You're right. But I do know the Word, and no matter how tough it is I believe you have to keep hanging on that cross.

I love 1 Peter 4:1-2, "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking..." Then the next phrase is unbelievable, I can't get this, "...for who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin..." Are you kidding me? Whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin! You've suffered, you've ceased from sin, how do you live the rest of your lives? "...so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God." Wow! Get this picture. I don't know who you are married to or what your situation is, but here is the thought here. You seek the Word, praying, calling out, and taking things a minute at a time, an hour at a time, a day at a time, a week at a time, a month at a time. You keep on clinging to the Word, and the promises of the Word. You keep on your knees, keep on trusting in Christ, keep on calling out to Him, entrusting your soul, spirit, and body to Him who judges justly, again and again! And there is hurt and pain, anger, frustration, doubts, and all these different things going on, but the entire time you as you hang on the cross with everything you've got! At the same time, the result is that eventually, if the Word of God is true, and I believe it to be true, what happens? You cease from sin and do His will. Isn't that the point of marriage, to be holy and blameless? Isn't that what we are called to do? I know it's hard. I know it's difficult for some of you, but ten million years down the road, fighting for that day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, it will be worth it.

There are a few thoughts I want to share. The first, and I'm bragging, is that I'm a basketball junkie, (I love my life) and a few weeks ago I got to go with a friend to an Atlanta Hawks basketball game. Guess where I get

to sit? So there I am, sitting on the floor, that's right, right by one of the owners of the Atlanta Hawks. Yeah, there is me, and there is him! I'm right on the floor and I can literally touch the players. I am down there with all the big dogs. I am looking for different celebrities to walk by (thinking maybe I am semi-one, I don't know). I am really, really excited because it is an unbelievable situation! Then, we get a special band, a little purple band (no one else but the people down around me gets one). So there are special places for food everywhere. They have shrimp tacos, BBQ ribs, soda, water, and chocolate...I love chocolate. (Every night before bed, I have chocolate, peanut butter, and a big glass of milk. I know it's unhealthy, but I love it alright!) Get this; they have brownies and milk! I've never been to a basketball game where they have brownies and milk! I can take my shrimp taco, brownie, milk, Sprite, water, my BBQ ribs, and walk out to the gym and eat by the owner of the Atlanta Hawks, while everyone else is up high! I am feeling good...18,000 people in the arena and I am loving my life more and more as the night goes on. The game is close. They are playing the Celtics and I am so into it, I am totally losing where I am, forgetting I am a pastor. It so close I am waving my white towel with fervor, and I am not even a Hawks fan! I am just into the moment, going crazy...if they lose I didn't care because it was just so awesome! I remember telling my friend it was so worth it, driving six or seven hours, and would do it again and if he even gets those kind of tickets again, I want to go back!

Then I started thinking it would be pretty cool to have Brandy there with me. Then I had another thought about one of my favorite chapters of Scripture, Revelation 5. Jesus comes back and there are all these beings. There are myriads upon myriads of angels. They aren't fluffy little angels; they are powerful! All these beings, saints, and all of creation at this scene saying, "Worthy is the Lord!" singing, praising, and glorifying. It is a celebration because He is here! I think what it would be like finally to be there!

And then I think about 1 Thessalonians 2. As Christ comes back, I am with my wife. I am with Brandy, and I say, "Here she is, she is holy and without blemish." That should be the number one goal of my life. I love all of you,

everyone in the room, but she trumps you all. The number one goal in my life is one day to present her as holy and without blemish before the Lord. Boy, if we had that attitude, how things would change. If that was our number one goal, no matter how long it took or how sinful she or he can act, day after day, week after week, month after month year after year suffering on their cross, wouldn't it be worth it one day to say here she is, my crown of boasting; here she is, it was worth it. In the midst of sin that attacks marriage, there can be battles and difficulties, but if you keep your eye on the end, it will be good.