

Unless you have tuned out the news on about every level this past week, you know that last Saturday on Valentine's Day no less, we had the release of a movie called "The 50 Shades of Gray", a movie that is based on what might be the largest selling series of books that have ever been published, certainly in England that is the case and it may soon be that way in the United States as well. The commentary and the talk that is taking place with regard to that movie and those books has filled the airwaves and filled social media, filled talk radio, filled the printed page. It's a series and it's a story line that I think on many levels is a reflection of where we are today as a culture.

I think it is appropriate that as we come to the end of our marriage series this morning and as we speak about something that is very significant, very important in the eyes of God with regard to the marriage relationship, that we have encountered even in this week within our culture such a strong and different message. That really is the take away that I want to put before you this morning that should not only sadden us but heighten our awareness of the people who are all around us who have such a very, very different understanding of human sexuality and the human dignity that is a part of what God has created and given to us as a gift.

For those who would see that series of books and that movie as something other than not only a commentary on our culture and how we see human sexuality, but also as a picture of the evolution of pornography in our country. Those who would disagree with that observation I would simply put before you the comments of the two leads in this particular movie. Jamie Dornan, who played Christian Gray, said this: Although he desperately misses his mother who died of cancer when he was 16, "It's probably just as well," he said, "that she didn't have to see 50 Shades. I've played some sick, sick dudes but this guy was a massive challenge." His co-star Dakota Johnson said: "I don't want my family to see it. I don't want my brother's friends to see it. It is inappropriate. There's a part of me that's like I don't want anyone to see this movie." Unfortunately we know that they're not only seeing it, they're seeing it in record numbers. I fear that within

that group of the record number of moviegoers, there are Christians who are taking part in this particular cultural phenomenon as well, those who would name the name of Christ. That saddens me and that concerns me because it is the corruption of this very special gift that God has given to us.

So what we're going to do this morning as we conclude our series on marriage is I would like for us to have a little different picture, a very different picture, and that is that marital intimacy God's way is far better than anything that the world has to offer. We are to enjoy God's gift as He intended. That's why He gave it to us. Let's review.

We have put before us three words that we want to think of often as we think of marriage. You remember those three words first of all are the fact that the word of God is a prescription for marriage. The word of God is a prescription for marriage. In this book, God has revealed to us the very best that He has for us. We need to believe that. We need to really believe that. We need to believe that with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. We need to believe that even in the face of a culture that mocks much of what it is that we hold so dear. This is God's prescription for us. God is the one who has created marriage. He's the one who gets to define marriage. He's the one who gets to prescribe what marriage is to look like. We begin with the Word always.

The second word is the word "gospel". The gospel is God's antidote for a struggling marriage. Since the gospel is God's antidote for a struggling marriage, that includes every one of us. Every one of us who is married or has been married knows that marriage represents a struggle. Do you remember Ruth Graham, Billy Graham's wife? She said she never thought about the "D" word so much. She never thought about divorce, but she thought about homicide quite often. Well, that might be that the place we find ourselves in different times, right? The gospel needs to be constantly reintroduced into our life on a daily basis and it is the gospel that just simply comes to us and reminds us of God's love for us. It reminds us of new beginnings and fresh starts. It reminds us of God's forgiveness and the grace that He so freely pours out upon us. That's the gospel that we share with each other in marriage every day. The need to be humble, the need to extend forgiveness, the need to recognize our own selfishness – that's the gospel in action.

Thirdly, there was the glory of God. The third word was the glory of God. That's the goal that we need to stay focused on. Nothing short of the glory of God will sustain us and carry us through those struggles that are always a part of our marriage experience. We're constantly asking ourselves: Does this glorify God? Is this response, action, word, direction that I have chosen – is this bringing glory to God? There we have it. We have the Word. We have the gospel. We have the glory of God. We take those with us into the future.

Let's look this morning and they should become one flesh. I want to begin with just three comments that are not in your outline. But put these thoughts before you before we look at our study this morning. The first one is that God has spoken about this issue. God is not silent about sex. He has spoken about it and, by the way, He's not the least bit embarrassed about it. I think He delights when we have these kinds of interactions and times of studying what it is that He has said and getting from His Word, His message. It shouldn't be like this guy who's getting ready to preach and He's got the brown paper bag over his head because he's going to teach on marital intimacy this morning. No, we don't have to go there. We don't have to be embarrassed about this. This is a subject that God has given us an entire book about. The Song of Solomon is about the beauty of sex within the marriage relationship. It shouldn't be this way. The pastor announces that he's going to do a series on the Song of Solomon and everybody bails out and runs out the door. God has a message for us. That message about this subject is good. It's positive. It's wholesome. It includes warnings and admonitions, but it's there for us to learn and to study together.

Secondly, we are surrounded by a culture that is absolutely confused about sexuality. I don't need to spend any more time on that point. That's where we are. We don't need to be shocked when the world acts in the confused state that it finds itself. Apart from God's revelation, apart from God's forgiving grace, apart from understanding the glory of God – that's where natural man is going to find himself on the other side of this issue.

Lastly, temptation in this area is everywhere. Temptation in this area is everywhere and it faces every one of us – young, old, in-between, single, married.

Temptation in this area is a constant that we live in our culture. We need to know what it is that God says about this matter.

Let's look at the two shall become one flesh. I want to start off by just simply asking the question what does it mean? To do that, I want to have us turn to three different passages. We're going to read these passages, make a few comments on those passages, and I want to put before you three principles that I think grow out of these three passages. We're going to begin in Genesis 2. There's this amazing statement that appears at the end of the second chapter: "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and they were not ashamed." We have said this before. You can mark it down again. This is the seminal passage, this is the foundational passage in all of the Word of God with regard to marriage. When people want to say the Bible doesn't say this or that about marriage, we just go back to Genesis 2 and here in Genesis 2 is where God lays down the pattern and the precept for marriage as He has created it and defined it. We always go back here just like Jesus did.

Do you realize that every time Jesus wanted to talk about marriage, He ended up back in Genesis 2? When Paul wanted to talk about marriage, he ended up back in Genesis 2. Do you realize that they never once went back and pointed out that the great patriarchs of the faith are examples we're to follow in this regard? They never talked about the life of Abraham or Jacob or Isaac or Joseph. They never went to the great kings of Israel – David or Solomon. Why not? Because frankly those guys all blew it in this regard. That's why Jesus and Paul went back always to Genesis 2 and said this is where we want to see the framework for what God has created and what He has designed. The very first occurrence of this word, this phrase "one flesh" appears here in Genesis 2. It is simple and yet incredibly profound truth.

The second passage is one that we're familiar with: Ephesians 5. We spent some time here. In Ephesians 5, I just want to read verses 31 and 32: "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, (there it is again) and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church." Paul tells us again that marriage exists as a picture of something

that is greater. We, in fact, have marriage because Christ is our Bridegroom and we are the bride as the church the body. Within this mystery, God is going to reveal within marriage something far greater than we could have ever understood apart from His telling us what this looks like.

The last one is in 1 Corinthians 7 in verses 1 through 5: “Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”

Let's take these three passages and let's see three important principles with regard to this matter of the one flesh relationship. The very first principle that I want to draw again is from Genesis 2 and it is that God's view of sex is that it is something very sacred while the world says it is something very common. The world has made it cheap and God has made it and presented it as being something holy. Back again in that Genesis 2 passage, those verses that we just read a moment ago, you have this beautiful description as God brings us to the culmination at the end of that second chapter of what it is that He has done in the creation of man and woman, Adam and Eve. As He brings them together, there is obviously a picture here that is physical on one level, wasn't there? The man and his wife were both naked and they were not ashamed. The two are going to become one flesh. He is talking there at least in part about something physical, but we would miss the mystery and the sacredness of this passage if that's all we conclude that it means. If this stops simply as a description that is physical, then we're going to miss the great teaching that the Holy Spirit would want us to draw from this passage. There's a lot more going on here than simply two people who don't have any clothes on. There is here a picture of unification. Unification of bodies, yes, but also of souls, of minds, of hearts, of spirits. That's part of what's happening here. There's a new reality that is being explained to us in that passage. That

new reality is putting before us in God's mathematics. In God's math, to become one in this great mystery that He has created. It's an act of disclosure.

Not only is it an act of unification, but it's an act of disclosure. It's interesting, isn't it, that when the Holy Spirit of God wanted to communicate something about the physical relationship and marital intimacy, He could have explained it in any way that He wanted and He does in various passages, but in the Old Testament one of the most common ways that He does it is by using the word "know". Adam knew Eve. What a beautiful picture of this matter of unification, of this matter of this new reality of this picture for us of disclosure that is captured in that one word that they knew each other.

God intended and He created the sexual relationship then to be a sacred one. That simply means it's to be set apart. It is to be viewed as one that is holy. It takes place within the context of marriage so that sex is for marriage and marriage is for sex. It is always presented in that way when God gives us these instructional passages. His instruction with regard to these matters always takes place within the context of marriage. The end of chapter 1 when we have this summary statement about everything that God has done, what He's gone through and He's created all the way through the sixth day. God doesn't just say at the end of that time that is good. He says it is very good and He's talking about marital intimacy as a part of that which He has created.

Verse 25 is kind of a bridge verse. Verse 25 prepares us on one level for what's coming in chapter 3 because then we get into chapter 3. We have the entrance of sin into the world and everything changes. No longer do we have two people in innocence. No longer do we have two people who are naked and not ashamed. Now they're naked and so they clothe themselves. Now they're naked and they hide themselves. Something very dramatic has changed between chapter 2 and chapters 3. What has happened, of course, is that what God intended to be glorious and beautiful and sacred and special has now been tainted by sin. How ironic is it that what God intended to be celebrated and to be enjoyed and to be sacred and special in the context of the marriage relationship is in our culture the vast majority of the depictions of marital intimacy don't happen in the context of marriage. Music, entertainment, books, movies – the vast majority of these occurrences where the sexual relationship between a man and a woman is portrayed is not in the context of marriage. Sadly, it has become

common and cheapened when God, of course, intended for it to be holy and sacred and special. I say that with regard to our culture.

It is perhaps even more sad when it is absent within the context of a Christian marriage – the very place that God intended for it to be taking place, the very opposite of what God wanted. A marriage that is devoid of a sexual partnership is certainly missing out on what God has intended. Remember in the Gospels both times in Matthew 19 and Mark 10 when Jesus got into some interactions about matters related in that case to divorce but talking also about marriage, that it was Jesus who said that it is God who joins the two together. He simply is taking us back to the beauty that God intended to Genesis 2. Jesus said what God has joined together let nobody put asunder. There is Jesus's commentary. We're to have a high and exalted view of the sexual relationship within the context of marriage.

The second principle grows out of Ephesians 5. God's view of sex is that it's symbolic of something greater while the world merely looks at it as a physical act. We say it is sacred. The world says it's common. We say it's symbolic of something even more than we might normally realize. The world says no it's just a physical act. In that Ephesians 5 passage, let me just refresh your memory: "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great, but I'm speaking with reference to Christ and the church." Marriage and marital intimacy are then to be a signpost for something that is yet to come. There is a picture, there's a mystery here of something that is greater than simply the marital intimacy itself.

It is like a sign. You're going to go to the Grand Canyon, right? There's a sign about 100 miles away from the Grand Canyon that says Grand Canyon hundred miles away. How odd, how strange would it be if we stopped at the sign and just took all of the energy and all of the excitement at the sign and made it seem as if we're here. This is it. This symbolism the Holy Spirit tells us that marital intimacy is symbolic. It's symbolic of something that is greater than the act that is taking place between the husband and the wife. We're learning about the love of God and we're learning about what it is to love like God within the context of marriage. That's part of the mystery. That's part of the wonder. That's part of the symbolism that's taking place. Tim Keller in his book on the

meaning of marriage says: "The ecstasy and joy of sex was invented by God to give us a foretaste of the intimacy and closeness we will experience when we finally see God face to face and we enter into the full union with Him and into union with everyone else that loves Him." Did you get that? The ecstasy and joy of sex was invented by God to give us a foretaste of the intimacy and closeness we will experience when we finally are in the Lord's presence and we're all there together. That's a part of what's being pictured in this sharing of lives with each other and the joy that God intends to come from that. The surge of love which unites a husband and wife in this remarkable display of love for each other, this one-flesh relationship, originates in the heart of God.

One of the things that I think we are to understand from this is that within the Godhead we have a picture of this selfless, self-giving love to each other. The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father. The Holy Spirit loves to bring glory to the Father and the Holy Spirit loves to bring glory to the Son. The Father loves to glorify the Son and the Son loves to glorify the Father. This is the picture of this amazing self-giving love that is flowing between the members of the Godhead. Three yet one. Two become one in this one-flesh relationship. That this love relationship is to be sustained by the same kind of self-giving love that is evident within the Trinity, is a part of what is to be pictured. A sexual relationship is a glorious one because it points to something glorious. It points to this love within the Godhead. It points to this foreshadowing of what it's going to be like to experience the joy of being in God's presence and of being there with each other. That's part of what Paul wants us to see here.

Now that idea that sex is more than just the physical act is going to be argued with by our culture. If there's anything that they believe, it is that this is simply a physical act, that there's nothing more going on here than two people coming together physically. We've already read in Genesis. We've already seen that the man and his wife were naked and unashamed. That's not just physical. There is a disclosure that's going on there. There's a unification of their spirits and their hearts and their minds together. I guess in view of our culture I would simply ask is there anything that could be put forward from the vantage point of what we see going on in our culture that would suggest to us that what they are offering is somehow better than what God offers. Is there anything in our culture that would give evidence that the modern view of sexuality

is creating more respect between men and women? Do we believe that for a moment? That where we are going and the path that we are on, there is actually a growing respect between men and women? Isn't it ironic that again within the predominant prevailing parts of our culture that are messaging us all of the time (whether it's entertainment or music or movies or books or the sports industry), that what we see within this message is an objectification of women, a sexualizing of women, to which there seem to be no limits. Then they wonder why there is not a growing respect within the relationship between men and women. You can't go to a sporting event, almost on the high school level but certainly the college and always on the pro level, where constantly before the eyes especially of men are women who are nothing more than being presented as objects of sexual fantasy. That's the reality of it, isn't it? In their using women to promote something that's totally unrelated to what's going on. We wonder why, for instance, in the NFL and within pro sports and within our culture at large with the constant scratching of our heads, wondering why we have all these problems of domestic abuse and taking advantage of women. It just goes past, doesn't it? But it's right there.

So what is it in our culture that would suggest to us that what they are offering is somehow better? Is it a safer environment for our children? Do you think the fact that we have made the sexual encounter simply a physical thing that happens between people, do you think that attitude of philosophy has created a safer environment for children in our country? Do you realize that 90% of children ages 8 through 16 have viewed pornography on the Internet? What is shocking to adults and to parents is not as shocking to their children, because their children have seen things that their parents never have any idea that they've seen. If your children have screen time and they're unattended in that screen time, I can assure you beyond a shadow of a doubt they have either viewed or been very close to seeing pornography. 90% of children who have screen time say they have encountered some kind of pornography. The average age in which that takes place is 11. That is the average age. The largest consumers of pornography are boys ages 12 to 17. We could go on and on with statistics like that. Do you think the fact that our culture has so devalued what God has said is sacred and

symbolic and special has been to an advantage to our culture and to our children? Of course not.

Do you think there's a fulfillment that's taking place in the lives of people as they have these encounters with each other? Do you think that loneliness is less because our culture views sexual freedom as the right to be enjoyed with anybody anytime anywhere? Do you think the loneliness is less now? No, our culture has so misunderstood and so devalued what God has said as special that all that they can do now is talk about technique and frequency. That is where they are. There's no mystery. There's nothing special. There is nothing sacred. Everything that flies at us from the world's perspective is about those two things. We are so glad that God has invested this special gift and said to us incredibly positive things about what He intends for us to enjoy in this regard.

Thirdly in 1 Corinthians 7, God's view of sex is that it's an act of serving one another. It is an act of serving one another while the world says serve me. In that Ephesians 5 passage, Paul called us, remember, to be filled with the spirit. He called for wives to be in submission to their husbands as unto the Lord. He called for husbands, as we saw last week, to love their wives the way Christ loved the church. Here in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul says meet each other's sexual needs. Do not deprive each other because you are to be serving one another, not approaching this with the attitude that says no you serve me. It been my observation that when a couple values and nurtures intimacy in their marriage relationship and when that happens, sex is really not a big issue in their marriage. When intimacy is not nurtured and valued, sex becomes a very big issue in that marriage and it tends to touch every other part of their marriage because it is a violation of 1 Corinthians 7. God intends for us to give ourselves to each other in the context of this marriage relationship. Not to do so is to open our marriage to things that are going to be harmful and is obviously in disobedience to what God has said.

So, guys, you are to serve your wives in this matter of your sexual relationship and that means that you need to overcome a laziness of spirit and a laziness of heart that says I don't really need to pursue her the way I used to. The lessons, those special encounters, those interactions that may have been a part of your earlier relationship. It

means you need to stop putting oppressive expectations on your wife in this regard. Sadly, many of those expectations come out of pornography. I have talked with Christian couples, as I have said before, in which it is simply understood that what he's viewing is supposed to now be translated into the bedroom. It is just bringing unrealistic expectations. It is bringing something that the world has put forward in a very common, in a very physical level only, rather than viewing it as something sacred and special and holy. It is wrong.

I suppose for the ladies there is the message of not being self-protective, of realizing and understanding that your body is a garden. That's the way Song of Solomon describes it. It is a beautiful picture. You are not to be a walled fortress but should be a garden for your husband to enjoy, not to use sex to control, to manipulate, or to reward. It's an exchange of two people understanding that God has given us something incredibly sacred, incredibly special, symbolic of something that goes far beyond the physical nature of that intimacy. He wants us to share that, to enjoy that with each other.

What's at stake in this whole thing? What's at stake here? To me, there are three things at stake. Three things. The Word, the gospel, and the glory of God. Right where we started this series. It seems to me, these are the things that are at stake. From the beginning, God intended for marriage to be a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. He intended for marriage to be a picture of the gospel. Husbands, love your wives the way Christ loved the church. Wives, submit to your husbands as unto the Lord. There is this picture in marriage of Christ and the church. Marriage exists to tell the story of the gospel. Marriage is a picture of Jesus and His relationship to His bride, which is us.

In this, we have this display of the gospel of God that is brought to us by the Word of God that is all to be for the glory of God. That, my friends, is why marriage is under assault. If you were the enemy and you knew that God created in the garden Adam and Eve and He created them knowing full well that He was going to invest in that relationship, something that at that point was still a mystery that would be unveiled in Ephesians 5, that it was, in fact, all of that time to be a picture of Christ's love for the church, what would you do to undermine that message? You would plan an all-out

assault on every level in any way you could because you know that the very Word of God, the very gospel of God, and the very glory of God are wrapped up in the marriage relationship. That is exactly what the enemy has done.

As we look at the landscape in the United States today, it looks as if he is prevailing on every front, doesn't it? The re-definition of marriage is not simply born out of a disenfranchised group within our culture. It is born out of the very attack of Satan on the institution of marriage. It is an attack against the gospel of Christ and the Word of God. For us, our marriage is to be a display of the glory, the grace, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So what do we take away today? Let's take this. Only in trusting Christ, can you give yourself fully to another. The desires of your heart must first be satisfied in Christ. You can't be satisfied at the deepest level of your soul by your husband or your wife. That's reserved for Christ alone. When your husband and your wife are not fulfilling and not measuring up and not doing all that God has called them to do, you come back again to the fact that you are drawing from Christ first and foremost everything that you need. He is sufficient. He is our sustainer. He is the only one who can fully satisfy. We walk by faith with full intent of giving glory to God, to honoring His word, and to portraying the gospel in our marriage and in our life.