

**Built by the Lord: Fall Family Focus**  
**“The Institution of Marriage”**

Franklin Church of Christ  
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October 16, 2005  
PM Worship

**Introduction:**

Do you remember what your relationship with your spouse was like before you got married? For many it was great. You couldn't wait to see your fiancé. You spent hours just talking to one another. Perhaps you had argued a time or two, but they always apologized and you knew their strengths far outweighed their weaknesses. Besides, they loved you so much, you knew that any issues they had would be quickly resolved once you got married. You were in love. You were sure that the Eagles were right when they said, "When we're hungry, love will keep us alive." Like Sonny and Cher, you were sure that no matter what happened, everything would be alright because, "I got you, babe." But, Sonny and Cher didn't last and now that you are married to that old flame, things have flattened out. They haven't fixed all those problems from before your marriage. Further, they don't seem that interested in loving you enough to do anything about it. Not only that, you have come to learn that your spouse, who once seemed so intriguing, is now just too different from you. They don't see things the way you do. What is important to you is not important to them. You don't always want to spend hours talking to your spouse because that seems to be when the fights begin. Even if there aren't the fights, there just isn't the spark. Your spouse can walk through the room and not once do you get butterflies in your stomach. According to our world, you have fallen out of love. It just isn't the same. You begin to wonder if you made a mistake. Maybe it was never really love after all. Like Van Halen said, "When its love...it lasts forever." Isn't it amazing how much of our subconscious view of love and marriage comes from music and the movies? We must learn, however, that the cultural view of love and marriage that comes from mainstream entertainment and modern pop-psychology is not God's view of marriage. According to **Malachi 2:14-16**, marriage is not something you try to see how it fits. Marriage is not like buying a new car or house; something to get into until you are ready for a bigger and better model. Marriage is not like a career move; something to be involved in as long as it pays off. Marriage is a covenant, a lifetime agreement. When we recognize that the fundamental basis for God's institution of marriage is the covenant, we recognize that marriage is not about what our culture believes it is. Notice four contrasts between the popular view of marriage and God's view of marriage. When we align our view with God's, our marriages will be stronger and last longer.

**Discussion:**

- I. Marriage is for holiness, not happiness.
  - A. Perhaps the problem we face in modern marriages is as old as our nation. We have all been taught since our school days to "hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" (Declaration of Independence). The pursuit of happiness is an unalienable right in our American culture. I am sure the founding fathers meant well by this statement. I am also sure they had no idea to what end this concept would be taken. Today, happiness seems to be the end all be all of pursuits. In our society, if something does not make us happy, that is reason enough to quit, whether we are talking about a career, social club, church or even marriage. Many a married person has dispensed with God's revealed word and when questioned responded, "God wants me to be happy."
  - B. We, however, need to remember that the statement that the pursuit of happiness is our unalienable right came from the Declaration of Independence and not the Bible. Thomas Jefferson wrote those words, not God. While the Bible clearly teaches that happiness, blessedness and joy are the natural by-products of a faithful life, not one verse in the Bible teaches that God's goal for us is happiness. Nor is there a single verse that says the overarching pursuit of our life is the pursuit of happiness. God is not so concerned with pursuing happiness as He is with pursuing holiness. In **I Peter 1:14-16**, God demonstrates that our overarching pursuit is to be holy as God is holy. Paradoxically, as we achieve holiness, we will gain happiness. But in that pursuit we will experience numerous things that are not joyful in the moment. For instance, **Psalms 94:12** says the man whom the Lord chastens is blessed or happy. Yet **Hebrews 12:11** says for the moment, discipline seems not to be joyful. Happiness is the ultimate result, even though to get there we may go through numerous unhappy moments.

- C. We recognize Paul's statement about marriage in **I Corinthians 7:1-2**. God has provided marriage to help us avoid immorality. I do not want us to think that marriage is simply about sexual purity, however, this passage clearly demonstrates that God's goal for marriage is our holiness, not our happiness. As seen above, holiness in marriage is what will ultimately lead to happiness in marriage even though there may be unhappy moments on the journey. Here is the key, if we make happiness our pursuit, we will most surely miss it and lose out on holiness as well. On the other hand, if we pursue holiness, we will achieve it and in the end be given happiness as well.
- II. Marriage is based on promise, not pleasure.
- A. In like manner, many people enter marriage for pleasure's sake. By pleasure here, I mean some get married to enjoy whatever pleases them. As long as the marriage provides whatever pleases them, they will stick with it. However, once marriage has lost its pleasure, they are ready to move on.
- B. We must remember that marriage is a covenant. Look again at **Malachi 2:13-16**. Our marriage is based on our promise, not on our pleasure. I want to be careful here and not act as though marriage is based upon the traditional vows our Western culture has developed over the years. I do not want us to believe we can simply change the wording of our modern marriage vows to get out of this issue. Rather, we need to understand that our traditional vows ("for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to have and to hold from this day forward until death do us part") are based on God's view of marriage as set forth in scripture. Marriage is an agreement in which two people promise to endure with one another, help one another, grow with one another and be there as a companion for one another. Let's face it, days will come when your spouse will not be all that pleasing. There are aspects of marriage that are simply not that pleasurable. But through all of that, the covenant of your promise and vow continues on.
- C. You must base your marriage on that promise you made before God, not on whether or not you are pleased with your marriage. Recall God's teaching about vows in **Ecclesiastes 5:4-7**. It is better that you never vow your hand in marriage, than to vow your hand and then some day say to God, "It was a mistake. It no longer pleases me." We must be people of our word and keep our marriage promises.
- III. Marriage is about personal responsibility, not personal rights.
- A. Sadly, most people enter marriage thinking about what they can get out of it. I have never once had a person stop by my office to ask me to help them because they are not giving enough to their marriage and want to improve. However, I have had several who have stopped by to get me to help them because they are not getting enough out of their marriage.
- B. **Ephesians 5:22-33** is almost always misread today. In fact, I believe that many of our modern problems are the result of the misuse of this passage. Male dominated western culture used this passage to justify inequity between the genders. Instead of reading this passage with its truest intent, men used this passage to assert their rights and their desires. As time has gone on, women, recognizing the inequity, have thrown off the shackles of a male dominant society and have equally lost the meaning in this chapter.
- C. I fully recognize that this passage demonstrates that a husband is the leader in the family, the head of the home. I also fully recognize that this passage demonstrates that a wife is to be submissive to the husband. But what has been lost is that this passage never once talks about the rights of either of the spouses. Instead it talks about responsibilities. The wife's responsibility is to be submissive to her husband, respecting her husband. The husband's responsibility is to lead his wife, loving her, sacrificing himself for her just as Jesus has done for the church.
- D. Marriage is about personal responsibility, not personal rights. The next time you find yourself complaining about what you deserve in marriage, you need to remember that God never once told you what you deserve in marriage, He has only told you what you are to do in marriage.
- IV. Marriage is held together by commitment, not fulfillment.
- A. We are a feelings driven society. As such, we have learned to glorify emotionalism, coming up with a vocabulary that ennobles our feelings. Therefore, as we try to make our views of what marriage is all about seem more noble, we talk about fulfillment. We ask is your marriage fulfill-

ing? Is your relationship with you husband or your wife meaningful, enriching and fulfilling? After all, how dreadful it would be if we are feeling unfulfilled in our marriages. But in the end, this is just a fancy way of saying I am not getting what I want out of marriage. This is nothing more than dressed up selfishness. Pop-psychology would suggest that when we make marriages meaningful, enriching and fulfilling, then they will last.

- B. Marriage is held together, however, not by our personal fulfillment, but by our personal commitment. The reality is, if we enter marriage with a weak state of commitment, the marriage is less likely to last. If we enter marriage thinking, as long as I am personally fulfilled I will stay, we are more likely to leave. Let's face it, nothing rides a perpetual high of fulfillment and meaningfulness. Read the **Psalms** and learn that even a deep relationship with God has highs and lows. How much more our relationship with our spouse. However, if we enter marriage with a sense of commitment, we are more likely to make it last.
- C. We must remember what Jesus taught in **Matthew 19:3-9**. Jesus was asked if divorce was lawful for any cause. While His response was wordier, it amounted to this—"No." Marriage is a union forged by God. Man is not supposed to separate what God has joined together. If they do separate it, they are sinning. Further, if they do separate what God has joined together and then marry another, not only was the divorce a sin, the newly married couple is actually committing adultery. God expects commitment in marriage, no matter how fulfilled we are. In this passage, God allows for one exception. For all the possibilities that we might bring up to end a marriage, God allowed for one lawful reason to end your commitment in marriage. If your spouse commits sexual immorality, then apparently the divorce is lawful and the remarriage is equally lawful. However, the general rule is simply this—get married and stay married until death parts you. When you have this kind of commitment, knowing that you have to figure out how to get along or just be miserable all your life, you can work out many problems and issues. Marriages are held together by commitment. How committed are you?

### **Conclusion:**

I understand, the picture presented here is far different from the one described around the water fountain at work or in the locker room at the gym. Modern culture praises and pursues happiness, pleasure, rights and fulfillment. We, however, are to be different from the world regarding our entire lives, including marriage (**Romans 12:2**). We must praise and pursue holiness, our promises, our responsibilities and keeping our commitment. This is the kind of marriage God instituted. As was written all the way back in **Genesis 2:24**, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." God instituted this marriage and we must pursue it God's way.