

Practice of Marriage

1. Intro: Problem of marriage

- We've been looking at the topic of Love, Sex and Marriage
- At the beginning of the series we looked at God's good pattern for marriage which is
 - the public, permanent and physical union between two equal but different and interdependent people, that is ordered
- However, human sinfulness means this pattern has been fractured
 - Lust, pornography, sex outside marriage, rape, adultery, same-sex activity, prostitution
- But human sinfulness has not just messed up our sexuality, its messed our relationships
 - That day in the garden, Adam and Eve's relationship changed and it changed marriage forever
 - Before they were naked and unashamed
 - Now they were ashamed and covering themselves
 - No longer able to
 - fully trust each other
 - be totally vulnerable with each other
 - They were defensive, guarded and suspicious
- And part of God's curse of humanity for their rebellion against him was their relationship would be fractured
 - Genesis 3:16 - *Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you*
 - Meaning, there will be this power struggle between man and woman as they seek to dominate and manipulate one another
- Every marriage ... in every generation, culture and era has been hard work ever since
 - NO marriage is easy
 - Every marriage has its challenges

- Because when you bring two sinful adults together ... you're guaranteed to have an imperfect marriage
- As Denis de Rougemont says
 - *"why should two neurotic, selfish, immature people suddenly become angels when they fall in love?"*
- Now that doesn't mean marriage is a lost cause
 - Marriage is still a wonderful gift from God to be enjoyed and be blessing to those who enter into it
 - Despite the increasing rates of divorce and growing pessimism about marriage in our modern world ... most people still seek to and end up getting married
- If this is all true ... we need help
- We need a pattern for marriage we can follow and practice so that our marriage may be healthy, loving and mutually fulfilling
- We need guidance, we need wisdom and we need a model to follow if we're going to make our marriage work
- And it's not surprising, seeing as God is the creator of all things that he gives us such a model for marriage that can redeem the fractured nature of marriage that we experience today
- If you want to grow and strengthen your marriage
- If your marriage is struggling
- If you want to redeem and restore a broken marriage
 - God gives us the greatest wisdom and ultimate pattern for marriage that we can apply ... whatever the circumstances of your marriage
- This morning we're going to be turning to Ephesians 5 where we see that model for marriage outlined
- I want to say before we get into the details that I am aware that this passage is highly controversial and the cause of great pain for many women

- Because this passage has been used by some men to justify domestic violence against women ... and even just to read and hear these words is difficult for some women
- And I'm going to be dealing with that issue very strongly shortly

- So this morning we are going to look at
 - The pattern for marriage – how the gospel is the perfect model for us to follow
 - The pain of marriage – the things that undermine a healthy marriage
 - The practice of marriage – how we can live out that pattern for marriage in our daily lives

2. Pattern of marriage

- The pattern for marriage the Bible gives us is outlined in Eph 5:22-33
 - In these verses we see Jesus is portrayed as the groom and the bride is the church
 - The marriage between Jesus and the church is the model marriage because
 - Jesus sacrificially lays down his life for the church
 - And the church submits to Jesus
- And Paul makes it clear here in Eph 5 that Christian marriages are to be modelled on Jesus marriage to the church

- What does that look like in reality?
- See it there in v33
 - Husbands must love his wife
 - Wives must respect her husband

Husbands love your wives

- Husbands ... your duty is to love your wife

- That seems obvious ... but it's the nature of the love that we really need to pay attention to
 - Paul spells that out in v25-28
 - Husbands are to love their wife like Christ love the church

- How did Christ love the church?
 - v25 – he gave himself up for her
 - Jesus put aside
 - his own ambitions
 - his own desires
 - his own preferences
 - his own feelings
 - In order to come to earth go to the cross and lay down his life as a sacrifice of atonement for our sin
 - It was the ultimate act of service and love

- And this is what we husbands are to imitate in the way that we love our wife

- Your role in your marriage is to, like Jesus, sacrificially put aside
 - Your own ambitions
 - Your own desires
 - Your own preferences
 - Your own feelings

- You won't get that unless you understand the loving sacrifice Christ made for you

- There's another way husbands are called upon to love their wife ... and that's to lead them
 - v23 - *the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church*

- Husbands ... God has given you the responsibility for leading your wife as you serve God together¹

¹ Grounded in creation order - Man was created first; Man takes the initiative to forsake his family; Man is given responsibility to name the animals ... that is, to name something, is to exercise authority over it; In v18, we see the woman was made as a helper **for** the man; In chapter 3:9 when A & E have sinned it's man that God comes

- That DOESN'T mean you make all the decisions OR
- Your wife has no say in the marriage or household
- You are to be the spiritual leaders of the home
 - You are the one who is to take the initiative with our wife as you serve God together
 - You're the one who ought to ensure our family gets to church each week
 - You're the one who ought to initiate prayer & bible reading with our wife & kids
 - You're the one who is to ensure our family gives generously to Christian ministry
- Don't leave these things for your wife to do ...
- Husbands ... this is the practice of marriage
 - sacrificially love your wife; and
 - lead her as you serve God together

Wives respect your husbands

- Wives ... v33 tells you to respect your husbands
- This is the way God has hard wired men
 - Most men need to feel respected by their wife more than they need to be loved
 - Not that they're indifferent to love ... but respect is the thing makes them tick
- Again these verses shows the wife what that looks like
 - v22-24 ²² *Wives, submit to your husband's as to the Lord. ... Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands*
- The idea of women submitting to their husbands is not a popular idea in our society today and even in our churches ...
- When some people read this they think it means a wife has to be

looking for because he's the head of the marital relationship; Later in 3:20 Adam named his wife Eve ... as Adam did with the animals. So we see order within the marriage relationship has been established by God. And so it is the man's responsibility to lead his wife, take care of her and show the initiative

- scurrying around as a cowering servant
- seen not heard
- doing everything she is told
- fetching the man his beer and remote control so he can watch the footy
- while she is forced to pick up after him and do all the jobs around the home
- But Christian submission is not like that
 - Wives are not meant to be made subject to or forced into submission
 - A wife's submission to her husband is **voluntarily** for the sake of order
- If you think about it ... submission is a not foreign concept
 - We submit to others in all types of ways each and every day
 - We submit to our bosses, teachers, other drivers, police officers and our government
- Submission to others for the sake of order and because of their authority is good thing > otherwise you just get chaos
- Even better than that is to see that submission is actually grounded in the nature of our God
 - God is a relational God > F, S & HS all relate perfectly with one another ... and yet there is order within the Trinity
 - Father sends the Son, both F & S send the HS
 - Son listens to the Father and does only what the Father tells him
 - Role of the HS is to point people to Jesus
 - Submission amongst equals is intrinsic to who God is
- Just as Jesus willingly, voluntarily and joyfully submitted to the Father
- Just as the church willingly, voluntarily and joyfully submits to Jesus

- so the wife submits to her husband
- It's never a forced submission
 - nowhere is the husband commanded to ensure his wife submits to him
- But neither is a wife's submission conditional on his love of her
- Wives are to submit to their husband because he is to lead his family
 - This is the order and pattern God has put in place

3. Pain of marriage

- Because we are sinful ... and we bring that sinfulness to our marriages ... it and means our marriages are often filled with pain
- There are many things that make marriage painful and hard work
 - Busyness of life
 - Past hurts
 - Recurring disappointment
 - Unresolved hurts
 - Being absent (physically or emotionally)
 - Destructive ways of relating
 - Criticism
 - Stonewalling
 - Contempt
 - Defensiveness
- Now I'd love to spend more time here ... because this is where most marriages are struggling
- However, in the context of
 - our Love, Sex and Marriage series
 - yesterday being International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women ...

- I want to focus on two issues that don't get talked about, but undermine and destroy God's good pattern for marriage – pornography and DV

Pornography

- Last week at our men's breakfast, MBJ gave us the cold hard facts about the destructive nature of pornography on individuals, relationships and society
- The statistics are frightening
 - Average age of viewing hard core porn is 11½ years of age
 - Conservatively, 50% of adult men and 30% of women regularly view pornography
 - 93% teen boys and 52% teen girls regularly watch porn
- What's the problem?
 - Causes chemical release in brain and body that is the same as taking drugs
 - Over time it becomes addictive and like drugs requires more and more extreme versions of porn to create the same high
 - Research shows that because of the plasticity of the brain, the neural pathways develop and strengthen so that porn becomes the normal way for understanding
 - Sex
 - Women and how they are treated
- Use of porn often starts early as a teenager ... so that by the time one enters into marriage ... these warped views of sex, women and relationships carry into the marriage which undermine and ruin marriages
- How?
 - Men want / expect their wives to behave like the women in porn films
 - This includes mimicking the violent nature of what they see on the screens in the bedroom

- Emotional disconnection during sex as the porn user is either not aroused by their spouse or is thinking about porn while having sex
- In the Matthew 5 Jesus says when a man looks at a woman lustfully he is committing adultery with her in his heart
 - Every time a spouse views pornography they are committing adultery
 - For porn addicts, this is often several times a day!
- Of course if the spouse catches the other viewing porn ... it's no wonder it causes
 - Huge levels of mistrust and anger
 - Emotional disconnection
 - From there the marriage begins to break down
- If you are consuming porn ...
 - You need to repent and do something about it
 - It is destroying you, your marriage and it is undermining your faith
- I want to suggest that later today ... each of you ask your spouse – “when is the last time you viewed pornography?”
 - And for your sake and your marriage sake ... it's in your interest to answer that honestly
 - Because once you've exposed the sin and brought it into the light, you can't conceal and hide it anymore
 - So as painful as it is ... you'll be forced to deal with it ... and that's what needs to happen
- What are the next steps?
 - Cut off all access to porn > software will help with this
 - Get an accountability partner
 - Get help

- Above all ... get back into God's word
 - Because what a porn user most needs is to remind themselves afresh of the gospel

- What is the gospel?
 - Gospel is that you are more sinful than you would ever dare to admit, but in Christ you are more loved than could ever imagine
 - And as you come to understand the goodness, love and grace of God to us in Christ ... you begin to see that its only in Christ that we will ever be fulfilled, satisfied and loved
 - And that looking for all that in pornography is like drinking water from the toilet bowl
 - It's never satisfying, never fulfilling, never gives you the love you crave ... all it does is leave you with a bad taste in the mouth

Domestic Violence

- The other issue that undermines and destroys marriages is domestic violence
- DV has many forms including
 - Physical
 - hitting, choking, hair pulling etc
 - Emotional
 - Blaming the victim everything
 - Comparing victim with others to undermine self-esteem
 - Withdrawing, not communicating
 - Verbal
 - Swearing
 - Belittling > public or private
 - Attacks on intelligence, sexuality, body image, capacity
 - Financial
 - Controlling the money
 - No shared ownership of house

- Social
 - Isolation from friends and family
 - Restricted use of car, phone
 - Needing permission to go out and meet with friends
- Sexual
 - Forced or unwanted sex / sexual activity without consent
 - Causing pain in sex
 - Forcing to watch explicit material, have sex with others etc
- Spiritual
 - Denial or misuse of religious beliefs or practices
 - Using scriptures to justify abusive behaviour or force unwanted behaviour
- While DV can be perpetrated by both women as well as men... 95% of offenders are male
 - DV against men tends to be emotional / psychological
 - DV against women tends to be physical, verbal and sexual ... plus others
- This is because DV is a result of perceived gender inequality and a power imbalance within a relationship
 - Because of the power imbalance between men and women, sadly many women are powerless to do anything about it
- This is a huge issue in Australia
 - DV happens in Australia every 2 mins
 - Over 650 times a day, every day of the year
 - It happens in every type of household and every region across Australia
- And our churches aren't immune from it either
- Journalist Julia Baird was written on this extensively lately on ABC website, exposing the prevalence of DV within Christian churches and laying the blame at the teaching of the Bible and

in particular this teaching we have looked at today from Ephesians 5

- Only this week she published another article detailing numerous harrowing accounts of women who have suffered physical, emotional, financial, spiritual and sexual abuse ... I am ashamed to say ... at the hands of their clergy husbands
- Many of the accounts of Christian women who are victims of DV tell how their husbands quote from the Bible and passages like Ephesians 5 to justify their abusive behaviour
- So let me say very clearly ... for a man to
 - tell his wife that she must obey him and submit to his sexual fantasies ...
 - verbally or physically abuse her when she disagrees with him or does something that it how he wants it done
 - and justify that behaviour based the Bible's teaching on headship and submission in marriage
- Is wicked ... and is an total twisting of the scriptures
- There is absolutely no justification for a husband to act abusively towards his wife and claim he has the authority and right to do so from the Bible
- It's a complete inversion of the passage which says a husband is to sacrificially LOVE his wife
 - Men - that's your only command
 - You are not told to tell, force, or coerce your wife to submit to you
 - You're job is to love her and care for her and cherish her
- The reason I want to speak to strongly against this issue is because, in trying to teach a biblical view of marriage, many pastors, like myself, have failed to teach what it is NOT like

- In addition, victims of abuse are now very courageously speaking up about the DV they have experienced, and so we are becoming increasingly aware of the issue within our churches as well as our culture
- Sadly for many women they feel powerless to do anything about it
- Might be because
 - they have nowhere else to go or no ability to earn money
 - they're afraid of the repercussions for themselves or their kids
- And tragically, when they do pick up the courage to speak up ... their concerns and issues are often dismissed ... especially when the perpetrator is a church going man
 - To our shame, there are too many stories of women raising their concerns with church pastors, elders and friends ... and who are not taken seriously

Application

- Three groups need to speak to
- Firstly ... perpetrators of DV
 - If you are in anyway abusing your wife – physically, verbally, financially, emotionally, sexually, socially, or spiritually...
 - You need to know it is wrong and it must stop immediately
 - I urge you to speak to me or a trusted friend who can help you and keep you accountable
 - You need to repent to your wife and seek her forgiveness
 - I urge you to seek counselling to help you work out what's the underlying issue that's manifesting itself in this behaviour
 - Finally, you need to see afresh the loving, sacrificial nature of Christ's death for you in the gospel ... for this is going to be the thing that changes your heart and gives you the right model for marriage to follow

- Secondly ... to the church
- You might think much of this doesn't apply to you because while you don't have the perfect marriage ... its going okay
 - But just to make sure ... later today ask your spouse another honest question
 - "Have I ever threatened, abused or caused you to feel unsafe at any point in our marriage?"
 - If the answer is yes ... you will need to work through that with humility, grace and truth
- For most of you DV won't be an issue ... however this issue continues to apply to you
- Because as a church / family / community ... we have a responsibility to look out for, address and combat DV
- It starts with listening to and believing those who share with you their abuse
 - The worst thing we can do is to ignore, dismiss, or minimise the problem
 - Victims of DV are physically and emotionally vulnerable and they need to know that those they confide in can be trusted and will care for them
- So when someone to bring it to our attention
 - We need to take responsibility and be the community and family that Jesus calls us to be
 - We need to care for them, encourage them to take action, seek safety, and when necessary involve the police
- Something else we need to do ... that's teaching our kids and especially our boys about how we think of and behave towards girls
 - A lot of our beliefs about how boys and girls, women and men are formed in childhood
 - Gender stereotypes and unequal power between men and women are the most important underlying causes of DV

- Therefore all of us need to
 - Say No to attitudes, stereotypes, practices and behaviours that support gender inequality and violence
 - Call out sexist attitudes
 - Speak out if you hear excuses for violence or victim blaming
 - Re-enforce that violence is never an option or a solution

- Thirdly ... to the victims
- Let me be clear ... you should NEVER be forced to submit to your husband where he is abusing you in any way
- That is not a biblical view of marriage

- In addition, if myself or anyone at this church has failed to listen to, believe or support you in your circumstances – I am sorry
 - I hope today shows you that we are now more ready to be there for you and help you

- If you need to talk, want help, are looking for support ... this church is here to offer that to you
 - We won't judge you > we will love you and care for you
 - We won't minimise the issue > we will listen to and believe you
 - We won't insist you stay > we will help to feel and be safe

- We're not experts in DV, but we know there are great resources and services that can care for and support those experiencing abuse
 - Through her pastoral care studies at MAC, Jocelyn Woodford has received some training on this issue
 - She is aware of the services and support networks that are available to those in this situation
 - You can also speak to me as your pastor

- As Christians we want all marriages to flourish

- We want all marriages to be a reflection of the gospel
 - The loving sacrifice of Christ for his church
 - The loving submission of the church to Christ
- And where possible ... that includes seeing broken and fractured marriages restored
- Therefore any couple whose marriage is floundering I would encourage counselling, transformation, repentance and forgiveness with the aim of moving towards loving, humble reconciliation and restoration

- However, where someone is the victim of DV ... the best thing will often be for them to separate to ensure they (and their children) are safe
- And while reconciliation (in time) will always be the aim ... in some circumstances, this may not be possible and the victim would not be bound to remain married²

4. Practice of marriage

- How are we going to have healthy marriages that flourish where both husband and wife are by nature sinful, selfish and self-centered?
- We need a model for marriage that we can practice
- And that model is the selfless, loving, sacrifice of Jesus Christ who lay down his life for his church

- Now the Bible doesn't give us lots of detailed instructions as to what the looks like
 - God gives us the principles which we are to apply to own marriage and context
 - And in way ... I don't want to get into details ... because I want you to go away today committed to living out marriages to be a reflection of the gospel

² 1 Cor 7:15 – such a man is behaving like an unbeliever and has (metaphorically) abandoned his wife therefore she is not bound to remain married to him

- The loving sacrifice of Christ for his church
- The loving submission of the church to Christ
- When husbands and wives, together ... look to Jesus and seek to imitate the gospel in their marriage ... the practice of marriage will sort itself out

- Because as you and I look to Christ and what he did for you and I ... it equips and empowers us embrace gender equality
 - For Christ died for all ... boys and girls, men and women
 - All are equally sinners in need of saving ... all are equally loved by Christ
 - Therefore a marriage centred on Christ will mean there's no room for gender inequality

- Likewise in a marriage modelled on Jesus, there's no place for misuse of power ... for as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus has more power than you or I can imagine
 - Yet he gave up his power ... he put aside his influence ... he let go of his authority ... in order to give himself up for you and I

- This is what we are commanded to imitate in our marriage
- Brothers ...
 - Love your wife
 - Lay down your life for her
 - That is how you lead her
- Sisters, respect your husband
- And as we do ... may our marriages be ones that point us all to the ultimate marriage we all share in with Christ as our groom and we as his bride ... celebrating at the marriage feast for eternity

PRAY

- **Resources**

- Books

- Meaning of Marriage
- Love and Respect
- Safe Haven Marriage

- Counselling

- See website, see me

- DV

- See Joce, Stu, White Ribbon, DV apps

- Porn

- Covenant Eyes
- Capture by better vision