

Lesson 2:

Marriage and Honor

I. Introduction

Dr. Kelly Flanagan describes three kinds of marriages:¹

A. **The Competitive Marriage:** In this marriage both spouses are in competition with each other for superiority. Husbands and wives can be armed with a vast arsenal of weapons, ranging from fists to words to silence.

1. Over what do husbands and wives typically compete?
2. In this kind of marriage, what are the respective goals of the husband and the wife? What is their objective and why?
3. What is the long-term prognosis for a competitive marriage?
4. How can you tell if you have a competitive marriage?

B. **The Dominant Marriage:** In this marriage there are clearly established roles: One spouse is dominant and always gets his or her way. The other spouse is always expected to yield to the dominant party. The winner always wins, and the loser always loses.

1. Why might a dominant marriage appear to work well?
2. What motivates each party? What does each hope to gain from the arrangement?
3. What is the long-term prognosis of the dominant marriage? Why?
4. How can you tell if you have a dominant marriage?

¹ <http://drkellyflanagan.com/2012/03/02/marriage-is-for-losers/>

C. **The Lose/Lose Marriage:** The goal of this marriage is not personal victory, but the flourishing of the other party, even at a cost to oneself. Though not perfect, in this marriage both parties strive to be the one to give the most dignity, strength, and esteem to the other.

1. What motivates each person in the lose/lose marriage?

2. What is the long-term prognosis for the lose/lose marriage?

In Lesson 1 we learned that the purpose of marriage is to glorify God. Our own sin makes this quest difficult, as we continually seek to exalt and elevate ourselves in place of God. There is no relationship where this is more apparent than a marriage. In this lesson, we will see that the key to having a God-glorifying marriage is for each partner to continually repent of his own thirst for glory and seek to honor the other instead.

II. The Commands to Honor

A. The Command to All Believers:

1. Romans 12:10

Context: Romans is an intensely theological book written to help Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome to live at peace with one another. Paul starts by rehearsing the work of God in their lives to make them one with Him, sending His Son to suffer and die so that Jews and Gentiles alike may be redeemed from the bondage of sin. Now, in Chapter 12, Paul begins to transition from the *indicative* (what is true of us) to the *imperative* (what we are to do in response). Now that he has described our great salvation, He gives instructions for how we must live out our salvation with lives worthy of God (12:1-2). This includes a life of self-sacrifice and love, including the command of Romans 12:10:

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

- a. What is honor, and what does it mean to show honor?

Note: To honor is to show respect and reverence. It is to esteem the priorities and position of the object of honor. To show honor is to display deference and respect.

- b. What does it look like to outdo one another in showing honor? How does this command contrast with the usual way people relate to each other?
- c. Why is it more important to God that we show honor to other people as opposed to receiving honor from others?
- d. What are some practical ways we can show honor to one another? In contrast, what are some ways we show *dishonor* to one another?
- e. How would this command work itself out in a marriage?
- f. Why do many husbands and wives struggle with this command?

2. Philippians 2:3

In Philippians 1:27-30 Paul calls upon the church to live in a manner worthy of their citizenship in Heaven, emphasizing the special importance of unity. But how are sinners to live in harmony with one another?

2:3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

- a. What negative and positive command does Paul give in **verse 3**?
- b. How do the commands in **verse 3** contrast with the normal way humans relate to each other?
- c. Does this passage teach that others are more gifted, valuable, and essential to the ministry? Why or why not? (cf. **1 Cor. 12:28-31**)
- d. Why doesn't Paul qualify this command? In other words, why doesn't he say "count elders as more important than yourselves"?

e. What character traits are essential to carrying out this command (see **vv. 3, 5**)?

f. What does this look like in a marriage?

B. How Husbands are to Honor: 1 Peter 3:7:

In the context, Peter adjures women to submit to their husbands—especially the rotten ones—as an act of faith and trust in the Lord. Not one to let the husbands off the hook, Peter goes on to give them the following command:

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives 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.

1. In what sense are women the “weaker vessel”? How do many men respond to this reality (cf. Col. 3:19)?
2. Why does Peter command husbands to show honor to their wives as “weaker vessels”? How can men sometimes respond to the “weakness” of their wives?
3. What rationale does Peter provide for showing women honor?
4. Why can it be difficult for men to show honor to their wives?
5. What does it look like for husbands to show honor to their wives in marriage?

C. How Wives are to Honor: Ephesians 5:33

In the context, Paul unveils that marriage is a picture of Christ’s relationship with the church. Both husbands and wives should strive to emulate this relationship before a watching world.

Ephesians 5:33 ***However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.***

1. What role does Paul assign to husbands and wives?
2. The word for “respect” can also be translated “fear.” What is the difference between wives being *afraid* of their husbands versus *respecting* their husbands?

Note: The term “respect” is literally translated “fear.” This conveys a stronger meaning than mere respect. While it is possible to respect someone and still disobey, “fear” does not allow for disobedience. This is not say that the motivation is terror, but reverence.

3. According to the following passage, what should drive all calls to submission within the church?

Ephesians 5:21 ***submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.***

Note: ***Ephesians 5:21*** is a general command to submit to those to whom you are obligated. These relationships will be defined in the teaching to follow. Such obedience flows from the command to be filled with the Spirit.

4. Why should a wife respect her husband even if he is not worthy of respect?
5. What does it look like for a wife so show respect to her husband in marriage?

III. How to Build Honor

Honoring one another is a command given to all Christians, as well as a unique command given to husbands and wives. Such honoring is good for the soul. It requires the Christian to renounce all claims of self glory, and generously lavish their spouse with honor and esteem – even at their own expense. This sounds good in theory, but can be difficult in practice, especially if years of bitterness, competition, and self-worship have fossilized a frosty relationship. In such a marriage, how can a husband and wife break out of this rut and learn to honor one another?

- A. Appreciate the Differences:

1. According to the following passage, why do you have the traits that you have?

Psalm 139:14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

2. God made you. He crafted your body, assigned your gender, and even created your personality. While such traits have been tainted by the fall, they will remain with you in the resurrection. Otherwise, we wouldn't recognize anyone in heaven! If this is true of you, it is also true of your spouse. How can this truth help us give honor to our spouse?
3. In what ways are women different from men, and why is this a good thing? (Remember the woman's unique role assigned in the creation mandate of Gen. 1:28.)
4. Conversely, in what ways are men different from women, and why is this a good thing?
5. Why do we tend to despise differences in other people instead of appreciate them?
6. When someone is bent on his own glory, how does he regard those different from him and why?

B. Value Wisdom:

Susan is an immensely talented woman. She is articulate, organized, well-read, self-disciplined, and executes tasks with excellence. If she was not a stay-at-home mother, she would certainly rise to the top of any company of her choosing. Susan married her high school sweetheart, Bob. While in High School he had dreams of playing college football until a knee injury changed his destiny. Not much of a student, he barely graduated from high school, and eventually got employment on the assembly line of a local factory.

1. From a worldly perspective, who deserves more honor and why?

2. If Susan listened to the world's assessment of Bob, how might she be tempted to treat him?
3. If Bob believed the world's assessment of himself and of Susan, how could this impact the way he treats Susan?
4. What would be the wise way for the couple to treat each other? In Bob's case, how could seeing Susan's gifts as an asset rather than a threat impact his leadership in the marriage?
5. Why must Susan repent of any tendency to despise Bob for his inferior gifts?

Proverbs 14:1 The wisest of women builds her house, but folly with her own hands tears it down.

C. Gain Understanding:

1 Pet. 3:7 Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way

1. What would happen if you traded places with your spouse for a week? Husbands, how would you handle your wife's responsibilities? Wives, how would you handle your husband's responsibilities?
2. How might this exercise help you to show honor to one another?
3. Why is it helpful to focus on your spouse's difficulties instead of deficiencies?
4. Why is this commandment directed specifically to husbands? What does this tell you about their natural tendencies?

D. Give Thanks:

Genesis 2:18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

1. Why did God create Eve? How would she bless him?
2. How should husbands respond to such a gift?

1 Corinthians 1:4 ***I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus,***

3. How can seeing your spouse (especially your wife) as a blessing from God lead you to show honor and respect?
4. What does it say about a person if she can't give thanks for her spouse?
5. How can the knowledge of what we really deserve help cultivate a thankful attitude? (Cf. Eph. 2:1-3)

E. Remember the Effects of the Fall:

On his way home from work, Mike can barely contain his excitement. Sheila has already shipped the kids off to Grandma's. Tonight he and his wife will go to their favorite restaurant, watch a romantic movie at home, and then... who knows? But when he walks through the door, rather than meeting him with a kiss, Sheila is lying on the couch, massaging her temples. She is utterly exhausted and has a headache.

1. How might Mike be tempted to respond to this? Why?
2. Why would it be important to remember the effects of the Fall before reacting?
3. How can Mike show honor to his wife in this situation?

IV. Thought Questions

- A. How would you respond to the argument, “A marriage where both parties honor each other seems to undo God’s design for the husband to lead his wife”?
- B. Why do many husbands and wives struggle to give honor to their spouses?
- C. Why are many husbands and wives embarrassed by their spouses?
- D. How would the quest to show each other honor enhance a marriage?
- E. What are some practical ways to show honor?
- F. After going through this lesson, Kathy resolves to begin showing her husband honor. She does, and he loves it. However, he has not made them same commitment to show her honor. Frustrated by his lack of response, she comes to you for counsel. What do you tell her?

V. Conclusion

A God-glorifying marriage God requires two people who refuse to glorify themselves. Those who generously heap honor upon others, actually worship God with their efforts. They demonstrate that they truly believe the teaching of our Lord that ***‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’*** (Acts 20:35). But what is the blessing?

As Bryan Chapell says in his book Each for the Other, *Husbands require the support and influence of wives. The more capable the wife, the stronger and more appropriate will be her aid. The man who understands this divine design for his own development delights to build up the woman who makes him more able to be what God wants. He recognizes that the regard he gives his wife defines and develops him. Real men respect women (p. 53).*

And, in the same way, stronger husbands will lead to stronger women.

God’s economy is not a zero-sum game. The more we give, the more we get. Humbly giving honor to your spouse not only strengthens your spouse, but strengthens you as well. They may not reciprocate the honor, but God will. In the words of James 4:6, ***But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”***

