

REIGNING GRACE AND THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP

INTRODUCTION

Most people are ill-equipped to enter into covenant with another individual who would become their spouse. Promises made with good intentions leave hearts empty. Failed expectations dash the frustrated and discouraged from rising above their circumstances and embracing the hope that rests firmly in Christ.

Historically, Americans lived in a context where cultural taboos against divorce and positive support for the family contributed to longevity in marriage and a determination to “work it out.” Today in our culture, such taboos and positive support for the family have been significantly undermined and continue to deteriorate.

George Barna notes how, “Born again Christians are just as likely to get divorced as are non-born again adults. Overall, 33% of all born again individuals who have been married have gone through a divorce, which is statistically identical to the 34% incidence among non-born again adults.”¹

If this is true, then what difference does a profession of faith in Christ Jesus make? Does Jesus Christ really matter? **It is my firm conviction that Christ does matter.** The problem does not lie with Christ but with our erroneous understanding as to what forms the basis for the Christian life, especially in the relationship of marriage.

We have forsaken the foundation of the Christian life and have recklessly cast ourselves into the abyss without securing the only means of deliverance. Many people have relationships that resemble a lifeless plastic plant, not rooted in anything of substance. A real plant pulsates with life because it is embedded in soil. Given consistent light, nutrients, and water, it will grow. The real plant can get dirty, its leaves do die, it does demand sunshine and water and sometimes you have to cut off a branch, but it will grow and it is alive. In order for our lives and our relationships to live and grow, they must be firmly rooted in the soil of who Christ is, what He has done, and who His people are in Him.

Often pre-marital and marriage conflict “counseling” focuses on what has been done and should be done. Such counseling reduces the

“problems” in marriage to a list of what to do and not to do. Such “direction” is shallow and mechanical. It is very much like the plastic plant noted earlier. It might look good, but there is no life behind it. Unfortunately, Christian “counseling” can be as anemic as its secular counterpart. It is the premise of this study that all relationships, and especially that of marriage, must first be firmly rooted in the truth of Jesus Christ before any attempt is made to look at the descriptions of marriage in the New Testament. All the descriptive commands of the New Testament are always preceded by the reality of who Christ is, what He has done, and who His people are in Him.

To look at the commands of Scripture in the absence of positional truth is to have a plastic plant. When we look at the commands of Scripture embedded in positional truth, than we have a command that lives.

When we look at the marriage passages in the New Testament (Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-22), we envision our marriage in this way. What we read, however, are the results of our relationship with Jesus Christ. The marriage passages are the consequences of this initial and foundational relationship. Unfortunately, we want the results of positional truth without understanding positional truth. **We want a Christian marriage without Christ.** We cannot have the fruit of

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positional truth without the tree. **It is the premise of this short study that our traditional way of viewing marriage is dysfunctional.** It is only as we take the marriage relationship and bury it into Christ and His cross-work that this relationship and all relationships will “grow.” You are invited to enter into the journey of a lifetime. You are invited to see Him. **There is hope, healing, and wholeness in any and all relationships and it is found in Christ and in Christ alone.**

Once the seed of the relationship has been embedded into the soil of positional truth, there are necessary activities to see the plant continue in growing to full maturation. Watering, weeding, sunshine, and trimming are all a part of the process of training, nurturing, and cultivating toward maturity. The following study is part of the overall process to assist in general health. Yet it must not be forgotten that “Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain” (Ps. 127:1). This same principle is found in 1 Corinthians 3:6 and 7 where it states that “God was causing the growth” and “God who causes the growth.”

The areas to follow do not guarantee anything except that in any relationship these are the kinds of things that should be discussed for the purpose of having a “healthy plant.” This study will not instruct you in how to “fix” relational problems. It will not give direction regarding finances, communication, intimacy, parenting, or any other issue that causes conflict. These are secondary studies, but they cannot precede this foundational study. The purpose of this study is to serve as a reminder of the truths that spiritually sustain a person in the midst of relational difficulties, regardless of whether or not there is any resolution. These truths serve as a firm anchor during the difficult work of conflict resolution so that the individual does not lose sight of God in the midst of the storm. In Christ, hope and contentment can be found, even if relational problems are never resolved. This is often forgotten when embroiled in an emotional situation. Our reaction to conflict is directly related to our attitude and perspective. The intent of this study is to align our perspective with God’s and thereby find rest in Him, regardless of our circumstances or emotional state.

Throughout this study we will be using the term, “Positional Truth.” At the heart of this idea is that of “position.” Before an individual believes in the Lord Jesus Christ for their deliverance from sin and to God, the Bible describes them as being **positionally in Adam**, in sin. After an individual believes in the Lord Jesus Christ for their deliverance from sin and to God, the Bible describes them as being **positionally in Christ**, in righteousness. Once this great transfer takes place God no longer sees you **in sin**, but **in Christ**. Thus, in His eyes, the individual is as holy, right, and accepted as Jesus Christ is before the Father. So . . . when we speak of “positional truth” we are simply referring to a believer’s righteous standing before the Father because of **being in Christ**.

As you study these areas, feel free to comment, interact, discuss and, I trust, grow. May God use these short studies to renew our minds for the purpose of life transformation inside of the marriage relationship.

¹ <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=170>