

*What God Has Brought Together*

Matthew 19:1-

May 18, 2008

Rev. Curtis J. Young

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So far in our series on marriage, we have asked the question, “Why Marry?”, to examine God’s purpose for our marriages. We have asked, “Who Is The Right One?”, to identify an often overlooked essential in choosing a spouse.

This morning I ask, “What is Marriage?” If you don’t know what something is, you can’t know its value or nature or what to do with it.

I don’t think it is safe any more to assume we all know what marriage is. As we saw this week in California, the simple truth of what marriage is being denied as if it is worth nothing.

In my garage I have two garage door openers from Sears. They’re in their boxes. The only reason I know they’re garage door openers is because the boxes say so, and there is a picture that shows what they look like when they’re installed. I opened up one of those boxes three years ago. It didn’t look like a garage door opener to me. It looked like a miserable way to spend four days off, which is why both of them are in still in the box.

What is marriage? Even if we see what Scripture tells us marriage is, it still takes a lot of figuring out. But at least when we know what it is, we know how it’s designed to function and what it does. If our marriage is needs reassembling, then we can know that, and have confidence to that when we do, it will serve its purpose.

Every verse in the Bible that tells us what marriage is, quotes from Genesis 2. The Bible is very repetitive, and that means emphatic about marriage. The noun that is used again and again is “one.” The verb that is used is translated “joined” or “united.”

It means to glued together. When Jesus said, “What God has joined together,” he used an emphatic form of the verb. What God has “superglued”. It can only be shattered or torn apart. It cannot be dissolved. I want to us to think about that. Jesus is not talking about the commitment we bring to marriage but to the effect of being married.

Scripture never calls a husband and wife a couple, or a pair, or a set but one flesh. It never refers to the physical act of marriage as two people mating but as their knowing each other. The Bible never refers to marriage as a merger of interests or desires, but as a union of flesh with flesh.

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Genesis says, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

One flesh. Please don't understand this superficially. Jesus didn't. When Jesus summarized our Genesis verse, he asked, "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one." Notice, Jesus dropped the word flesh. They are one.

Most of what is visible or physical in Genesis 2 is clearly to be taken as signs of a greater spiritual reality and truth that is invisible. The breath of life, the tree of life, the river of life, the life-sustaining garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The woman is a sign from God to Adam of his love and help for Adam.

Scripture repeats in Genesis 2:18 and 20, that God determined to give Adam a helper suitable for him. Everywhere else in the Old Testament this verb is used of God as man's true help. It is never used in a positive way of people helping each other. When God created Eve, she was help from God incarnate. She was love from God incarnate.

To speak of the images used in Genesis 2 as signs is to say to little. This was no literary device. The whole creation is significant. What is seen and temporal points to what is unseen and eternal. The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made..."

So, too, in Genesis 2 and in reality, the physical union of husband and wife is the sign of a spiritual union. In this way, the marital union is like a sacrament. We take bread and wine as signs of our Lord's real, spiritual presence with us. In marriage, husband and wife join physically as the sign of a real, spiritual union between them.

Some very intelligent people, like the California Supreme Court, see this as so much religious mumbo jumbo. But it is not. The one flesh union of husband and wife is utterly unique, and the real, spiritual union for which it serves as sign, so that to partake of the sign is to partake of the substance.

The physical union of man and woman, of husband and wife is remarkably unique. Genesis 2 ends by saying, "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."

They were naked. Examine the animal kingdom and how creatures mate to reproduce. None of them are naked. They are incapable of being naked. They can't remove their scales, or fur, or leathery hide, or coat of hair. Only man and woman can stand naked before each other.

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This isn't necessary to reproduce. There is no Darwinian explanation for nakedness. The presence of bare flesh puts our species at a unique disadvantage, makes us vulnerable to injury, to death from variations in temperature and weather.

There is only one advantage to being naked. Our flesh is sensitive, and extremely responsive to touch. The physical contact when flesh unites with flesh is breathtaking in its extent. If skin could meld with skin, married couples would all be conjoined, not at the hip or head or any place, but as entirely as they are entirely exposed.

Mating in the animal world involves the most limited exposure necessary. For husband and wife, loving each other involves the most physical contact possible.

There is something else about us as man and woman that makes the union of husband and wife unique, and shows its remarkable significance. God so designed Eve in relation to Adam that when they came together as husband and wife, they found themselves gazing into each other's eyes, looking at each other's faces, the part of their being that is most expressive of the personal, spiritual self. Their faces can touch. With their faces, they caress each other. They communicate love soul to soul.

No other creatures mate face to face. Many have no faces at all.

A third feature of the union of husband and wife distinguishes it. When other creatures unite sexually, it is exclusively for the purpose of mating, of producing offspring. They come together infrequently, at the highest point of fertility in their reproductive cycle.

Animals mate to reproduce. God created us uniquely. The union of flesh and flesh is far richer. Husband and wife unite frequently for the joy and pleasure of uniting together, of loving each other, of confirming the union they share.

To deny that the physical union of man and woman is this unique and this significant is foolish. To disregard it, to conduct yourself as if Scripture is not true, leads to exploitation, humiliation, and the destruction of persons.

C.S. Lewis has written, when man takes what God gives as a blessing and corrupts it, it acquires by character of a curse. What is intended to expand and enrich life diminishes and ruins it.

So what is this union called marriage like, this participation in the core of another's being? To what shall we compare it?

Since marriage is described throughout the Bible in terms of Genesis 2, let's return there, and ask this question: The relationship between Adam and Eve, what was it modeled after? Or, before God created Eve, what relationship did Adam have that was like the relationship he would have with Eve?

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Was it his relationship with frogs or newts or goats? No, for Adam no suitable helper was found. The KJV says that no helpmate “meet” for him was found.

The relationship was modeled after God’s relationship with Adam. God had made Adam in his image, so Adam might fully know God, and experience God’s own life in his. When God warned Adam that consequence of his sin would be death with its terrible separation, it is quite clear that what was essential to their relationship was their shared life in a true spiritual union.

So God had made man in his image. He had not made any creature in Adam’s image. That is essentially what he did when he formed Eve. She was no less created in God’s image than Adam as Scripture from Genesis 1 affirms. Still, she was created so that Adam and Eve could know a true spiritual union with each other as God and Adam knew.

So, if you diagram marriage as God created it, it does consist of a triangle, not a line. Adam and Eve each share true spiritual union with God, and they share true spiritual union with each other. Think of the power of a praying and worshipping husband and wife! You understand, because of what marriage is, that God commands that if Christians marry, they marry only in the Lord.

And so in Scripture, it comes as no surprise that God cast himself as the husband of Israel, as the Adam for his Eve. It comes as no surprise that God characterized idolatry as adultery.

It comes as no surprise that in the New Testament Jesus cast himself as the bridegroom for his church, the bride. He took on a body to give his body for us and in the mystery of the Lord’s Supper, we can say, to give his body to us. And we are told he regards us as so joined to him that he regards us as part of his body, and our bodies as part of his.

In Ephesians 5, as Paul drew near the end of his instruction for husbands and wives, he quoted Genesis 2, but listen to what he added: “for this reason a man will leave his father and other and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.”

We look at husband and wife and naturally think of their physical union and secondarily, if at all, of this being the sign of a far more profound spiritual union. Yet it is true.

We think of Christ and the believer and naturally think of their spiritual union and secondarily, if at all, of this including a true physical union. Yet this also is true. At the resurrection, we will understand it fully.

Because the husband and wife was modeled after the union of God and man in Genesis, as we proceed through the Bible, the union of God and man is then illustrated in the union of husband and wife. As we proceed still further (Eph. 5), the union of husband and wife is then explained in terms once more of God and man, Christ and the Church. Finally in Revelation we have come full circle, to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, the sign of human marriage is gone forever. The marriage of Christ and his church remain forever with inexpressible joy.

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This is the truth about marriage as God created it, man and woman united together in one flesh -- that is to guide us. Not the norms of our culture. Not what you are taught in sex education. Not what you see in the movies. "What God has united together, let no one put asunder."