Genesis and the Institution of Marriage 061922

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Today we continue on in Genesis with a “meat and potatoes” teaching, the second of five Divine Institutions we will highlight as basic building blocks of societal organization. Last week, we went over the first organizational piece that God put in place for us, which is Responsible Labor. We were created for work. We are to do our very best, evaluate it, and pronounce a judgment over our own work. Not someone else’s, by the way. We are accountable to God for our own work, as is everyone else. We saw last week how this is the way God designed for us to be, and we also took a brief look at how things are when we don’t hold a high regard for work. Society begins to break down on a core-level.

SLIDE 1

 As a means of setting this up, we examined the concept of institutions versus conventions. Institutions are essential, unchangeable frameworks of order. Conventions are agreed upon by the majority of people and are highly fluid or subject to change. God has established institutions by His Word, and mankind has disregarded these institutions by conventionalizing them and changing them into what man thinks they should be. This practice always manifests in perversion and dysfunction, and results in disorder and confusion.

SLIDE 2

 The institution of Responsible labor is the context for the next Divine Institution – Marriage. God established the institutions up in order. First there is an individual directive, then the formation of the couple. This means that the marriage directive or institution was given by God in a certain context, that of responsible labor. Marriage, or the partnership of marriage, is a necessary function of the commandment to be “fruitful, multiply, and have dominion.” If we try to make marriage a stand-alone arrangement by removing it from its context, there are consequences that alter the intended end result of order and stability, not only in the individual marriage unit, but then in society, since society is comprised of these individual units, or building blocks.

 We can never deviate from God’s design without negative consequences.

 So today we will examine marriage as established by God. Before we do this, however, we will observe how God made men and women comparable and complementary, but different and special. We will cover God’s rationale for marriage, His design for marriage, and how the Fall has affected marriage. In the end, we will reaffirm both Godly marriage and the redemptive, regenerative power of Jesus in reestablishing this institution in our lives.

 Please open your Bibles to Genesis chapter 2. At the point where our reading begins, God has made man and woman. He has specifically told us that He created them male and female, delineating biologically one kind from another. Adam and Eve are of the same substance (the earth) but different. We will see that they are complementary and equal in importance.

SLIDE 3

Let’s pick up the narrative in verse 26 of chapter 1:

**“Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” 27So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”**

We see a couple things when we look at these verses. To begin with, and as a reminder, we (humanity) were made in the image and likeness of God. ALL of us. If you have any feelings or attitudes of racism or prejudice, you can know that you’re on the wrong side of the fence. We are all made in the image and likeness of God.

Next we see that God created us male and female. Now, you may not like that, or you may be confused about which of those you are, but that doesn’t change the fact that God made you one or the another. There are anomalies. Some are born with a degree of each kind present in their genetic makeup. Approximately one half of a percent of the world population is born with clinically recognizable sexual or reproductive variations, of which the majority are unaware that these variances exist within them. I don’t know why God allows this, but He does. As for the remainder of the population, our sexual identity is as unquestionable as our age.

This begs the question, “Why?” Why did God make men and women? Why not just one kind that somehow reproduce themselves? God could have created us any way he chose to. His Divine Institution of marriage is central to the answer.

 Chapter 1 of Genesis is a general account of creation, and Chapter 2 serves as a more detailed description of those things God wanted us to pay special attention to. This is in keeping with what was a Hebrew literary tradition. There are not two separate and conflicting creation narratives. There is a broader and narrower focus in chapters 1 and 2 respectively.

SLIDE 4

We pick up the detailed account regarding Adam and Eve in chapter 2, verses 18-25.

Let’s read this together:

**“And the Lord God said, “*It is* not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” 19Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought *them* to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that *was* its name. 20So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. 21And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. 22Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.23And Adam said:**

**“This *is* now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man.”**

**24Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.”**

Before we even get started with the explanation of this passage we must consider our view of God. Is He big? He is not making up this stuff as things move along or progress. There are no contingencies here. Sometimes the Hebrew literary tradition can make it seem so**,** but this is never the case. Just remember that there is a poetic manner of presentation that determined how some information was presented in the Hebrew.

Anyway, we see first that Adam was alone, and that God explained to us that this is not how it should be. God’s design is that we were made in His image and likeness. God exists in plurality as a Triune being, ever and always eternally in fellowship with Himself. He designed us to be the same way.

So Adam is alone and has been tasked with being fruitful, multiplying, and having dominion. This is one way we can know that God is not making this up as He goes. In verse 15 we see that Adam is given the job of categorizing and naming everything. Now, remember, this is not like having one of us do it. Adam was prototypical, meaning that he had considerably more to work with intellectually than we do. The highest IQ ever recorded has been 230, give or take a point. Adam’s score would have blown 230 out of the water. Also, there were not as many variations in kinds as there are nowadays, so it’s not as though he had to name thousands of types of birds, for instance.

Adam spent a good deal of time on day six naming things, and there is no doubt that God allowed Adam to see his need for companionship (he was alone), and for help (He had a lot of work to do).

God graciously met Adam’s need, while fulfilling the design and purpose that was in His mind all along. The first administration of anesthesia and the first surgery in history was performed in verse 21. In verse 22, God then took that part of Adam, and fashioned it into something different. He didn’t merely duplicate Adam. He took the same substance and made someone beautifully different but miraculously complementary with it.

The second part of verse 22 is so cool. God brought the woman to the man. In other words, God presented Adam with the most precious gift imaginable. God presented Adam, the first man, his BRIDE. Sound familiar? As Eve was God’s gift to Adam, so are we all God’s gift to His Son, Jesus. You know the old snarky question, “Who do you think you are, God’s gift to mankind?” Well, ladies, actually, yes, you are! And we are all as believers, God’s gift to Jesus.

Now let’s address something that some have found to be problematic with Genesis 2:18-20. The problem is this word, “helper.” Here, once again, we run the risk of falling into the trap of our western thinking. First off, we need to recognize the word “comparable” that follows “helper.” This word, “neghed” is also translated as “suitable or corresponding to, or equal to.” God is saying that Adam needed a complementary partner. Another male would not have been complementary and would not have been able to fulfill the purpose of multiplication. God’s plan was to stay true to His Trinitarian nature and create of the same substance or essence a “helper” that complemented Adam.

Now back to this word, “Helper.” We in the western world think of a helper as a kind of underling, or go-fer. Someone who takes orders and gets bossed around. Well, the Hebrew word used here is *ezer.* Ezer is used repeatedly by God in the Old Testament in reference to Himself. Ezer is often referred to as the help that comes from God, in other words, His Spirit. This is the helper that Jesus sent when He ascended to heaven. God uses this holy word “ezer” in reference to Eve. So if anyone wants to cast women in some sort of second-class, subservient light, you might want to rethink that position. God has assigned women a holy role. Additionally, men and women are designed to be comparable, or complementary. This is the Biblical model set up by God. The next verses deepen this concept.

We were created to be complete in our fellowship with God, but we were separated. Through belief and trust in Jesus, we are reconciled to God and restored to that position of completeness.

God, as a God of order and harmony, has given marriage between one man and one woman as a picture of this relationship between humanity and Himself.

SLIDE 5

Verses 21-22 of chapter 2 deepen the context for marriage. Marriage is the reason there are two sexes, or genders. **“And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place. 22Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.”**

As I said earlier, this first surgery in human history divided mankind so the two could be brought back together. The union of the two would create one entity. This husband and wife entity could then replicate many times over, each time resulting in a male or female, who would themselves bind to a complementary partner and replicate. Naturally the result of this process is multiplication, as God commanded. This is far more than a practical process or arrangement, however. It is a beautiful mirror of God’s relationship with His people. It is symbiotic and perfect. Aside from God showing us how we should relate to Him through our human relationships, the union between a man and a woman is a function of God’s love for us and grace toward us. Adam was alone, was allowed to see his need as he worked to fulfill God’s directive, and God gave him a complementary and equal helper. The complementary nature of the relationship meant that the two could harmonize and join together physically, emotionally, and spiritually in order to create one entity.

Again, the picture we see in verse 22 of the LORD literally bringing Eve to Adam is exemplified by the modern-day practice of a father giving away his daughter to her groom.

SLIDE 6

In response to this gift, Adam is filled with joy, which is expressed in verse 23.

**“And Adam said:**

**“This *is* now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man.”**

Biblical scholars have noted that verse 23 in the original Hebrew is presented as a poetic song. Adam is literally singing a song of praise to God for giving Eve to him. He recognizes that they are one, and that she completes him.

SLIDE 7

Following this verse of praise, the narrative continues with God giving the straightforward, only legitimate definition of marriage. Verse 24 reads:

**“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”**

With this simple yet profound statement, God established the institution of marriage. This perfect arrangement is given pre-fall. The statement is absolute. One man. One woman. They shall disconnect from their previous family ties and establish their own unit. They are reunited in every respect and physically, they become one flesh. Think here of the DNA code of each one of their children. Exactly half from mother, and half from father. It’s incredible.

When I say the statement is absolute, I mean it is all inclusive and final. There is no room for interpretation or deviation from this template. It is what it is. I don’t feel the need to address any deviation or creative interpretation, since the statement does not allow for one.

SLIDE 8

Just in case anyone wants to cast doubt on this simple directive by saying it is outdated and relating to the Old Testament only, God, through the words of Jesus, repeats Himself in Matthew 19:4-6.

**“And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made *them* at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ 5and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? 6So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”**

Not only does Jesus verify the Genesis definition, He warns us not to mess with it. As God’s word, it is holy and not to be altered.

SLIDE 9

Finally, God gives us in Genesis 2:25 a picture of perfection in marriage. The man and wife are naked and unashamed. This means that they don’t yet know sin, and that they are laid bare before one another and before God, and there is nothing to hide. They are in perfect synchronization, trust, and harmony. Man, Woman, and God. A perfect Triune alliance.

SLIDE 10

Unfortunately, things are no longer perfect. Everything and everyone is corrupted and fallen. All of us. Marriage has been a casualty of sin ever since sin existed. God told Eve, “**Your desire *shall be* for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”**

Just as we are all born at odds with God, husbands and wives are now at odds with one another. It is a case of ME over WE. The self has become supreme. The beautiful partnership that God intended is beset by strife and rivalry, domination and submission. The equal, complementary roles are now subject to inequity and control. The good news is that through these relationships we are shown our need for God’s grace and reconciliation.

Today’s reality is that God’s template for marriage is under attack, from without and within. It is a Divine institution, but it has been conventionalized and redefined, subjected to man’s wisdom, which is always counter to God’s wisdom. From within, it has been trivialized and cheapened. People have failed to see marriage through God’s eyes, or perhaps only one partner has been committed to God’s will for their marriage.

The context for marriage has also been altered. Most see it as a feelings-based arrangement that is hopefully lasting, but subject to a change in feeling or circumstance. Very few people see marriage as a holy alliance that functions to join a man and woman into one for the purpose of fulfilling God’s directive to be fruitful, multiply and have dominion.

So, maybe you are hearing this sermon regarding the way a perfect marriage is supposed to be, and you’re feeling either uncomfortable or self-righteous, depending on how things have gone in your life regarding marriage. In either case, stop. If you are feeling self-righteous, please understand that if you have a good marriage and it has been your only marriage, it is only by the unbelievable grace of God. If you have a good marriage that may not be your first marriage, Thank the Lord for second chances and for His work in you and your spouse’s life.

If your experience with marriage has been a total mess, there is no condemnation in Christ. Commit your past to Him and move forward in His grace and provision. All of us have sinned. None of us are righteous.

Here is what matters: Are you right now, at this moment, submitted to the will of God? Are you putting on the new and taking off the old? Are you abiding or living in Christ? Are you a one woman man or a one man woman? Are you totally committed to upholding His will and word in your life, including your marital situation moving forward? Have you repented of your wrongdoing in the past? Do you trust Jesus with your future? Are you allowing the Holy Spirit to help you and are you yielding to Him? If so, stop living in the past and trying to resurrect the old you.

I am asking you as your pastor, please commit to God’s singular design for marriage, from now on, regardless of your current situation. Give your past, present and future to Jesus. Be willing to stand uncovered before almighty God.

SLIDE 11

In Revelation 21:5, Jesus said, “Behold, I make all things new.” He says this at the end of the age, when you are already in His presence. You know what that means? It is never too late to be made new. You and your marriage are not past saving. If you have trusted in Christ, it is already done. You are new. Walk in it.

Application

1. Know God’s definition of marriage (Genesis 2:18-25)
2. Uphold God’s definition of marriage (Matthew 19:6)
3. Practice God’s definition of marriage (James 1:22-25)