

Children's Talk and Sermon Notes
for Sunday, 23 August

Children's Talk: Two Become One

Today we are going to talk about marriage. Marriage is when a man and a woman love each other and decide that they want to spend the rest of their lives together, supporting each other, caring for each other, and raising a family together. This idea of marriage goes all the way back to the very first people the Lord created, Adam and Eve. At first, there was just one person, Adam. But God realized that Adam needed a partner, and He chose a very interesting way of creating that partner.

And Jehovah 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. Then the rib which Jehovah God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

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.”

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:21-24)

So God started with one person: Adam. Then He made a second person out of Adam: Eve. But then Adam said that for this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother, be joined to his wife, and become one flesh. That's describing marriage: when a man and woman start to work together as a husband and wife, it's like they are becoming one person.

Now this is a little strange. Think of your mom and your dad: they are two separate people, right? Sometimes they might even disagree or argue, sometimes they have different rules, one might say you can have a snack before dinner but the other says no. So Mom and Dad are definitely not the same person!

What then does the Lord mean that a husband and wife become one? They get to stay as individual people. But what happens is that their hearts and minds become more and more connected. They begin to love and care about the same things. When they talk about what matters and is important, they help each other come to the same conclusions. They have the same goals.

When a husband and wife work on this for a long time, for their whole lives, they can keep working on it even in heaven, forever! In fact, in heaven, husbands and wives are so connected, that from a distance they even look like one person! But even then, when you get closer, you would realize that they are two, a husband and wife who love each other deeply.

Now you, too, might someday, as an adult, get married. If you are very young, that might sound gross. But it's actually a really awesome thing, that the Lord wants for everyone. It's a chance to have a best friend, that is always there for you, who you get to become almost like one person with; and at the same time, you get to stay you, and even become a better you, to eternity.

Amen.

Relationships, Part 2: What God Has Joined Together

A Sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn

23 August, 2020

People get and stay married for all sorts of reasons, from basic economics to profoundly deep love. There are as many, and in fact more, reasons to get married as there are marriages. But underlying all these reasons is a truth that is not always apparent: that although each of us makes our relationships our own, it is the Lord, not us, who defines and shapes the core of those relationships.

As a caveat, I should mention the oddity of giving a sermon on marriage in spite of the fact that I am not married myself. I'm not really in a position to speak to the lived experience of marriage, and so I hope that those among you who are or have been married can take in what I'll be presenting with some understanding and realize that of course it will shift and alter as you apply it to your own, unique circumstances. As for those of us who are single, I still think this topic will be useful. It speaks to the reasons the Lord has made marriage, and preparation for it, a central part of life; and whether we achieve it here in this world or wait until a heavenly marriage after death, it is worth anticipating and looking forward to.

It would be interesting to do a little poll asking why people got married in the first place, or why they intend to get married in the future, and also whether those reasons still hold true. I imagine for many people the reasons have shifted over the years. I also imagine that it would be hard to pin down just one reason. No matter how deep two people's love is, there are also external factors too, some quite appropriate, some merely superficial. Among these reasons, in no particular order we might find tax benefits, true love, social and family pressure, long-term companionship, sexual desires, wanting to have a family, fear of being alone, it sounded fun, having the fairy-tale wedding, and so on. Maybe all, maybe none, of these play into your own thinking about marriage, whether you've gotten to that stage of life or not.

Yet for all that we have our reasons, marriage is not something that we solely get to define. Marriage is above all a spiritual relationship, instituted by God. When challenged by the Pharisees on when it was permissible to break the marriage covenant, Jesus responded with these words:

Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning "made them male and female," and 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"? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate. (Matthew 19:4-6)

What God has joined together, man cannot separate. We cannot impose our own reasons and purposes for marriage to suit ourselves and ignore the spiritual side of it.

So what is the spiritual side of marriage? How can we, whether married or single, tap into that spiritual side of things and put it into practice? The spiritual origin of marriage is described all the way back in the book of Genesis, with the creation of mankind. It is described first as a union, then a separation, and finally a reunion, of mankind.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; ..." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Genesis 1:26, 27)

Notice that at first man is spoken of as one, male and female both together. But then later there is a separation, in the description of Eve being built out of Adam's rib:

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. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

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."

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:21-24)

Neither of these descriptions of literal histories of the origin of mankind kind. Rather, they speak to a spiritual origin of humanity, and the spiritual union of men and women in marriage.

That spiritual union is what lies at the heart of marriage. It is a union of love and wisdom, or good and truth, between the two partners:

Male and female were created to be the very image of the marriage between good and truth. That is because the male was created to be an expression of the understanding of truth, thus a picture of truth, and the female was created to be an expression of the will of good, thus a picture of good, and implanted in both from their inmost beings is an inclination to conjunction into one (see above, no. 88) Thus the two together form a single image, which imitates the marriage model of good and truth. (*Married Love* §100)

Marriage is how the Lord brings together the spiritual love and wisdom of women and men and melds them into one united form.

So far everything I've said has been fairly abstract. In short, for all that we get married for all sorts of reasons, some shallow, some meaningful, some valid, some less so, marriage itself is about love and wisdom being brought together between two people. Which is cool, but it's not exactly easy to apply. I mean, if you're having marital troubles, and you go to a counsellor, and he says, "well duh, just do a better job of uniting your love and wisdom! Problem solved!" you would likely go away unsatisfied. Likewise, I imagine there are few people who yearn for marriage who put it in terms of not being able to wait to get to unite goodness and truth. This simply isn't how we talk about or experience marriage.

A more practical way of phrasing it, that might not at first appear to be the same thing at all, is to say that a married couple is building that deep spiritual marriage when they look to the Lord together and do what He teaches (ML 53). This is the work that fuses the goodness of one partner to the truth of the other. In looking to the Lord, a person acquires core principles of right and wrong, what matters and what does not, where their priorities should lie. In following His commandments a

person learns about life application, how to make truth shape their words and actions, how to change their behaviour to better serve others. Marriages work best when the principles that one partner has gathered from the Lord are joined to the applications supplied by the other partner.

Imagine a situation in which the one partner can see that their teenager is struggling with rules and pushing the boundaries. They want to help, but can't see how. The other partner then steps in with teachings from the Lord on the growth of a child into rationality, the need to honour freedom, and the role of parents in setting boundaries but still allowing flexibility. Together, they come to conclusions on how to help their teenage son. This is an example of goodness in one partner finding its truth in the other.

The inverse also happens, when one partner has a strong sense of what is right, but is struggling to apply it. Perhaps they see that something happening at work is wrong, and not ok, but they are not in a position to change it. In talking things over their spouse points out ways that they can still do the right thing within the confines of their responsibilities, and sees where they need to let go and where to remain firm. In this case the truth of the one partner has found its own goodness in in the other. Although this only shows two examples, marriages exist so that this kind of pairing can take place. It is one of the Lord's purposes in leading people to get married, even if many people might not consciously list it as a reason for being married.

Because this process, looking to the Lord together and doing what He teaches, is core to marriage, it can also be a source of discordance. What happens when the key religious values of the partners conflict? This is something that can perhaps be avoided before marrying someone by making sure your core spiritual values match. But even then, we do, and should, change and grow in our beliefs. What happens if the two partners do not grow together, but instead grow apart? Imagine making those same decisions from before, but without having a supportive partner to make them. Imagine, in trying to do what is best for a teenage son, having a partner who only suggests strategies that conflict with what you value. Imagine a partner who urges you to take actions that go against your principles to make things right at work.

I say imagine, but of course many people don't have to imagine, because you find yourself out of sync with your partner's core religious beliefs. Unfortunately, we cannot, and should not, force our beliefs onto our partners. What we can do is continue to adhere as best we can to the Lord's teachings, and maintain a friendly, kind home environment. By doing this we prepare for that deeper marriage that the Lord promises, whether it is with the person you are married to in this life or someone who is more spiritually compatible in the next. Just because the deeper marriage of good and truth has stalled from time to time does not mean you have to stop working on and growing in your own spiritual marriage.

At the end of the day, the same practices that strengthen a person's spiritual life will strengthen their marriage, things like reading the Word, prayer, repentance, integrity, doing good, and so on. There is a passage in the Teachings of the New Church that "the human inclination toward marriage goes hand in hand with religion at every step" (*Married Love* §80). That does not, however, invalidate all the other aspects of marriage. With faith in the Lord at the core, all the other reasons for being married to a person are strengthened and deepened. Something as external as wanting someone to have fun with, who laughs at your dumb jokes, is perfectly valid. So is wanting friendship and companionship, someone to go through life with,

someone who you can build a family with. We all have unique reasons for why we are married or for why we might look forward to marriage. Indeed, how people experience marriage, and in what ways they find enjoyment in it, are infinitely varied, so much so that we could not possibly cover all the aspects of it (*Married Love* §57, 69).

Yet the fact remains that it is the Lord who makes a marriage, no matter how varied: what God has joined together, let not man separate. When we, as single people or married, happily or unhappily, widowed or divorced, look to the Lord and keep his commandments, and strive to marry goodness and truth together, we are brought into true marriage love, a love that enriches and deepens all the unique variety of our own unique circumstances. *Amen.*