

GENESIS 2:18–24

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Smith

GOD'S GIFT OF MARRIAGE THE SECOND ESTATE

18 The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” 19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. 20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. 21 So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. 22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. 23 The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” 24 That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

The world God made on the first day did not much look like it does now; it was formless, it was wet, it was empty, and God gave it darkness and light. The darkness of night came and went, a new day dawned, and on the second day, God pulled the waters apart with a firm barrier between, and now there was sky and sea. Another night and another dawn, and God pulled the waters apart again and brought out the land, and filled it with trees, plants, and stones.

Then God gave light and dark some shape, and the sun, moon and stars were formed on the fourth day, to give light and to give a clock and a calendar to the crown of his creation, but the crown had not yet come. Then he threw flying creatures into the sky and poured fish and swimming things into the sea, and the world was almost ready.

On the sixth day, God brought out animals and creatures of all kinds on the land, and then he made the crown; then he made man. But after he gave the first man the first estate, which is the church, by giving him a command to obey and to show his faith, he also gave man a way to worship. And as Adam began to use his intelligence and to carry out his work of ruling over the animals, he named them for what they did and looked like. But as God showed the man all of the animals in their pairs and in their little families, they all had mates. But there was no mate, no suitable helper, for Adam. This wasn't a mistake on God's part, but a way of showing the man what he needed. In a gentle and loving way, God had to let this sinless man understand a little of loneliness and a longing, and then putting him into a deep sleep, still on the sixth day of the world's existence, God removed a rib from Adam and built another person, a mate, a helper, a woman.

As his suitable helper, she was suitable ■ socially, as a friend and companion, ■ physically, since two people can build or fix many things more easily than one, ■ psychologically and mentally,

with someone to talk to and build a language, grammar, idioms, music, poetry, humor, and other things that a man alone might never think of, ■ spiritually, since a good companion will be a partner in worship and the study and understanding of the word of God, ■ and sexually, since they are commanded to multiply their numbers. Before the fall, this was their duty, but after the fall, each partner in the marriage is also an antidote for the natural urges God gives. In animals, those urges come for the most part just once a year, and there is little or no love or tenderness in them. But in man, the urge to mate is constantly there in almost everyone, and so God has given us marriage as the correct outlet and antidote for one another's urges, but also to keep us together for life.

Adam's reaction to seeing this perfect and suitable helper was an outburst of emotion, gratitude, the desire to make a vow, and more. Seeing her, his language changes. Up to now, his vocabulary consisted of a growing list of names for creatures: Fish, bird, cow, horse, wolf, goat, giraffe, and so on. ■ But seeing her, verbs, comparatives, superlatives, adjectives, subordinate clauses, and more come pouring out as he composes not only sentences but poetry, and an oath!

His poem, "bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh," means that he knew where she came from, but also that she was the best part of him. They were bound together for life, he and the woman, and that is the pattern for marriage that God has given to us all. That is God's design for marriage: ■ a man and a woman will be bound together and faithful to one another for life. Adam makes a pun on the word for "male," which is *ish*, and he calls her "from the male," which is *ishah*, "woman."

There are many sins against marriage and God's plan for sex and companionship and raising children in our world. I could not even list them all in a single sermon, let alone counter them all with God's holy will. But when we remember the basics of God's plan for marriage: who we marry, how many we marry, and how long marriage should be, then maybe we find categories for the various sins against marriage that are given as examples in the Bible.

■ As for who, marriage is to be between a man and a woman. There are sins against this already in Genesis, in the account of Sodom and Gomorrah, and in the New Testament passages the explain that homosexuality and similar deviations from God's will are all sins. ■ As for how many, there are quite a few examples of bigamy and polygamy, marrying one or more spouses at the same time, but this is also seen when the unmarried have sex apart from marriage and begin to tally up what the ignorant and sinful call "partners," although that would have been the ideal word for what Eve and Adam were meant to be for one another. We have to be blatant about this when we teach our children, and I don't hide the fact that I teach them in Catechism: **"If you're not married to it, don't have sex with it."** This is also why pornography and sensual books and movies are sins against one's spouse, because they bring someone else into the sexual life of the married couple. And just because you haven't met your spouse, doesn't mean you can't sin

against that spouse with your body or be unfaithful to them. ■ And as for how long? God intended marriage to last a lifetime. It's true that God makes an exception because a sin against marriage like abuse or unfaithfulness can break a marriage. But God's plan was the lifetime plan.

Now, just because a government permits exceptions to all of these parts of God's will does not mean that for a Christian, they will be acceptable. After all, the government permits idolatry, but that doesn't make idolatry any less a sin in God's eyes.

What makes sins against marriage, sexual sins and sins of one's sexual lifestyle or sexual choices so difficult for a person, is that the fallen human nature will have urges that cause us to incline, to lean toward certain sins, and to fall into certain sins. And the more often one falls, the easier and more familiar the slope gets to be. It no longer seems like a sin.

But the sin against marriage that gets the least talk is the sin of cursing marriage itself. When someone says, "I'm going to try something else out for my body besides marriage, or before marriage," they're hitting Christ in the face, spitting at their Savior along with the Sanhedrin and the Roman Soldiers. "You don't know what you're talking about, Jesus." They don't care about government statistics that say that couples that live together before they get married are far, far more likely to get a divorce or to end their marriage or relationship in a more violent way.

So much hurt is possible. So much pain. So much loss. So much guilt. What is God's rage against these sins? God identifies better than some might think. When he describes idolatry, he uses the language of adultery, of unfaithfulness, and of promiscuity. God despises sexual sins just the same way he despises and rages against idolatry. There is no salvation for the idolator. And the adulterer? The one who spits in Jesus' eye and says, "My body and business is no business of yours?" The prophet says: "You love the wages of a prostitute? You will not remain in the Lord's land."^a Is an eternity of suffering worth a few minutes or a few years of so-so physical pleasure?

Think of Jesus facing off a mob of angry sinners: "If any of you is without sin, let him be first to throw a stone." But then, think of the repentant woman, terrified, admitting her guilt, not putting up any defense. "Has no one condemned you?" Jesus asked. "Then neither do I."

There is forgiveness, there is holiness to be restored. The sinner has only to say, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean," and Jesus responds: "You are clean! Be clean!"^b Oh, the joy and the release of having our sins lifted from us so that we are welcomed back into God's presence, into his arms, washed clean of our sins forever.

^a Hosea 9:1,3

^b Mark 1:40-41

So responding to God's love, love and promote God's plan for marriage. Don't give in when the sinful world wants you to act like they do. Be God's BILLBOARD for what Christian Marriage looks like. Be the example that the rest of us will always think of.

Husbands, when you talk about your wife anywhere, anywhere, in public or alone or in your prayers that only God can hear, let your wife be your Queen, the woman of your dreams, and never ever put her down. Romance her, date her, court her for the rest of your life.

Wives, love your husbands; adore them. Be the suitable helper God wants you to be, designed you to be. Talk about your husband in public or in private as the king of your world. Love him, cherish him, flirt with him, and don't let him go.

Folks who aren't married? Honor marriage. Revere it as the estate to aspire to. Never drive a wedge in anyone's marriage, but pray for them. Pray for each other.

And the peace of God... Amen.