

Genesis 2:18-25; Song of Songs; Ephesians 5:21-33

The Lord God said, “it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” (Genesis 2:18)

Just as families are from God for new life and love, paralleling God’s relationship with His children, so marriage is from God for help and wholeness, paralleling Christ’s covenant with His bride, the church. We are in a series on the family with today on marriage. And just as we acknowledged family hurts last week, we begin by acknowledging marriage hurts...hurt familiar to every person here. Yet God is a God of healing, help, and hope...a God who blesses... a God who covenants with us and guides us as we do so with another. The purpose of marriage (according to Genesis 2) is to provide friendship and partnership. Sometimes the term “helper” has been viewed as a way of minimizing the role of women, but we shouldn’t forget that the most common term for God the Holy Spirit is “helper.” In the Genesis account, the woman is made from Adam’s side (2:21) to be part of him...his completion.

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife...(2:24)

Marriage requires leaving before cleaving. The King James Version said for man “to leave” his parents “to cleave” to his wife. This is why at weddings we ask for the blessing of the parents. To love rightly you must separate in a healthy way from your family of origin to fully commit yourself to this new union. Parents, when you present your children in marriage, you are covenanting that you will not interfere with their new life as a family; you will not try to control their choices.

...and they will become one flesh. (2:24)

God’s design for oneness is through covenant. The man and woman were created to be naked with no shame and no secrets...physical, emotional, and spiritual intimacy. One flesh is intended to create a sharing of hearts, of spirits and of lives. In Christianity, one is a whole number...in Christ, we are made complete. Christians do not have to get married; in fact Paul commends singleness for those who wish to serve the Lord with no distractions (1 Corinthians 7:1). But if Christians are going to be married, then go for God’s goal for marriage. God’s goal is oneness. The oneness God has for 2 of His children making a covenant reflects the oneness Christ has with His bride, the church. The Apostle Paul called this ***“a profound mystery”*** (Ephesians 5:32).

A friend compared his and his wife’s commitment to the diamond in her ring. When they were getting engaged, his job was to get the diamond. At the time he was in college, trying to get the most “bling” he could. He found a small but pretty diamond worth more than his car. They put it in an envelope for him to take to the jeweler. As he walked out onto the streets of the city, he felt he had a neon sign on his forehead, “Mug this guy; he’s got a diamond in his pocket.” He drove it straight to the jeweler, who put it into a setting that held it secure. Once it was in the setting, he knew it was safe. When it was in the envelope, he was anxious about it. But once it was in the setting, it was safe. Love is a treasure worth more than we can possibly afford; it is a diamond. If the diamond is not protected, it is too easily lost or too easily taken from us. The diamond of love requires the setting of commitment. A God established commitment is a covenant. The New Testament was originally written in the Greek language which has three words that can be translated into the English word “love”.

First is the Greek word “eros”, from which we get the word erotic. It means physical, or sexual love. Christian marriage is all about oneness. And part of oneness, is sexual oneness. God invented sex. Adam and Even were naked and not ashamed (2:25), but the first thing they did after sinning was feel shame and cover up. Read The Song of Songs, sometimes called The Song of Solomon, an Old Testament account of a torrid romance. In poetic fashion, two lovers describe each others bodies and express their delight in anticipating their union. In the covenant of marriage, physical love is enjoyed without embarrassment. In chapter four the man describes the choice fruits of her body, comparing various parts of her as fruits of a lush garden, yet their love is a ***“walled garden,”*** (4:12)...meaning their relationship is exclusive.

An interesting aspect of The Song of Songs is the way that physical love nurtures what the Greeks called “philia”, or emotional love. Repeatedly the man refers to the woman as his “sister”, ***You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.*** The ancient Greeks idealized male friendship; but among Jews and Christians, they were convinced that healthy marriage results in deep companionship. Because men and women are wired different—the whole “men-are-from-Mars, women-are-from-Venus-thing”, married couples must work on communication - how to share and how to listen. But as God grows our relationships, a very special kind of “philia love” happens when husbands and wives begin to pray together; baring souls along with bodies.

Third is “agape” or sacrificial love. This is the aspect that is too-often missing from the expectation of marriage today. Marriage was made in heaven for having physical and emotional needs met, but also for creating a framework for caring and building up one another. Marriage requires sacrifice. Raising children requires great sacrifice. This is why God gives us agape.

In the New Testament, agape is most often used to describe God’s love for us, but in passages like Ephesians 5:21-33, it is used to describe marital love. ***Husbands, agape your wives, just as Christ agaped the church and gave himself up for her*** (5:25). Paul challenged men to go far beyond Jewish and pagan expectations of how men should treat their wives. This was radical stuff 2000 years ago. In that time women were viewed as a possession passed from her father to her husband. Yet Paul said, husbands ***love your wives as you love yourself...love her as Christ loves the church...***and wives, ***support your husband in ways that show your support for Christ*** (5:28,25,22). Christian marriages should thrive through the love received from Christ. This is why Paul begins the whole section saying ***Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*** (5:21). Mutual submission means mutual sacrifice. Neither submission nor sacrifice are popular terms...but they are about following Christ and about being one.

“Dancing With The Stars” is on TV right now. In it 2 equals try to be in step with each other as choreographed to the music. To me, dancing together is a helpful analogy for mutual submission. The music is life; the choreographer is Christ...and both work together for it to be a thing of beauty...with many missteps along the way...and a new song and dance next week.

This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church (5:32). Christian marriage is a covenant that reflects Christ’s relationship with the Church, His bride. It is a covenant through which God’s love flows and oneness – or communion – is known.