

God's Covenant with Male and Female
Genesis 1:26-29

Will you turn to Genesis 1 please? We're beginning a series of sermons called "marriage, celibacy, and bodies." It's really trying to answer, "what is at the core of marriage?" That's what we're trying to do – find out what the Bible puts at the core of marriage.

These sermons are not so we can have better marriages. They will help us have better marriages, but that's not why we're doing this. These sermons are not to correct what's wrong with marriage in our society, though some of that will happen too.

What does the Bible actually mean when it talks about marriage? That's what we're after, because sometimes we try to answer these other questions about marriage and we're still not clear what exactly the Bible calls "marriage."

Celibacy

If we're going to talk about marriage, then we have to talk about celibacy. We are believers because we heard the gospel, and we trusted in Christ. Three essential people at the beginning of the gospel were all celibate, possibly the three most important people at the beginning.

John the Baptist was the predicted forerunner, the first one to preach that the kingdom of God had arrived, and people should repent and be baptized. John was the initiator, the first to preach the gospel. He had huge impact on Judah, preparing it for Jesus.

Then Jesus of Nazareth appeared, God's anointed Son, made in every respect as we are, tempted in every respect as we are, weak in temptation, yet without sin. We look and long for his return. Thirdly, Paul the apostle, the greatest missionary ever, and the Bible's number one example of a follower of Christ. We know more about Paul's life than any other NT believer.

All three were celibates. They lived without marriage. What's more, Jesus and Paul both recommended it. Jesus agreed that it is better not to marry. And Paul advised it four or five times, just to make your life better. We can't really believe it, or don't like it, so we don't talk about it, but in this series we'll talk about it.

We have to, because there are many celibate believers in the church. And if John and Jesus and Paul were all celibates, it is obviously a good way to live. So we'll talk about celibacy as well, but not today.

Two Core Marriage Stories – Genesis 1 and 2

The Bible does not have one creation story, it has two creation stories, Gen 1 and Gen 2. These two stories together give us the Bible's essential picture of marriage. They are a little different from each other, and they work nicely as a pair. Today the first creation story in Gen 1.

In Matt 19, Pharisees asked Jesus about divorce. To explain divorce, Jesus taught them about marriage. That's important. They had *divorce* questions because they did not understand *marriage*, so Jesus began with *marriage*.

And to teach about *marriage*, Jesus took them to *the beginning*. Twice in Matt 19 Jesus mentions how it was at "the beginning," and he quotes from both Gen 1 and Gen 2 to teach them about marriage. Jesus did not do anything new with marriage, he based his marriage teaching solidly on Gen 1 and Gen 2. So as we understand Genesis 1 and 2, we also understand Jesus.

Why Did God Make People? Gen 1:26

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

Why people? To rule the earth and subdue it. The image and likeness of God in mankind includes this ability and responsibility. Humans are God's representatives on earth. He made it, and gives us the management of it. Right from the start, the earth needed a great deal of subduing and managing. The whole earth was *not* a garden.

The Two Human Essentials – Gen 1:27

*So God created mankind in his own image:
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

The last two lines here are deliberately parallel, and give us the two essential truths, two core truths about humans: *in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

The fundamental trait of all humans is that we are in the image and likeness of God. Verses 26-27 mention that several times. The first characteristic is the most important – all people are in the image and likeness of God. We all share that.

The second human essential gives us the fundamental difference between humans: male and female. The first essential, made in the image of God, joins all humans, the second essential, male and female, separates us and divides us.

Everything else about humans is secondary to these two. If you know these two things about the human race, you know the two most important things the Bible has to say about humans. All in the image of God, and divided into male and female.

God's Covenant with Male and Female – Gen 1:28-29

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Then God said, "I give you every plant ... for food.

God blesses people, he commands them, and he provides for them. This is how covenant with God always works. This is the first covenant, a solemn agreement: God will care for people, and people will serve him. Here it is a relational covenant, sort of parental: he blesses people and provides for them, and they obey and serve him.

God gives five commands to males and females: Be fruitful. Multiply. Fill the earth. Subdue it. Rule all the creatures. The first three are just different ways of saying the same thing: have children, have lots of children, fill the earth with people.

God created humans with one fundamental difference: either male or female. In order to keep the covenant, and obey God's commands, male and female have to come together. The essential separation into male and female is such that can unite, they are created to come together.

Imagine a crowd of single men and single women listening to God's words to them in our Scripture. Based on God's words, why would the men and women start looking at each other and getting together? Because they want God's blessing, and they want to eat. They want God's care, and the food he provides. To make this happen they will need to pair up, have babies, and raise them to be responsible people.

We don't think about marriage like this, but Genesis 1 does. It is pragmatic. If the men and women want God's blessing and they want food from him, they need to pair up with each other and have children and raise them. God made them separate, male and female; but in order to survive, they have to come together in a way that produces children, which means they really have to come together.

We talk about human creativity from Genesis 1 sometimes. Since God is the creator, and he made us in his image, we are creative as well. But there is only one human creativity that is really worthy of that label: when male and female humans come together, right together, they can create more males and females who are also in the image and likeness of God.

We can bring into the world males and females made in the image and likeness of God. God created us so we could create, we could fill the earth with males and females in the image and likeness of God. That's creativity.

And that's *bodies*, female and male *bodies* coming together. People don't make babies with a conversation and a handshake. A man's body and a woman's body come together intimately, and those two bodies uniting creates males and females in the image and likeness of God. Creativity.

Covenant between Male and Female.

So we come together to have children. Now we are talking about marriage. God wants many humans, but not just quantity. God needs responsible functioning people, who will get along in an orderly way, and not self-destruct. God wants people who will manage earth in a way that's good for the earth and good for people.

This means that the man and the woman must not just come together to make babies, but they must themselves covenant with each other, to provide a stable and nurturing place for their children, so their children will grow up and continue to bring order to the world.

In Genesis 1, we don't marry and covenant with each other because we love each other, or for any kind of mutual satisfaction, what we get from each other. We covenant with each other to have children and raise them well *because we want God's blessing and provision*. We marry because we are looking at God, and we want God to bless us and take care of us.

For his part, God wants to get something done. He wants earth managed and subdued, and he wants it done by us. Men and women covenant to receive God's blessing and provision.

Genesis 1 has a pragmatic view of these things, which does not please us. The rest of Scripture fills out this pragmatic view with the relational benefits and joys of both covenants. But these pragmatic essentials are not left behind, and we have forgotten them to our loss and sorrow.

I'm not sure any couples every actually married for this reason, which is okay, but in the big picture, this is how it works. So let's not forget it.

As a matter of fact, males and females have done a lot of what God wants. There are many people on earth, and people marry and raise families in all kinds of places on earth. This is good, this is what God wanted from the start.

Every ancient society had something called marriage. Joseph was sold as slave to Potiphar in Egypt. Potiphar was married, and there's a story that you know about Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Later Joseph in Egypt married the daughter of an Egyptian priest. Ancient Egypt was a very immoral place, but they still had weddings and they had marriage.

Genesis 1 was written for societies that already had weddings and marriages, and Genesis 1 was written to tell them and to tell us what marriage is really about.

Genesis 1 explains marriage between a man and a woman in such a way that other marriage options. In a different way we will see the same essentials in Genesis 2.

Conclusion

God for his part blesses us, and we for our part obey him by marrying to have babies and nurture them responsibly. This relationship has not changed, it is still in place as described in Genesis 1.

There have been some severe famines recently, due to drought and war and other factors. But the world still produces enough food every year to feed everyone adequately. We just don't distribute well. There's still enough food every year because God still blesses and provides food, and men and women all over the world still have children and raise them.

Our main question today was "what does the Bible teach about marriage in Genesis 1?" That we have seen.

Many people are not married, and we know from John and Jesus and Paul that this a godly way of living. Some couples marry but cannot have children, others marry but for different reasons are only able to have one or two. These things are fine, and they have always been true.

There's a sitcom around that's called "Children Ruin Everything." I've not watched it, but I've seen the ads. It is a bold title, and tells a nasty truth. In our society, adults want to have their own fulfilling lives, usually about career and money and holidays. Children are inconvenient because they are hard on careers, finances, and the holidays we prefer. We learn from society that real life is that part that's not with our children. But in Genesis 1, having children and nurturing them is the fundamental human project.

I know that there are wars and famines, and the world is a mess. Remember that there have been wars and famines since Genesis, and that the world was a mess before Noah. The world being chaotic and frightening is a fairly normal state of affairs. Does the Creator still bless and provide? That's the question to ask, and the answer is "yes."

PRAYER:

Well, God, we've got a lot to learn, don't we. May these words guide us O God. Help us straighten out our ideas. Guide the celibates among us, and guide the married, guide the parents and guide the children. Together we bless you, Almighty Creator, for making every one of us in your image and likeness! Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and into Christ's perseverance. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.