

Genesis: Foundations of the Christian Faith

“Two Shall Become One” (Genesis 2:16-24)

The Lord God gave a command to the man. He said, “You may freely eat from every tree in the garden, but you shall not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, for on the day that you eat from it, you will certainly die.” The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is a suitable partner for him.” Out of the soil the Lord God had formed every wild animal and every bird of the sky, and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them. Whatever the man called every living creature, that became its name. The man gave names to all the livestock, and to the birds of the sky, and to every wild animal, but for Adam no helper was found who was a suitable partner for him. The Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. As the man slept, the Lord God took a rib and closed up the flesh where it had been. The Lord God built a woman from the rib that he had taken from the man and brought her to the man. The man said, “Now this one is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She will be called ‘woman,’ because she was taken out of man. For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and will remain united with his wife, and they will become one flesh.



A man and woman turn to look each other in the eye. They smile and perhaps there's a tear in her eyes. With hands joined, he begins to make his promise to her. “I, in the presence of God and these witnesses, take you to be my wife. I promise to be faithful to you as long as we both shall live.” Then smiling, she responds with almost the same words. Rings are exchanged as a symbol of their love and faithfulness. Then the minister declares something wondrous. “By their promises, they have bound themselves together in marriage before God and these witnesses. Therefore I declare that they are husband and wife, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Those whom God has joined together, let no one separate.”

Ceremonies like that might look a little different depending on culture and local customs, but the end result is the same. These people got married! They were brought together and were declared to be husband and wife. It was a joyous day for them as they celebrated with people they love. But look a little deeper. What really happened as they were united in marriage? As the bride and groom declared their intent and promise and they were pronounced to be husband and wife, what was said in Genesis became a reality: Two became one flesh. As we focus on marriage today and seek to understand better what God had in mind when he began it, we see that in marriage two become one flesh for loving complementary companionship.

Last week we looked through the magnifying glass at God's creation painting where God focuses our attention on day six and the creation of man. God took dust from the ground and shaped Adam. He breathed life into him and placed him in the Garden of Eden to work and take care of it. The Garden was his home. He only had one command to follow: Do not eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. If he ate its fruit, he would die. We'll get to that next week, but God notices something missing as if things weren't quite complete with his painting.

So he moves that magnifying glass slightly to another equally important aspect of day six. Everything in the world God had made was perfect, but there was something missing. It was like there was a glaring hole in the painting and it needed another stroke from the painter's brush to complete it. “It is not good for the man to be alone,” God says. This fact was not addressed to Adam, but it serves the purpose of revealing God's thoughts to us concerning the matter at hand. So God declared his intentions. “I will make a helper who is a suitable partner for him.”

Adam was a unique creation of God created in his image. Only another creative act of God could give Adam a suitable helper, a partner and companion that was like him. This companion would need to be someone corresponding to him physically and mentally. In other words, it would need to be someone who was a fitting counterpart to the man whom God had formed.

Yet instead of just acting and creating that companion for Adam, God allowed Adam the opportunity to come to the same conclusion. God took steps to make man keenly aware of the fact that none of the animals in the world could be that counterpart and complementary companion. God followed a course that would awaken a deep longing in the man's heart for a partner that would be like him. He did this by causing all the animals to pass by Adam so that he could name them. It must have been like having the world's largest zoo walk in front of you. Large animals to small animals came to Adam. After all had come and all received names, Adam reached the same conclusion as God. "No helper was found who was a suitable partner for him."

God's procedure had served its purpose. It had caused Adam to realize that he was unique among God's earthly creatures. None of them was a real companion for him with whom he could share his thoughts and feelings and with whom he could serve and praise his gracious God. Having come to the same conclusion as God, God would now put the finishing brush strokes on his creation painting with another unique and wondrous creative act.

At Adam's creation, we are told God formed him from the dust. Now causing Adam to go into a deep sleep God took one of his ribs. From that rib, Genesis says that the Lord God "built a woman". As an able and resourceful builder builds graceful buildings from materials of stone, wood, and metal, so the all-wise and almighty God made the most beautiful of his creatures from a rib taken out of the man. And God brought her to Adam for that suitable partner and complementary companion. In this way he began marriage.

When God brought Eve to him, Adam acknowledged that. In contrast to all the animals which God previously had passed in front of him and he had carefully examined and named, this woman was just the kind of companion which he as an individual needed and had deeply desired. For the first time in Genesis, we hear Adam speak. He makes a beautiful statement about the unity of the human race and a joyful tribute to the dignity of his wife. He acknowledged that she was not inferior, yet also not identical, but fashioned from his bones and his flesh to be a fitting complement, the perfect companion. **"Now this one is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken out of man." (vs.23)**

Then the reality of what God had just begun in bringing Adam and Eve together and uniting them as husband and wife is made clear. **"For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and he will remain united with his wife, and they will become one flesh." (vs. 24)** Whether said by Adam or it was God offering commentary about marriage, the truth is unchanged. United in marriage two people, man and woman, become one flesh first of all for the purpose of a loving, complementary companionship as husband and wife.

Certainly in our life, we do have people who we spend time with and they keep us company. We have our good friends who know us all too well and might even complement us in some way too, but this is different. This marriage union is more than just a "best of friends" kind of union. In marriage man and woman are brought together as one flesh in an intimate union that is unique to marriage. Yet this intimate union between man and woman is not limited just to sexual relations. Marriage is meant to also involve a sharing of interests and pursuits, mutual companionship, caring for each other, faithfulness to each other, working together as one, and sharing in love for each other. Of course each person is still an individual, but in a mysterious way two become one in this uniquely intimate union of marriage which established the family.

We think again about the words spoken on the reality of marriage. “A man will leave his father and his mother and he will remain united with his wife.” When a man and woman are joined together in marriage the relationship with their parents changes. In some way there is a leaving behind of what was to establish a new family where husband and wife are devoted above all else to each other and to caring for this new family which has begun.

The marriage rite we often use at weddings speaks to the point that with the establishing of marriage, God also established the family. The minister addresses those present with these words, “Dear friends: When God in love created the world, he made man and woman in his own image and bonded them together in marriage. Through this blessed union of husband and wife, God established the family, provided for the physical and spiritual welfare of children, and fostered the peace and stability of society.”

In marriage two become one flesh. God began marriage with the intention of it being a blessing not only for a man and a woman as they enjoy the companionship and share this uniquely intimate union. It was also for the blessing of family and society as a whole.

Yet because of sin, marriages are not lived perfectly. Adam and Eve discovered this after they ate from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. We discover this every day. God’s gift to mankind is often overcast with sorrow and the harmony of family life is shattered by sin. Lustful thoughts creep into our minds. Angry, hurtful words are spoken from one spouse to another. Marriages are ended just for the sake of ending them as commitments are abandoned. Husbands and wives aren’t faithful to their spouses. Sexual relations designed to be a blessing within marriage are taken advantage of outside the marriage union. What we see and experience is far from what God shows us in Genesis when the world and mankind were still perfect. Today that wondrous union of two becoming one flesh is lived by sinful people like you and I who constantly need to return the cross of Jesus seeking forgiveness when our own sin works its way into our marriages and families.

Even though the gift is lived imperfectly and God knows it, let’s also not forget that he has not adapted the gift to mesh with our own sinful desires. Marriage remains bound up with the very creation of mankind. God has not changed marriage since the wedding day of Adam and Eve. So it isn’t an option for us to modify it in God’s place. It isn’t up to us to terminate it as we see fit. It isn’t okay to develop different lifestyles that take the place of marriage.

Instead of trying to change it, whether you are married or unmarried, we simply rejoice in exactly how God has given it. Two become one flesh for loving complementary companionship of husband and wife living in a uniquely intimate union for the foundation of the family. What God has joined together as one flesh, let no one separate.

On their wedding day, the bride and groom receive a blessing from God on their marriage itself. Dear husbands and wives, today as you rejoice in marriage, and you reflect on your own marriage, I place that blessing on you. “God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit preserve you in faithfulness, strengthen you in love, and guide you to life’s end.” Amen

