

Real Marriage

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

We've been talking a little about law and really, probably will be for the next year. What is law? The simplest answer would be it's some standard or regulation that society regards as binding like the 30-mile speed limit. That's a law that you ought to obey because our society regards that as binding. Last Sunday, we discussed a more internalized definition of law -- it's that that we feel after we've lied to cover over a missed assignment, or after we've taken someone's money that we have no real right to. That evening when we go to bed, we feel some guilt inside in our conscience because we have a kind of internal sense of obligation to live up to certain standards. That's something that all people everywhere throughout the whole world feel. It's a universal sense of obligation to live up to certain standards.

It doesn't matter where you go. It is bigger than education. It is deeper than instincts. It is deeper than society's convention. It's just a fact that throughout all nations, everywhere in the world, there are certain things that all people feel they should not do. All people feel they should not be selfish. All people feel they should not be cowardly. All people feel they should not be traitors. Quite apart from some law that the courts pass or that the legislature passes, this internal sense of obligation that all of us feel, whether we live in a state governed by law or not, is so universal that men have called it "the law of nature" because everybody seems to feel it. Even cannibals feel it. Even savage primitives have certain things that inside they feel obligated to do. It's amazing that some of the most primitive tribes have set some of the highest laws regarding husband/wife relationships. So, that's another definition of law, the internal law of nature that all of us feel.

There's another law that I think, you'd agree, which we call a "law of science" or "scientific laws". One of them would be the law of gravity. You have this book that is heavier than air and you don't need to say to it, "You must observe the 30-mile speed limit. You must observe the 30-mile speed limit. Oh, you must not steal. Oh, you must fall. You must fall. Now book, you must fall do you hear that?" No, I mean it has no trouble -- it just falls. It just falls and yet, we call it a law. The book doesn't have any trouble obeying the law. There, law seems to mean something different doesn't it? Law, in a sense of a law of science, seems to mean a description of the way this book behaves. It's a description of what is natural for a heavier-than-air object to do in that situation. That's a third meaning of law. There's no sense of obligation, no sense of being bound by it. It's simply a description of what is natural for certain people to do.

Brothers and sisters, that's really what we mean by "the laws of God". The laws of God are the laws that describe God's own nature -- truly. I mean, the other idea we have of them is utterly prejudice, "Oh no. The laws of God are things we have to struggle to obey." No. The laws of God basically are descriptions of God's own nature, and they're actually descriptions of the nature of anybody who trusts God or who treats God as God.

So really, if you treat God as God or if you trust him as your Father, the laws of God describe the way you behave. You don't have to TRY to obey them. It's just like the law of gravity. It describes the way you behave. Let's take an example, it's Matthew 6:25, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" Now to one person that comes as a binding law. To a person who says to himself, "I'm here in this world -- my success is

up to myself. I have to make my own money. I have to look after my own clothes. There is no God anywhere, or anybody else who cares about me.” Then that is a binding law that is almost impossible for him to obey.

Somebody comes along to a person who is a self-made man like that and says, “Do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, or what you shall put on,” -- and he says immediately, “Well, who else is going to worry if I’m not? I have to worry.” Then you give that law to another person who really believes that the Creator who made them loves them, has counted every hair of their head, notices when a sparrow falls to the ground, and knows exactly what they need and is not going to let them down in order to destroy his nature that he has built up over centuries, then to that person this comes as a description of their lives. If you say to them, “Do not be anxious about your life,” and they say, “That’s it. I don’t. I’m not. Don’t worry. You don’t need to tell me. I trust the Father.”

Now loved ones, it’s like one person having a millionaire father and the other having not a penny in his pocket. You come to the one person without a penny in his pocket and you say, “Do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall put on.” He says, “Boy, I have to, otherwise I’m going to die.” The other person has a millionaire father who owns General Motors or something else and you say to him, “Do not be anxious about your life,” and he says, “I’m not. Don’t worry. I’ve plenty in the bank. My dad will give me whatever I need.”

Now do you see that a law of God really is a description of what God himself is like? Therefore, it is a description of the lives of those who treat God as God and who trust him as their Father. Now let’s try to apply that to this law that we’re reading today. In Romans 7:2, Paul uses as an example in his discussion of law and our attitude to law, “Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies she is discharged from the law concerning the husband.”

Now the fact is that that’s the normal pattern for a marriage between two people who treat God as their Father and who trust them as their Father. That’s the normal pattern for their marriage. They’re together for life. Now two people who don’t treat God as their Father or people who have gone into marriage by not trusting God will find that that’s a law that binds them. They’ll be finding out how to get out of it and how to wriggle out of that law, that a man and woman are to be together for life.

We’ll look at that situation in a moment. But dear ones, first of all, it’s important to see that the normal pattern for a husband and wife who trust God as their loving Father is that they’re together for life. It runs through the whole wedding service. Friday night I married Jorn and Barbara. This was what Jorn said to Barbara as he held her hand, “I call upon these persons here present to witness that I, Jorn, do take thee Barbara to be my lawful wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death us do part according to God’s holy law.” Loved ones, that belief runs right through the wedding service -- that people who trust God as their Father find that their marriage is forever and that it cannot be broken whatever happens.

That runs through all of scripture. If you look at Matthew 19:7-8 where Jesus talks about divorce -- and I hope that we’ll talk a little about divorce next Sunday -- even there, Jesus emphasis that this is something that has come in the meantime. But at the very beginning, the normal pattern that God set was for a permanent relationship that lasts forever and that that is in fact, God’s plan for

a marriage. Matthew 19:7-8, "They (the Pharisees) said," "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" He said to them, 'For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives.'" And then the important words, you see, "But from the beginning it was not so." You find that God is always pointing us back to how things were at the beginning, before we made such a mess of our society.

Loved ones, if you really treat God as your loving Father and don't think of him as a deistic God away out there somewhere who can't affect your life, then you'll find that your marriage will automatically be a permanent thing forever. That runs right through scripture. You see it in 1 Corinthians 7:39, "A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives." That's it. "If the husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." But a wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives.

Actually, it's almost boring when you keep going through the wedding service, especially, if you go through it as often as I've done it. But really, when you go through it dear ones, it's just so plain. It's written right into the thing again and again. The pastor gives a charge to the bride and groom and gives a question to them. This is it, "Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together according to the law of God in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honor and keep her; and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her so long as you both shall live?" And it keeps on coming in.

I use an old Irish wedding service. It has an old Anglo-Saxon phrase at the very end where you make your vow to the bride, and the bride makes a vow to the bridegroom, and says, "And thereto I plight thee my troth." Any of you who know anything about old English or Anglo-Saxon know that "troth" is a covenant, I make an agreement with you. You're making an agreement with the person: "I'm staying with you for life, not, "as long as I love you" not, "as long as you love me" not, "as long as we're enjoying it", but, "I make a covenant with you for life because I trust my Father in heaven to give me sufficient grace to live with you in love and in peace for the rest of our lives." It's all built, loved ones, on trusting God as your Father in your marriage. You can see that a "Christian marriage" is one that lasts forever, whatever. I really will try to be honest next Sunday about the divorce situation, and I do think that you'll see that God's plan is for us to live together forever if we're both trusting God as our Father -- and where divorce comes in is where one or the other is not.

Now brothers and sisters, you might say to me, "But brother, let's face it that is not a description of many Christian marriages. There are many so-called "Christian marriages" that have not stayed together for life, and there are many of them that aren't happy even though they are staying together, They may as well be apart because they're doing more harm to God's word and his name by the way they live together than if they did part." And isn't that so? That often, that law in Romans 7:2 is not a description of many marriages.

Now why is it not so? Well dear ones, it's because many of us don't trust God as our Father going into marriage. Many of us end up married to the wrong person. Many of us push ourselves into marriages that we shouldn't be in at all. In other words, in our whole approach to marriage, many of us here in the theater are not trusting God at all. We're not treating God as a loving Father who will set it all up for us. Many of us simply don't live like children of God in regard to our marriage, and so we get into marriages in a way that is not characteristic of children of God and we find that the laws that apply to the children of God don't apply to us.

Now you see, it is true in scripture, brothers and sisters, that God plainly tells us that he will take care of leading us to the right partner. The Father sets that down repeatedly both in word and example. Let's look at one plain example of it. You'll find it there in Genesis 24. More of us would find our marriages falling into the pattern of that law if we would allow God to lead us to the right person in marriage, but many of us, even as we're looking for a partner, are not at this moment trusting God in regard to it. Genesis 24:42 (Abraham's servant was sent out to find the wife for Isaac), "I came today to the spring, and said, 'Oh Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if now thou wilt prosper the way which I go, behold, I am standing by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, 'Pray give me a little water from your jar to drink,' and who will say to me, 'Drink, and I will draw for your camels also,' let her be the woman whom the Lord has appointed for my master's son.'"

"Before I had done speaking in the heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her water jar on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, 'Pray let me drink.' She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, 'Drink, and I will give your camels drink also.' So I drank, and she gave the camels drink also. Then I asked her, "Whose daughter are you?" She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her arms. Then I bowed my head and worshiped the Lord, and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. Now then, if you will deal loyally and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand or to the left.' Then Laban and Bethuel answered, "The thing comes from the Lord; we cannot speak to you bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before you, take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken.'"

Now don't get caught up in the sign business. In the Old Testament days, the Holy Spirit was not abroad as he is today and so God led people by signs. But brothers and sisters, the promise is plain that if you trust God as your Father to choose the right partner for you, then he will send a servant-angel through the Holy Spirit before you to lead you to the right person and that your job is to do what was Isaac doing back there? He was carrying on with his responsibilities. He wasn't sitting at home hoping, "Oh, I hope my father's servant gets the right wife." No. He was carrying on with his duties. He was carrying on with his responsibilities to God.

Now brothers and sisters, the whole matter of guidance goes utterly astray when you stop being concerned with the Father and with the things he has given you to do, and you stop your normal responsibilities to him, and you give yourself over to this whole business of getting some girl or some fella to marry you. It just all goes – it's perverted. The whole thing becomes completely perverted because the whole basis for God's guidance is that you trust God with it. That you treat him as a Father who is concerned about whom you marry and who is anxious to get you into a marriage that will last forever, effortlessly and with ease.

Now you can see that's the basis of God's guidance, dear ones, that quiet spirit. If you look at 1 Kings 19, it's a very kind of picturesque example of how God guides. Elijah was running in fear of persecution and he was actually at this moment hiding in a cleft of a rock. This is the basis of God's guidance to us. 1 Kings 19:11, "And he said, 'Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.' And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice." Or the Hebrew means a sound of gentle

stillness.

Now our Father guides us in a sound of gentle stillness. He guides you when all your own desires are quiet and at peace and when you're in a real place of neutrality and trust -- then the Father is free to guide you either in regard to what brother was saying, whether he should leave Macalester college or in regard to a partner for your life. The Father guides when you yourself are quietly trusting him and about your Father's business.

Now you know that so often that's not the case. The poor sisters, as well as the brothers, go home for Christmas vacation. You just get the bags down on the floor and the earthquake hits you. "Jean, I asked John to come over on Christmas Eve after church." Or, "Jean, you're 25 now. Don't you think it's about time?" And it's not even just with the sisters because the dads are a wee bit clumsier about it but they do the same, "John, that girl, what's her name?" And he knows her name, "What's her name? She called here last weekend. I think she's really fond of you." Ah loved ones, with that kind of earthquake you couldn't hear a sound of gentle stillness if you tried!

So let me first say to the dear moms and dads, I know you love them. I know you love them, but don't you see loved ones, that that's human affection? I know you want the best for them but in wanting the best for them, you're driving them into a kind of panicked earthquake situation where they have all these kinds of feelings running through their minds and they feel, "Well dad said it. Well mum said it," and they do love you. They love you and respect you and so your words mean a lot.

Brothers and sisters, ignore them. Ah yeah, loved ones. If dad and mom won't learn, then you have to walk in faith yourself. Yeah, 25, 35, 45, the Father can bring you a beautiful person whenever he wants. You need to rest in it, loved ones. You need to reject all that pressure that comes from parents or from peers that you ought to get married.

Loved ones, I remember a tragic situation, oh about four years ago, and I was involved in it because I was trying to counsel in the divorce situation. I met the mother. Without talking to the mother very long, I saw who had made the marriage. Not only had this mother made that marriage that wasn't right at all, but she was already planning another marriage for the daughter after the divorce was over. Now loved ones, that's pitiful.

Your mom or your dad, they're dears and they can give you general advice, but there is only One who can choose a partner for you that will be a good life partner and that's the Holy Spirit, that's the Father. So relax, it is no big deal that you're an old maid at 20 years of age -- it is not. It is no big deal that you aren't married at 24, 25, 26. The Father knows when is the time, so don't listen to the earthquake. Don't listen to that earthquake -- just be quiet before the Father. Say, "Lord, I know everybody else seems to be getting married at this time, but I'm trusting you. I'm trusting you for the right person. If I drive myself into some relationship through the earthquake of my parents' desires or my own feelings that I ought to be married now, all I'll do is get myself into trouble."

Loved ones, most the marriages that do not find themselves abiding by this law of God that they're together for life are due to somebody forcing themselves into a marriage that they shouldn't have been in the first place. Rest before the Father. Reject all that kind of pressure. There is pressure of "wind" as well -- and the sisters can create this kind of feeling themselves. They can begin to talk among themselves. They start looking at a fellow and they say, "Well, maybe this is

the one. Maybe this is the one.” And the whispering and the wind starts going around in the dormitory at night. They start discussing this fella and that fella, and they start talking about what their feeling is towards this one and what their feeling is towards that one. Loved ones, I can guarantee this, you’ll never be able to have honesty with that fellow if you ever marry him if you’ve discussed him so freely with everybody else.

Brothers and sisters, do you not see that the late night dormitory discussions do not lead to peace, and quiet, and rest? There’s some of them that are just fun, but you know a lot of them that are just fun have a lot of hard seriousness down here in the heart. Now dear sisters, I think it’s better to trust the Father, especially if you have a good open honest relationship with a brother in Jesus. I think it’s really important to trust the Father and trust God to tell him. Don’t try to pray that God will give him light. We’re stupid people, but even God can get through to us. Don’t try to talk the other fellow into it. Don’t try to pray him into it. If you’re beginning to sense that maybe that’s the person for you, then leave it with the Father. Let the Father do it. Trust him with it.

Often what you do is you expose your own lack of trust in God by the subtle devisings and manipulations you go through. Often you spoil good honest relationships with brothers whom God never intended you to marry but he wanted you to be their friend for life. You often destroy good relationships which you could enjoy and where you could derive a lot of love. The sisters need not to listen to the wind.

I think the brothers need not listen to the fire. I think brothers, we too often allow the old fire of lust to govern our choice of a partner, and too often our eyes are set on what a person looks like outwardly. We’re looking completely at the physical appearance. We’re looking completely at how much we might enjoy them physically or emotionally. Brothers and sisters -- and the other brother and sisters who are married would reinforce this -- whatever you may think, sexual intercourse is a very small part of a real marriage. Whatever the books may say, we are not all hopping in and out of bed every night or even every week.

Marriage is much more than physical satisfaction and more than sexual intercourse. Loved ones, you want someone whom you’re going to enjoy being with forever. If you lay your whole plans on the basis of their looks, or their appearance, or how they can turn you on emotionally or physically, you’re going to end up sitting with someone 12 years hence who absolutely bores you to tears and who is beginning to have to use a lot of makeup to look like they used to look when you first met them.

Loved ones, that’s not the way to come to a marriage. The Father really wants the brothers to be content and maybe to never have sexual satisfaction from their partner. That is really the only way ever to go into marriage, to be satisfied never to be satisfied physically and emotionally -- and then you’re in a real place where you can love the dear person. Because dear ones, it’s not the body’s satisfaction that makes the marriage. The only reason that has any meaning is because it’s a dear person whom you have come to love over years and years that is inside that body, because of the dear mind you’ve come to know and respect, because of the dear emotions that have often expressed themselves to you. That’s what gives any meaning to any kind of physical intimacy.

So brothers and sisters, I think it’s very important to trust the Father in choosing your marriage partner and to not listen to the earthquake, or to the wind or to the fire.

One other reason I think why many of us end up in marriages that are not God's will for us, and therefore which are not described by God's law of permanence and staying together forever, is our whole attitude to celibacy.

I think a lot of us feel that the only ones who ought to be celibate are sisters in the Catholic Church or brothers in the Catholic Church, nuns or priests. Dear ones, that's not what God says. God says in his Word that some of us are meant not to be married. Loved ones, it's a totally unscriptural and untrusting attitude that our society has encouraged that obviously, everybody is to be married.

Loved ones, it's God's plan that many of us should not be married. That's the problem. Some of us who ought not be married and who should be carrying out a special ministry for the Father have pushed ourselves into marriage because society says everyone should be married. Now, you see it there [Bible]. We kept treating Paul as a pure old neurotic who didn't know what he was talking about despite of the fact we listened to him on every other issue. When it comes to celibacy we kind of say, "Oh Paul got a bit off there." It's not him. It's society that got a bit off on the other side.

Would you look at it dear ones in 1 Corinthians 7:8, "To the unmarried and to the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do." And Verse 7, "I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another." God is plainly teaching that some of us are given the gift to remain celibate. I think this is one of the problems -- we all feel everyone is getting married so we must get married. Or some of us feel, "Well, I don't feel very much that I need to be married -- but I need security", or, "I need company. As the years pass by I want to have somebody of my own who is with me, and who can be my friend, and who can understand me and who can take care of me."

Loved ones, is there God or is there not a God? Is there a dear Father who loves you and has promised that he'll look after you -- or is there not? You know, we keep on saying, "Oh yeah, yeah brother. There's a God but I just like to have somebody that I can touch that can give me security." But loved ones, do you see that many of us lead ourselves into marriages that aren't God's will because of a general feeling that, "Well, we'd like to have children", or, "We'd like to have somebody to keep us company", or, "We'd like someone to give us security." Brothers and sisters, it is the Father's will that many of us should not be married.

I think one of the problems is that we have a misunderstanding of the love that exists between a husband and a wife. I think a lot of us feel a husband and wife marry because they love each other more than they do anybody else. I think most of us think that. A man and a woman marry each other because they love each other more than they do anybody else in the world. Some of the husbands and wives sitting here are probably thinking, "Yeah, well, I think that's why I did it." Well that's terrible if that's the situation, isn't it? That's terrible if the only way to have somebody that loves you more than anybody else in the world is you have to marry them. It really cuts out an awful lot of people. It certainly means that a husband and wife have great difficulty convincing a third person that they love them as much as they do each other.

Dear ones, husbands and wives don't marry because they love each other more than they do anybody else. They marry because they're God's choice for each other. That's what makes them so precious to each other. They are together because God planned for them to be together. God put a spark of love in each of their hearts for the other and that's why they're together. That's why their

relationship is unique. You're right, it is unique, but it's unique because it was God's will for them to be together, not because they love each other more than anybody else in the world.

I think a lot of us fight celibacy. We fight the single life because we think, "Oh, we want somebody to love us as much as everybody else is loved." Really, God's plan is what he has begun among us, a family of brothers and sisters who love each other as much as husbands and wives love each other -- not a church where the single lady or the single man is kind of "out of it" and they do special extra jobs because well they have more time than those of us who are fortunate enough to be married -- but a church where brothers and sisters love each other as much as they love their husbands and wives. It's a family where it would be possible for sisters to grow up feeling not that they had one husband, but that they had many husbands, that they had many brothers who cared for them and loved them, and who would take care of them, and brothers who would not have just one wife but many sisters who would love them, and be kindly to them, and be gracious to them, and express the gentleness of Jesus to them.

Really dear ones, that's the plan that the Father has for us. That we would have such a body of brothers and sisters here that a person would not be driven into marriage because they needed more love, but they would really be free to listen to God and to marry the person that God wanted them to marry, or not to marry, if that was his plan for them. Loved ones, if you would begin to trust God that way for your own marriage, you would find that that was not a binding law upon you at all in Romans 7:2, but it was a beautiful description of your own marriage: that a woman is bound to her husband as long as she lives. Oh, there's such a confidence when you know that your partner thinks that and your partner knows that you think it. It brings a lot of peace and a lot of quiet -- yet, the same quietness and confidence is meant by the Father to be experienced by all of us here in this body.

So, if I could do it, if I could get each sister here and give you a good shake and say, "Rest in Jesus and stop destroying yourself and torturing yourself," -- if I could get each brother here and tell you to, "Rest back and be content never to be married if that's Jesus' will for you," -- I'd do that, except that it would take a long time to get around to you all! You know that it's really what's needed, brothers and sisters, because all of us in this theater have suffered agonies because we will not trust the Father with this whole business. So why not get out and enjoy ourselves in his world and trust him to take care of this thing. Let us pray.