

The Purpose of Marriage

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Loved ones, I'd like to continue the conversation that we began last Sunday morning. And I'd really encourage you to make it a conversation. I'm game to give a kind of introduction to the subject but I really do ask you to ask questions, and questions that are really on your minds. And not because I think I can answer them all, or not because I think that my opinion is so important, but because we have so rarely discussed Christian marriage and God's idea of sex and love, that really we've been deluged for years by society's opinions. And I think it's vitally important that a group of us, such as we are this morning, discuss freely and openly what God believes marriage, and love and sex should be.

And that's why I think we need to discuss it, because I think if we've had any kind of teaching on the subject it's been one way stuff, some Moses like creature telling us what we should do and many of us have had questions in our hearts that we've really wanted desperately to ask. Or at least, we've wanted to have some kind of feedback, or at least just put up our hand and say, "I disagree." And so I'd really plead with you to be real this morning, you know, and don't clam up on me after I give my introduction because it's your questions that really make the thing real.

One of the reasons we need to discuss it is because we have failed utterly to distinguish between two types of marriages that exist in our society. There are two very different types of marriages. Now, they both stem loved ones, from God's own plan in Genesis. So maybe you'd look at that, it's Genesis 2:24 and it's right there you know, in the first days of creation that the Creator laid down the plan for marriage. And it's from that plan that two developments have taken place: one, that is corrupt; and the other that is correct. Genesis 2:24, "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh." That was God's plan.

God was the one who thought up the lovely idea of marriage and the beautiful idea of love is his idea and sex is his idea and we need to hold onto that. That he started the whole idea and it was his plan. But the first development that has followed from that is the corrupt version of his plan called civil marriage. I don't want to knock it and say it shouldn't exist; I just want us to see that civil marriage is not the same idea that God had in mind when he made that statement at the beginning.

Civil marriage is a physical and mental joining together of two personalities primarily for each other's sake. That's civil marriage. It isn't primarily for God's sake; it's for each other's sake. They see each other at school, or they see each other at work, and they like the look of each other and they think they'd enjoy each other and so they get together and they marry. And it's a physical and mental union and it's primarily for the sake of each other. It may have the trappings of a white church wedding. I think, many times it does in our western society, many civil marriages have all the trappings of a Christian marriage, but inside in the heart of the union it is really just a civil marriage because it is founded on the same selfish love that is at the heart of civil marriages.

Now, that's one kind of marriage. The other kind of marriage is Christian marriage and there are so many differences between the characteristics of Christian marriage and civil marriages that it is really important for us to study it this morning and to look at those differences and see them clearly. So maybe we could just take up from where we started really last day.

The first big difference is the basis of the marriage. That's the first big difference between a Christian marriage and a civil marriage. It's the basis of the marriage and the basis of the marriage in Christian marriages is not love, but God's will. Now let me elaborate that a little from last day. You remember, Abraham was looking for a wife for his son Isaac and so he sent his servant off to find a wife, and the servant chose the woman that God chose. He set up some circumstances, you remember, whereby God would be able to show him which was the woman that Isaac should marry. And in other words, Abraham let God choose, through his servant, the wife that Isaac was to marry.

That's the pattern throughout the Bible. The people that others marry who are part of God's family always allowed God to do the choosing and that's the basis of Christian marriage and it's from that that real love stems. Now in civil marriage that isn't the way it works. It's interesting, at the beginning most of us even in a civil marriage or an ordinary non-Christian relationship, it's interesting that most of us experienced part of the gracious gift of love. God does try to get us on the right track. He does try to get us on real love. He does give us a gracious generosity in our attitudes to each other.

And you know we've often joked about it. You remember where you were so anxious to please the other person that you don't care what you want yourself. And it gets really funny when you are asking each other out, and you say, "Where would you like to go?" And the other one says, "No, where would you like to go?" And he says, "No, where would you like to go?" And she says, "No, where would you like to go?" And then he guesses where you would like to go and she guesses where you would like to go and you end up somewhere where neither of you wanted to go.

But it is beautiful. I mean, it is for a momentary experience of unselfish generous love that God actually gives to people who base their marriage on his will. And most of us, it's interesting isn't it, God is so good to us, even those of us who don't care about God, even those of us who don't care about Jesus have a strange experience of love for a moment at the beginning of a marriage. It doesn't last too long because we then become consumed with what we really want and what we would enjoy, and either that happens during the courtship or it happens soon after we marry. We stop being interested in the other person, we say the magic has gone out of the relationship but really it is that we have ceased to love.

We have begun to concentrate not on giving which is the heart of love, but we have begun to concentrate on getting. And you know how, because we have an uneasy conscious after certain experiences, we have to say, "I love you." But really we know fine well we don't mean that, we really mean I want to get from you, or I need you. And so most marriages that are not based on God's will after an initial experience of unselfish giving love, sink into just downright lust, desire, wish for the security, significance, and happiness that they should get from God and they concentrate on getting it from each other. And most civil marriages sink down onto that level and that's the basis of most civil marriages.

I need you. I want you. I enjoy the praise that you give me or the sense of position or importance that you give me as a provider and a father to your children, or I enjoy the security that you give me and the money you provide, and the good home that you've given. Or, we both enjoy the thrill or the exhilaration that we give to each other physically as long as we give it to each other. And most civil marriages are based on that.

Whereas, a Christian marriage is based on the will of God and as a result of that of course, God gives real giving love to those two people. That's why loved ones, the marriage service goes like this, "I call upon these persons here present to witness that I take thee to be my lawful wedded wife to have and to hold from this day forward." And then towards the end of this, "And to cherish till death us do part according to God's holy law and thereto I give thee my troth." And troth is the old English word for covenant and that's why in a wedding in a Christian marriage you say, "I make a covenant with you this day because I understand that the Creator of the universe wants you and me to be together for life, and I understand that that is his will, I abide by his will for us and I tell you in his name and for his glory that I'm staying with you until death."

It's if you like, a very cold blooded covenant and promise not on the basis of your transitory likes or dislike physically or emotionally which civil marriages like to call love. But it's based on the fact that you know this is God's will for you and you're agreeing with this loved one that you're going to stay together because of God until death. And that's the basis and the solid basis of a real marriage. The other is no basis as you see. I mean, 50% of the marriages in our country are ending up in divorce so obviously the other idea of love which is really lust, or I need you, or I want you, or I get from you that is no basis for lasting marriage.

The only basis for lasting marriage is that you know it's God's will. And what we said last Sunday was you can only find out which is the person that God wants you to marry if you've at last died to getting security, significance, and happiness from other people. Only when you've died to that will you be like Elijah, able to ignore the earthquake of the old physical desires and the fire of the old emotional needs, and be able to hear the sound of gentle stillness that is God's voice. So in a very real sense, only when you've died to your need to marry are you in a position ever to find out from God whom he wants you to marry and that's the basis of Christian marriage.

Maybe we should just comment for a moment on those loved ones here this morning, because I know some of you are here who have married years ago and are wondering, "But was that God's will for me? Was that God's will for me?" And you wonder that either because you weren't Christians when you married, or because you didn't know what Christian marriage was about and so you married in ignorance and you sit here this morning and wonder yes but was that God's will for me? And loved ones, there's a clear word from God to those of you who are like that this morning because honestly I think that many of us wonder that at times and we allow Satan to get in with real doubt because of our wondering about what we did so many years ago. And God has a clear word – now, I'd like you just to look at it so that you see it is from him.

1 Corinthians 7:27a, "Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free." That's it loved ones. At this moment as God's word comes to you are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Why? Well, because of Romans 8:28 if you look at it. Romans 8:28, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose." You remember the King James Version reads, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

You remember we said last Sunday that God never allows anything to happen in your life that he cannot redeem. He never allows anything to happen that he cannot redeem and that he cannot work into his plan for your life. And there's just one other strong verse that it would be good for you to look at. 1 Corinthians 10 it is, 1 Corinthians 10:13, because I think many of us find ourselves in relationships that don't seem ideal. 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation," and the Greek word means trial also, "No temptation (or trial) has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted (or tried) beyond your strength, but with the

temptation (or trial) will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” Not only endure it but redeem it and transform it.

And I know some of you feel, “Well maybe the way of escape is divorce?” But do you see that God would never have you disobey him in order to obey him and there is no ground for divorce in the Bible that is based on the fact that the relationship is hard or impossible, or that is based on the conviction you have that you made a mistake way back. There is no ground for divorce like that in scripture and so whenever you try to get out of a marriage by excusing yourself on the ground that you were not a Christian when you got into it, or that you did not know what Christian marriage really was supposed to be like, really you’re just retreating into the selfishness that is the heart of sin and you’re retreating from what God has allowed to come into your life in order to make you like himself. And loved ones, you’re actually not only retreating but if you walk towards divorce you’re walking into further disobedience simply because there’s no ground for divorce that includes the idea that you made a mistake way back, or when you said, “I take you to be my lawful wedded wife,” you didn’t really mean it.

Then how is God going to know that you really mean it this time? Do you look up and say, “Lord God, I didn’t really mean it this time but I’ll really, really mean it this time.” No, you’re just taking his name in vain a second time. That’s all you’re doing when you try to give up what he has allowed you to come into.

Just to go on a little further then before maybe we’d open up into conversation, the attitude underlying that is an attitude that is one of the greatest misconceptions about marriage. That is the attitude that wants to get out of a relationship that has got a bit hard. That attitude is one of the biggest misconceptions about marriage, and here it is, “That marriage is for my happiness and comfort.”

Now really loved ones, that is dumb. Honestly, but I know it strikes you almost silent because you think, “Of course, that’s why marriage.” But it isn’t, that’s an absolute misconception about marriage; that marriage is for your happiness and comfort. It isn’t and that’s where all of us are getting into trouble. We are all utterly convinced that the purpose of marriage is to make me happier, or to make me more comfortable, or to help me to enjoy life more and that’s why you have such a hard time with marriage as the years pass because, you find that in fact it doesn’t always do that.

That is a misconception about marriage. What is the purpose of marriage? It’s very clearly stated in scripture loved ones, if you look at it. Genesis 1:27 and it has nothing about your comfort and happiness in it. Genesis 1:27, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” That’s the first purpose of marriage.

The whole purpose of God creating the world was to express himself as he really is. To express his own tenderness, his own justice, his own righteousness, his own mercy and immediately he thought of his own image he thought male and female. That’s the way that verse runs. In the beginning God created us in his image male and female he created us. Immediately God thought of his own image he thought male and female and all of us understand that. That it requires male and female to express the full beauty of the God who is the Father of Jesus. All of us that is who have ever been in a men’s locker room, or who have ever been in a women’s club, or who have ever attended a boy’s school, or ever attended a girl’s school. All of us know fine well that it takes male and female to express the beauty and balance of Jesus’ character and the determination, and the flexibility, and

the strength, and the tenderness is contributed by each one. By one at one time and by one at another until the full balanced beauty of God is expressed to the world and that's why God made us male and female.

That's why even in this group this morning there is a more balanced picture of God because there are men and women here; there are brothers and sisters here. And that's the primary purpose of God drawing a man and a woman together. Not for their sake at all, but so that the world will see his beauty in two people, because God himself of course said to his Son, "Let us make man in our image," and God's own beauty can only be seen in a communion of at least two people with each other. But so full and so complete is his character that it requires the tenderness at times of a woman and the strength at times of a man. The determination at times of a woman and the flexibility at times of a man, it requires – you didn't think I'd say it that way? But it requires both and that's why God made us man and woman and that's why a body of Christ needs men and women equally united and equally cooperating together.

Now in a deeper way loved ones that works in individual marriages because believe it or not, horrible little thought it may be to you, God will probably guide you to marry your own weaknesses, really, your own worst points. At times some of your own strengths, but probably you will marry your own worst weaknesses. Each of you, not just we perfect men. But really loved ones, you'll probably marry your own worst weaknesses and do you know why?

So that every morning you get up you'll see that mirror staring you in the face and you'll come up against it again, and again, and again and if you have little ones without dealing with those weaknesses, those little ones will reproduce those weaknesses and God is determined that you will not evade the need to die with Jesus and be resurrected new with Jesus. So he has planned marriage to bring before you constantly and repeatedly in the strongest form possible the ways in which you yourself have to become more like his son Jesus and that's why part of the marriage vow runs, "I take you to be my lawful wedded wife to have and to hold from this day forward for better for worse in sickness and in health for richer for poorer." And our mistake is we slide over the worse. We do. We say, "For better for worse, in sickness and in health, for richer for poorer."

Now loved ones, why did they put it in? Why did they put "for worse" in? And the truth is that when the other one is at her worst you are driven to grasp most vehemently for the peace, and the gentleness, and the long suffering, and the love of Jesus and no Christian marriage can exist without the supernatural power that you draw down from Jesus at the right hand of the Father as you at last die to whether this loved one is blessing your life or cursing it and you grasp for Jesus' life so that you can be a blessing to her or to him. And so in individual marriages loved ones, those sore spots are rubbed again, and again, and again until you see there'll be no heaven for me until Lord Jesus, you're able to transform me so that I can bear this loved one with love and so that I can bless her when she perhaps curses me, or so that I can bless him when he perhaps curses me. But loved ones, the purpose of marriage is to reproduce the image of God in us and that's the primary reason for it.

Now loved ones, you wouldn't believe it but really we're only about half way through but I think I should stop for a moment and we'll continue next Sunday on the other reasons for marriage. But, would you like to question at this point? And maybe not, and that's alright.

Question from the audience:

What about loved ones who were divorced a few years back?

Reply from Pastor O'Neill:

It seems to me brother the same verse applies, "If you're married do not seek to be unmarried. If you're divorced do not seek to be undivorced unless you can reconcile." We'll deal with divorce, I'm afraid it will be two Sundays on now, but the Bible clearly encourages you to be reconciled to the one from whom you were divorced so undoubtedly one should do that. But I was taking it that you were saying what about a loved one who divorced years ago and the partner has married again, or they have married again, then you cannot go back and create all the chaos and unhappiness that would come from breaking up marriages and remarrying. But where it was possible to be reconciled either because you yourself had no married again, or because the other person had not married again then God says we should do it. Really it is important loved ones, just to speak.

Question from the audience:

In the example that you used of unselfish love about one going where the other wanted to go, and the other going where the other wanted to go, and ended up where neither of them wanted to go is that an example of Christian love?

Reply from Pastor O'Neill:

No, no, that's no doubt an example of infatuation. But sis, it is interesting that even in that, even in that perverted as it is by our own selfish wills or by our own wills even in it is a seed of the concern for the other person that is at the heart of a mature marriage. And that at least is a beautiful side of it. No, it isn't all beautiful and it isn't all as it should be because both people aren't completely under God's guidance in that case, even a desire to please the other is in that case not under the control of Jesus. But at least it has the element of concern for the other person which is so much of an improvement on what many of our marriages are about later on.

Question from the audience:

Should you be able to love everyone as much as you love your wife?

Reply from Pastor O'Neill:

Jeff brings up the awkward one that I know it gave me trouble with my wife when I said on a radio program that one should be able to love everyone as much as your own wife. And even though my own wife is somewhere here I still say it, yeah, that the heart of married love loved ones, is not that it contains more love – how you would measure love anyway is difficult but the heart of married love is not that you love your wife more than you love everybody else in the world, but that you express that love in a way that is appropriate to your wife or to your husband, and that the precious thing about being someone's wife or being someone's husband is not that he loves me more than everybody else in the world, or that she loves me more than everybody else in the world because there's something wrong if that's the case. But that the mighty God of the whole universe when he was establishing Mount Everest and when he was establishing the bounds of the Mediterranean Ocean decided that I should be the wife, I should be the husband of this dear person and that is a steadiness and stability that is ah, just beyond anything that the mere love of a human being could bring to you.

And so it is important loved ones, to hold to that because I think very often we'll be talking about celibacy maybe three Sundays from now, but the heart of celibacy and beauty of celibacy is made possible because husbands and wives are not little closed enclaves that make everybody else feel the third man out or the third woman out. But in fact, they are dear partners who make everybody else know that they love them as much as they love each other. And so yes Jeff, I think it is important to see it.

Question from the audience:

Some loved ones say that you could marry many different people but that God just zeroes in on one person?

Reply from Pastor O'Neill:

It seems to me it's an academic question in a way, could you marry many people because what we believe is the one that we are led to if we're dead to what we want out of it is the person that God has chosen for us. Now, whether many people could be our wives or our husbands or not is therefore a little academic. I think it is important that from the point of view of living with each other it is important to see that people who are in Jesus and who are dead to themselves should be able to live together in perfect peace and that is the basis of our own fraternity houses on campus, that we – in those homes, live together in peace because God has really begun to deal with our own desire for our own ways and our own wishes. So that is true but the other is an academic question I don't know – I can't answer it.

Question from the audience:

Does God ever will a Christian to marry a non-Christian?

Reply from Pastor O'Neill:

All I could quote you is that verse "be ye not unequally yoked" and testify loved ones that there are many of us here in this group this morning who would say for goodness sake and for God's sake do not be dumb enough to think that you can be happy in an intimate relationship with another person who differs from you on such a basic subject as what your attitude to God should be. And loved ones, all of us who are married would testify to the truth of that verse "be ye not unequally yoked". We would say, "Listen, many of us have found enough trouble just because we come from different backgrounds." Many of us have found enough trouble just because we have different interests. But if we differed on such an intimate basic topic as what our relationship to the Creator of the universe should be, there would be no peace between us at all.

Question from the audience:

What does it mean to be married to your own worst weaknesses?

Reply from Pastor O'Neill:

Well, all of us who are married get rather embarrassed when we think of this but it is interesting brother that after three or four years you begin to talk like your partner. It's terrible. And you

begin to have the same gestures as your partner and then it's not long before you either begin to see your own weaknesses mirrored in them, or you begin to see that deep, deep down without really knowing it you married something of yourself in them. Some of it was your own strength, but some of it was your own weakness. It's interesting that God almost seems to use that you have in common to draw you together and it's then that you begin to see yourself in an objective way in the other person.

And so it's just a fact, it's just a fact that many of us would have discovered in our wives the very things that we had wrong in ourselves except that we are not always such good judges of them. I mean, we can always condemn it so clearly and plainly in them but we are always so poor at condemning it in ourselves. And I think it's just a beautiful plan that God has to get around our hypocrisy. I think it's just a fact loved ones, I think the husbands and wives will probably testify to it. Maybe just one more question.

Question from the audience:

What about several verses down from what we read in 1 Corinthians where it says "Let those who have wives be as though they had none." How would you interpret that?

Reply from Pastor O'Neill:

I think Anita, it might come into studies in future Sundays but I could briefly comment. I think that many of us here would have come to the point in our own lives where we do put Jesus first in our hearts and it has brought a balance and perspective into our attitude to our marriages where before we were looking to our marriage for all the security, significance, and happiness that we needed, now we are able to get it from God and so we are able to live free from the binding of purely human love. And loved ones, isn't purely human love as opposed to spiritual love is binding, isn't it?

You know, where you love the person but there's something of self in it and I'll try to talk about the three loves the next Sunday where there's something of self in it and so you love them partly because they're loving you and so you're afraid not to love them in case they won't love you and so it becomes a binding thing. So it seems to me that as we come into the position that God wants us to be in, in regards to Jesus we come free of that and we're able at last to love the other person freely. Not so that they love us back, but because we just love them and then it is that we live as if we were not married in the worldly sense, that is not bound by the world's idea of marriage but more faithful than ever before to our married partners. I think we'd testify, those of us who have begun to deal with Jesus in our own lives, that the only result it brings in marriage is a more tender and a more kindly, and a more thoughtful, and unselfish love for our dear ones.

Well loved ones, we'll try next day to continue talking about the purpose of marriage and so if you have questions will you note them down, or you can put them into the reception office at the end of this service if you want. Let us pray.

Dear Father, thank you for your plans and Lord, we would ask you to make your plans for us clear and clearer in these coming Sundays and by the power of your Holy Spirit to undeceive those of us who want to be deceived, and to clarify for those of us who cannot see clearly, and to change and transform those of us who need to be turned upside down and made more like you in our marriages. And Lord, I pray especially for those loved ones who are not married and are wondering about the

whole question of whom they are to spend their life with. Dear Father, I trust you to assure them, "As I looked after Abraham and Isaac so I will look after you and I will prepare the way before you so that your life will be much better than you ever thought it could be. I love you with all my heart and I will not let you down in regard to marriage." Thank you Lord, thank you. Amen.