

Love & Marriage

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

For the past two Sundays loved ones, we've been carrying on a conversation about marriage. And I say conversation because I've tried to introduce some of the topics that we would talk about and then given you the opportunity to ask questions. It's not an ideal way to run a conversation but it's the best approach we can make with about a 1,000 of us here. And so I ask you to try to help me to do that again this morning.

It might be good first of all, to stand back together and look at the subject from a distance and see that there are two ways to approach it. We could approach marriage here together empirically. That is, we could look at what society has done with marriage here in America, what it has done successfully and what it has done unsuccessfully. We could look at what society has done with marriage in the past and what it might do with it in the future. That is, we could share a lot of human opinions here.

We could give the opinions expressed in the Hite Report, give the opinions expressed by Masters & Johnson, and give the opinions expressed by Alec Comfort. We could share even what Hugh Hefner thinks about it, and maybe even what old Dear Abby thinks about it. But I think that most of us here are kind of anxious not to know what other human beings think about marriage, but we're anxious to find out if there's any authoritative basis for marriage itself beyond what we human beings think.

And I think most of us are anxious to know not what marriage is like but what marriage is meant to be like and that's why we're approaching it doctrinally. That is, we're discussing what the Creator of the universe's plan for marriage is. Most of us here believe that Jesus is the unique Son of the Creator of the universe. We believe it because of his resurrection from the dead, because of his miracles, because of his perfect life. We believe that what he says is the real explanation of reality and the real meaning of life. And so we believe what he has described about marriage is what our Creator wanted marriage to be.

And though most of us here, I think, agree there are some elements of success and some elements of good in secular or civil marriage, yet we believe that it is a poor shadow and a poor imitation of what real marriage is. And I think most of us here really believe that Christian marriage is the only marriage that is real in our Creator's eyes. And so loved ones, if you're here this morning and you're anxious to say, "Oh, but isn't there other marriage besides Christian marriage?" Sure there is, there are all kinds of ideas of marriage depending on the society that you live in. But what we're saying this morning is there is really only one marriage that was meant and planned by our Creator and that is what we have described in this book here. And that's the marriage we're discussing loved ones.

So undoubtedly there is secular or civil marriage and there is Christian marriage. What we're discussing here is Christian marriage not because we're just a little ghetto group of Christians who have a little story that suits our personalities, but because we believe that is the meaning of marriage in our Creator's mind. That is what marriage was planned to be, and actually at the end of the day it's the only way it'll work. And so we're not saying that many secular or civil marriages do not appear to work, but we're saying that there's only really one marriage that works deep down in private as well as outside in public, and that is the marriage described in this book, the

marriage described by Jesus.

Now loved ones, we've said that secular marriage differs from Christian marriage very, very much. First of all, it differs in its basis. The basis really for secular marriage is man's will. It just is. It's man's will. You see a nice girl in the class at the U, or you see a handsome guy in the office, and you decide, "That's the kind of person I'd like to spend some time with." And deep down really what you want from that person is some kind of happiness. And later on as you get more serious you really want some kind of security from them. And later on as you get into a close relationship you want him to give you some sense of importance. And so the basis of secular marriage is that. Most people who involve themselves in secular marriage whether it's a white church wedding or not, and therefore in name a Christian wedding, secular civil marriage is based on man's will. It's what man wants to get from a woman, or it's what woman wants to get from a man, but it's based on a man's will.

Now Christian marriage is based on something entirely different and you remember, we discussed it in connection with Abraham's search for a daughter for his son Isaac. And you remember, how the servant prayed, "Let the woman whom the Lord chooses for my master's servant speak certain words to me." The basis for Christian marriage is God's will. In other words, it is a person coming to the place where they die to getting happiness, security, and significance from some other person and they agree that they can only receive it from God. And that brings instead of the tremendous emotional furor that drives so many of us into wrong relationships, that brings a deep peace where at last the sound of gentle stillness that is God's choice can be heard inside our spirits.

And so really, there is a tremendous difference between secular and Christian marriage and Christian marriage is based on God's will and comes when a man or a woman is really ready in a sense never to be married if that's what God wants for them. Is ready for whatever he wants, and is ready to receive what they need from he alone and is not looking for something from a partner, but is looking for, "Lord, who do you want me to marry?"

It differs immensely loved ones, in regards to the purpose of the marriage. A secular marriage, even though it may initially experience something of unselfishness in the courtship time, secular marriage usually deteriorates into a claustrophobic in turned selfish and rather boring experience of trying to make the other into your image. That's right, trying to make the other person into your own image. And that's why so often secular marriage ends up in a standoff, because the other person will only become like you up to a certain point and you'll only become like them up to a certain point and then you go no further. And that's usually where developed intimacy ceases and it becomes a quite cold war, a life of just desperation, quiet desperation where you stay together for the sake of the children or for the sake of the appearance.

A Christian marriage is based on the plan that God has to create his image in a man and a woman living together and sharing more and more of each other's qualities, experiencing more and more of each other's good qualities and each other's bad qualities because sometimes the other's bad qualities are planned by God too to conform you to the image of his son. And that's why in the marriage service we promise to take each other for better or for worse, because sometimes it's the worst in the other that makes you grab most for the patience and the love of Jesus that transforms your own character. And so Christian marriage is based on the expression of God's image in a man and a woman being recreated into one person that reflects their good qualities and reflects all the beauty of Jesus and so Christian marriage differs a great deal, as you can see, from secular marriage.

Now, that was the first part of the purpose loved ones, of Christian marriage. The second part of the purpose of Christian marriage is found, if you'd like to look at it, in Genesis 2:18. "Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'" Now, a helper fit for him and then for him to do what? Well Genesis 1:28 explains the commission that God has given to each man. Genesis 1:28, "And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

Each one of us here, men and women, are exactly right to bring some part of God's world into his order and under his will. That's why we were put here. We weren't put here to milk the earth for our own benefits. We weren't here to make as much money as bankers, or as carpenters as we possibly could. We were put here to bring the world into the order of God's will. That's what that great commission means, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it." Don't fill it with smog, don't fill it with coal dust, subdue it in the sense of bringing it into my order. Use the lakes, and the wind, and the solar energy to reproduce my plan for the kingdom of heaven here on earth. Now, that's why we're here.

Now loved ones, the woman that God has allowed you to meet and fall in love with, is exactly right to be a helper to you in that task. That's what it means. The second purpose of marriage is that the one would help the other to fulfill the purpose that God has for that person here on this earth. That's what it means to be a helper fit, a helper exactly right. Now, you husbands and wives who are married, would you accept that? That the loved one that you have by your side is exactly right? You can argue as you want, you can say, "No, no brother he made a mistake in my case." But loved ones, God knows what he is doing and he knows what he has allowed to happen and that loved one of yours is exactly right to help you fulfill the purpose that God has for you in this world.

Now maybe you're involved in the wrong purpose at the moment. Maybe you're in the wrong job or something like that, but there is a place for you where God will use you to bring his world more into the order of his will and that partner that you have is exactly right for that purpose. That's why brothers and sisters, those of us who aren't married, it's really important when you consider marriage that you think together of what you want your future to be, or what you're planning for your future.

It's alright to be boy and girlfriend and not take each other's job seriously. But it's very important, once you begin to think of marriage to consider, "Is this person thinking of spending their lives the same kind of way that I am?" And loved ones, those of us who are married, the person that you have with you is exactly right to help you fulfill the purpose that God has for you. How often if you wives would take that position, how often could you save us dumb men from so much of our misspent energy and our misdirected energy, from our misspent time? How often you could save us from the frustrations we get into because we don't have someone else who knows us well, and knows what we're doing to share with us?

But loved ones, how often would our wives enter fully into the experience of our jobs if we would stop ignoring them and if we would begin to talk and discuss with them? But do you know the tragedy? The tragedy is that we brothers have read only the first part of that great commission and we let the little women, we let the poor sisters that have married us, take part in only one part of that commission. That's the 'be fruitful' part. And then when the children are grown up we no longer have anything in common with each other and we begin to have our troubles. Is it any wonder?

Because, we've shut the loved one out of the thing that we spend eight hours a day doing.

Now all you brothers who sit there and say, "Brother, my wife wouldn't understand the first thing. She's not even interested." Would you take my word for it that she loves you and she wants to be part of what you're doing, and she does not like to be treated as an alternative to a Whirlpool washing machine, or as an alternative to a clothes dryer, or as an alternative to a babysitter? She does want to be part of your job and part of what you do, and maybe you should begin to wonder if your job is what God wants you to do if she cannot in some way share with you about it.

But loved ones, that's why God has put you together and you're missing half of marriage if you keep treating her as just the one who can produce babies, or can look after the home, or washes your clothes. She is a helper fit for you. And then dear brothers and dear wives, the brother is a helper fit for the wife. The brother is someone who can take part in the things that the wife does.

The reason the whole woman's liberation thing has got so unbalanced is because we have not entered into this concept of marriage, and we have not treated each other as helpers fit for each other, but loved ones, that's God's plan.

God has given you a helper that is fit for you and if you would begin to share with that loved one at least the things, I know we men are doing such deep and complex things that what could a mere woman understand about it. I know that, I know we're quite brilliant but it may surprise you that God has given you a dear wife that probably knows you better than you know yourself. And she may not be able to go into all the details of the computer, or all the details of the last contract you completed, but she knows you and she can speak to you about your human performance in your job, and that's why the Father has put her there. So that in every way you'll have someone who knows you intimately who can speak about you from an objective point of view. That's the second purpose of marriage.

Now the third purpose loved ones, is there in that same verse if you'd like to look at it and it's Genesis 2:18. You see it's Genesis 2:18a, the first part of the verse, "Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone." And the Father decided that for fellowship he would give the man a wife and give the wife a husband and that's the third purpose stated in scripture for marriage, for fellowship, for real love.

Most marriages stop their intimacy at the point of physical intercourse, or at the point of understanding that they had a week after the first child was born. And the point is God gave you to each other for fellowship for interaction with each other, for intimacy with each other that would pass beyond just physical things. He gave you to each other to love each other. That's really it. And the love has a purpose; the love is stated clearly in Romans 8:29. It's the purpose that God said all things work together for good for, and the purpose is that they may be conformed to the image of his Son. And God has given you to each other to love each other into the image of God, into the image of Jesus.

He's given you to each other to make sure that the other person gets into heaven. That's why you're together. You're together because nobody can pray for you, nobody can think for you, nobody can want for you, nobody can listen to you as intimately and as correctly, and as precisely as your dear wife, or as your dear husband. Loved ones, there's nobody can pray for you like your husband or your wife because there's nobody who knows you as clearly as your husband or wife does and you're given to each other to get each other into heaven.

That's why you're precious to each other. That's why it is madness to ever think of divorce and I'll try to show you the grounds, there are grounds for divorce in scripture, but it's madness ever to think of divorce purely on the level of selfishness whether you enjoy the other person or not. You're not given to each other to enjoy each other. You're given to each other to get each other into heaven and that's why always loved ones, you should do everything to avoid parting from each other. You're together so that someday you'll walk through the gates of heaven together and that's why he has put you there.

For fellowship with one another, for a constantly increasing intimacy and you know if you say, "Oh, for goodness sake we're different. I don't understand her. I don't understand him." That's right.

That's right, that's why God put you together because there'd have to be a stretching, there'd have to be a stretching and an exercising of patience, and an exercising of gentleness and long suffering to get to know the other person. So sure, sure he sits there and doesn't say a word, just looks at her like Archie. Just looks and doesn't say anything. And sure, you talk 20 to the dozen, that's right. That's right, that's why God put you together because somehow you have to get that gentleness, and that love, and that kindness of Jesus into your voice so that you can get into that dear old fella's heart and it's the same the other way around.

That's why you're put together because it's going to stretch you. It's going to stretch you big enough so that you'll be at home in heaven. It's going to stretch you big enough so that you'll be like Jesus. But that's what marriage is about. It's about patience, and kindness, and you go around that way and you can't get to them so you go around the other way and you try to get to them. And you can't go around that way so you go over that way. But you don't like dumb idiots try once and say, "No, we're not the same kind of people." No loved ones, that's not what marriage is about.

Marriage is there to stretch you and to change you and as you endeavor to love the other person in truth and in spirit, that's what will happen to you. But loved ones, it's a stretching. I'd plead with you, I'd plead with you, what's killing our world is that nobody will stretch over to the other person and eventually you know, Tennessee Williams is right, you remember in his preface to that 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof' he said, "We're all condemned to solitary confinement within our own skins," and that's the way society is going. It is you know that. It's going more and more to isolation. And do you see it's because people won't stretch over to each other. Sure it takes dying to what you want and dying to your own convenience, but that's why the Father has put you together, to stretch over to each other and to love each other.

I'd just like to summarize it really and it is easily summarized loved ones, because you can say that the difference between secular marriage and Christian marriage is one is getting and the other is giving and that's it. Love is giving, it's not getting and you can see that clearly outlined if you realize that the Greek language is much richer than the English language as you probably know and we have only one word for love and that covers Liz Taylor's seventh husband and her attitude to her seventh husband. And that word love covers the attitude of a man or woman to their God, and it covers the attitude of a son to a father, and it covers even what a prostitute would have said to her on certain occasions. And it's really a very poor way to describe the many facets of love.

Greek has three different words and the first one that I'd like you to look at it is the word "Eros" and it looks like that in Greek and in English letters it's that. "Eros" it's the name of that statue you remember, that is in Piccadilly in London. And "Eros" is the concept that is found there in that verse we looked at before in 1 Thessalonians 4:5 and it's the word that gives rise to words

like erotic. 1 Thessalonians 4:5 and Verse 3 you remember gives the syntax a little better, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from unchastity; that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor.” And then Verse 5, “Not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God.”

“Eros” is sexual love if it ought to even have the word love. It’s sexual love or sexual desire. It’s preoccupied with getting what it wants, emotional satisfaction or physical satisfaction or exhilaration and “Eros” is sexual love. It’s an utterly selfish thing that’s why really you had better put love in parenthesis or at least in quotes because you can hardly call it love because love is giving. The heart of erotic love is getting. It’s getting emotional satisfaction or exhilaration or physical satisfaction or exhilaration for yourself and that is the basis of what 80% maybe of marriages and that’s why the seven year itch becomes a joke, and that’s why the 45 year old running around after the secretaries is a joke. Because, there comes a time in marriage where that is not the center of the relationship at all and so “Eros” is no basis for marriage because it’s a preoccupation with getting for yourself.

The second type of love is “Philia”. It looks like that and comes out in Philadelphia you remember, the love of brothers and that’s really what it is. It’s the love of two people for each other because they have the same interests. So it’s common interest. Two men could have it for each other because they both like football, because they both like fishing and it’s a common interest thing. They’re drawn together – many of us had those experiences in school, many of us have friends who are drawn together with us because we have a common interest.

It’s still a selfish thing because you – it only lasts as long as the common interest is there and that’s the kind of love that is hinted at in 1 Corinthians 7:12-13. 1 Corinthians 7:12-13, “To the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.” If it was just “Philia” love, of course they’d divorce immediately because they’d have nothing in common and “Philia” love runs out after she ceases to take an interest in his bowling, or he ceases to take an interest in the children, or they both cease to play tennis together, or they both cease to be interested in building a home, or building the house together. And so “Philia” is a selfish love and is preoccupied with something in the other person that you’re interested in.

The only love that really works is “Agape” love and it looks like that in English letters and is the kind of love that is talked about in Romans 5:5, and it’s the kind of love that is described in 1 Corinthians 13. And Romans 5:5 runs like this, “And hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.” “Agape” love is a gift from God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit, but not arbitrarily. But that love is given to any person who is willing to obey God, any person who is willing to die to what they want and what they think they should have and is willing to want what God wants. God then sheds abroad in your heart “Agape” love.

It’s the love that Jesus had for a leper. He looked at the leper with the withered flesh and in no way was that leper useful to him emotionally or physically. In no way had that leper anything in common with him and yet Jesus’ heart was filled with God’s love for that leper. It’s a miraculous desire to put yourself in the other person’s shoes and really see things from where they see them, really understand things as they understand them, really feel for them. That’s what love is.

Love is not a big complex thing. Love is a very practical interest in knowing what the other dear person is feeling and in seeing things the way they see it so that you can really understand them and sympathize, and empathize with them. Now that love is shed abroad miraculously in the heart of any person who is willing to die to themselves. You do have to be willing to die to yourselves loved ones and just one or two things then to comment on that. That love does show itself in physical expression because I think a lot of you listen to that and you say, "Oh yes, it's a very spiritual thing but it never shows itself." Of course it does, that's what gives intercourse its beauty because "Agape" love is preoccupied with the other person rather than their body and that's what makes the physical expression of love such a beautiful and such a right and appropriate thing to do.

It's what brings physical intercourse into perspective, "Agape" love. It's what enables the woman to know that you're not just making use of her body. It's what enables the man to know that you're not just depending on his virility. It's a concern for the person and a desire to even die for the person if need be and that's what "Agape" love is. Ephesians 5 you see describes it, "Husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." And that's what "Agape" love makes you want to do and so it does express itself in physical ways in a husband wife relationship but it's a desire to give, and a desire to put the other person before yourself.

Now loved ones, there are just a few minutes so do you want to ask any questions? I'll try to talk next day about physical relationships inside and outside marriage, and try then to go gradually on to celibacy and to divorce, and then to authority and submission but that would be maybe two weeks hence. But are there any questions?

Question from the audience:

Would the "Agape" love operate here where perhaps one would have an interest that was different from the other and would the "Agape" love then prompt one to lay down their interest and begin to be interested in what the other was doing?

Reply from Pastor O'Neill

Yeah, "Agape" love is beautiful because it makes you ready to give up what you yourself want to do and enables you to want more what the other person wants. And so the beautiful thing about it is that the Holy Spirit is able perhaps to change both your apparent interests and to bring you into something that he wants you to be interested in.

Question from the audience:

Does the "Agape" love then correspond to the promise two shall become one?

Reply from Pastor O'Neill:

Yes. It's the only way two can become one brother, because two can only become one if there's a readiness to die to what you want, and what you want to be and do and be prepared to become what God wants you to be. Yeah. And the beauty of a marriage which, loved ones you husbands and wives, we've made of a mess of it you know, because we don't see it in all its beauty. It's a new creation. It's a new creation but you know how stiffed neck we are, we don't want to lose what we are and we don't see what God wants to create is a new creation that two shall become one. That

means there's a new person who comes about you know. But we spoil it because we won't let her touch what we are, or we won't let him touch what we are. And we've missed it you know.

Well loved ones, those of us who are married, I would ask that we would seek the Holy Spirit. Really, and I'm saying this to myself as well as to you others who are married, that we'd seek the Holy Spirit and ask him to give us light about our own attitudes. I'll talk about us guys, let the ladies take care of themselves, ask the Holy Spirit to show us men in what way we are not loving our wives as Jesus loves them. And you dear sisters, I'd ask you to do the same thing. Oh so often loved ones, you sisters you're to be – we're dumb I agree we men we're the dumbest creatures alive and we need you. And we need you not to criticize us.

Do you realize that one of the beautiful things about physical intercourse is you open yourselves completely to the other person and that really symbolizes the opening that there is intellectually and emotionally in a marriage. That means that a person is lying open to you and if you cut in with criticism you cut that dear fella deeper than anybody else can. So dear sisters, you're not there to slash us, you're there to help us, encourage us, not always agree with us but help us to see what you can see. But you know so often, do you see what it's like? Your wife is your right hand your husband is your right hand. Now whoever saw someone taking a sword in his left hand and cutting his right hand in ribbons?

You don't do it. You're weakening yourself when you do it. Every time you criticize your dear partner, every time you criticize what he's involved in you tear apart your own personality. So I do ask you, you dear sisters don't criticize it's of Satan, and you dear guys, don't criticize what she is doing but begin to love each other and begin to build each other up and you'll be amazed at the liberty that that begins to bring to you.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, I would pray for every dear husband and wife here in this place. Lord, I would pray that by your Holy Spirit you will give us eyes to see. Lord, those of us brothers who have become insensitive and who have become incapable it seems of appreciating the pain in the heart of our wives, Lord we would ask you for light so that we may see it. And Lord, those wives among us who have become drivers or who have settled for something second best for our marriage, Lord help us to see that we're stealing from our menfolk, we're stealing most of all from God. We're preventing something beautiful coming about that he planned when we first fell in love.

And then Lord, I'd pray for my brothers and sisters who are not yet married. Lord, I'd pray that they'd see it as beautiful, and as magnificent, and as dignified as you intend it to be. And Lord I would pray that you would help us to see in the right perspective the whole physical side of marriage. Help us to see Lord, that first comes the spirit, first comes the mind, first comes the emotion and then after that the physical has meaning. Lord, I pray that even in the man woman relationships that obtain in this room at this moment, I would pray Lord, that you'd pull any that have gone the wrong way back into line with your will and that you'd enable us to step forward towards marriage as you see it and as you have planned it.

We ask this for your glory Lord Jesus, and now the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and throughout the days of this week. Amen.

