

# MARRIAGE

Genesis 2:18-25

Third Wednesday in Lent

March 8, 2023

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The Old Testament lesson comes from *Genesis*, chapter 2, verses 18 through 25. Genesis 2 is a close up of the sixth day of creation. Genesis 1 is an overview of creation. The second chapter zooms in on the sixth day. These verses focus on the creation of the woman and God's institution of marriage. Please stand as you are able for God's Holy Word. From Genesis 2, beginning at verse 18, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>18</sup> Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." <sup>19</sup> Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup> The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. <sup>21</sup> So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. <sup>22</sup> And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup> Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called Woman,  
because she was taken out of Man."

<sup>24</sup> Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. <sup>25</sup> And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

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We live in an orderly universe. When God created the "everything," it wasn't just material that he created. He also created the structure or "Law" that governs how that material functions. That Law governs everything, including rocks, trees, water, animals, wind, light, people, and everything else. God designed all of it to function in a certain way. We live in an orderly universe.

Sometimes it seems orderly, and other times it does not. That's the effect of sin. One way to define sin is as disorder. First of all, we are not the way we are supposed to be. Our nature and our desires are out of order with God's design. That's original sin. And second, our thoughts, words, and deeds are out of order with God's will. That's actual sin. Our natures and our actions are out of order with God's design.

This, I think, will help us understand the Sixth Commandment. And by understanding the Sixth Commandment better, it should also help us to appreciate it.

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We've been doing this little exercise with each of the commandments where we not only identify what sinful actions a commandment prohibits, but we also consider what gifts a commandment protects. Going back to last year, and even farther, we've done this with all of the commandments, so maybe you're starting to think it's repetitive and boring. I hope not, because this little exercise teaches us that God's commandments are really gracious and kind. God prohibits certain actions in order to prevent us from damaging and despising the good gifts he has given us.

But instead of starting with what this commandment prohibits, I want to start with what the commandment protects. And sometimes a commandment might protect multiple gifts, and this is certainly the case with the Sixth Commandment.

The first and most obvious gift the Sixth commandment protects is God's blessed estate of marriage. Marriage, as we just read, was instituted before the fall into sin. It goes all the way back to day six of creation. So its purpose is intrinsic to the order of the universe. Marriage was instituted as a means through which God continues his work of creation. This is why we prefer the term "procreation" instead of "reproduction." It's not about reproducing ourselves. It's not about passing on our legacy. It's about participating in and continuing God's work of creation. So God has instituted marriage to continue his work of creation, to bring joy to husband and wife, and to provide a safe and stable home for the protection and teaching of his children. And when marriage and the family are strong, these blessings pour over into society.

Children have the best outcomes when they grow up in a stable home, that is, with their mother and father in the same home from birth until at least the point when they graduate high school. Children who suffer divorce or grow up with an absent parent face more challenges. It doesn't mean those children can't succeed. But it does mean they will face more challenges.

So when we talk about "protecting marriage," we need to remember why we protect it, and we should state it. Some time ago, Christians got off message on this, or maybe the message got muted. I'm not sure. But when we talk about protecting marriage, we're not trying to impose an arbitrary morality. Instead, we see the good benefits of marriage, especially for children, and we want children to have those benefits. Protecting marriage is really about protecting children. They have a right to their mother and father. So it's a matter of justice for children.

And the best thing any of us can do to make a positive impact in the world, is to make a positive impact in our homes. Nowhere else will you have a greater impact than in the lives of your spouse and children. So by protecting marriage, the Sixth Commandment also protects the home and the children who live in it. And by protecting children as they are growing up and developing, the Sixth Commandment protects society by providing it with well-trained and God-fearing citizens.

And, like many of the commandments, the Sixth Commandment also protects our own persons. Sexual sin has a unique character about it. The apostle Paul teaches us that, "Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body" (1 Cor. 6:18). God has given you your body. And it is a good gift. God even intends to raise your body from the dead on the Last Day. He's not going to give you a different body. This body is the one you will spend eternity in. God will take this good gift he has already given to you, and he will perfect it.

Now, the injuries, diseases, and defilements our bodies suffer will not endure past the Resurrection of the Dead. Christ will remove those in the Resurrection, but that doesn't mean we should disregard our bodies. Our bodies reflect the image of God. And our actions in this life can have lasting consequences on our bodies. An easy illustration of this is the various infections a

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person can acquire while violating the Sixth Commandment. God would like to spare us from that.

But even if we don't get something nasty, there are still lasting consequences we endure when we misuse our bodies. That is because there is a link between body and soul, and we can't turn it off. It's kind of mysterious, and I don't really know how to explain it, but if you know what I'm talking about, then you know what I'm talking about. When a man and a woman join themselves together physically, the link is more than physical. Their bodies and souls are bound together. This is the most basic definition of marriage.

We usually think of marriage in terms of vows and ceremonies. And those vows and ceremonies are good, because they help everyone recognize the reality that this man and this woman are husband and wife. But those are simply a recognition of marriage. The actual marriage occurs when man and woman come together physically. We get at least a hint of this when God says, "A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (2:24). The clearest statement on this comes from 1 Corinthians 6, where the apostle Paul says, "Do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, 'The two will become one flesh' " (1 Cor. 6:16). That's marriage. This is simply the way God designed the universe to function. Sexual intercourse joins a man and a woman together in marriage, and this bond lasts for the rest of our lives. God made this bond, and we can't just make it go away.

So when we ask the question, "Is sex outside of marriage a sin?" a very simplistic answer would be, "Yes." But a more precise answer would be, "Sex outside of marriage doesn't exist." The problem, in most instances, is that a man and a woman do not recognize that a marriage is taking place, so they are not committed to it. In other instances, the problem is that they are creating a marriage where one should not be created.

Now, if we follow this principle to its conclusion, we will see that someone might be married to many different people. At first, this might seem like an impossibility. But if we think about it a little, it might actually makes sense of all the brokenness, loneliness, and shame we experience. Sexual intercourse binds a man and a woman together both physically and spiritually. This is the way God designed the universe, and it is good. The problem is that we may create these connections without realizing it, or we may create connections where they should not be.

This opens up some situational questions, which I suppose I have to address now, but I will do it as quickly as possible. Someone might realize, "I'm married to many different people. What should I do?" First, you confess your sin, and you trust in Jesus' blood, which covers every sin. Then you identify the marriage that is legitimate, and live faithfully in that one. In almost every instance, that will be the person you are legally married to. If there are any exceptions to this, they would be extremely rare.

So there is great pain when we live out of order with God's design, but God's design is still good. And despite the pain from broken relationships, God's good design can still bless your marriage.

Another way we see the goodness of God's design is when children are conceived. And I want you to think about this. When we hear that a teenage girl or a single woman is pregnant, what should we say? You know what we should say? We should say, "God be praised!" It might be difficult to say that, because we know that something is out of order. But our first reaction should be rejoicing, because a new person has been created, and that is good. Now, somebody sinned, probably two people. And that sin is a problem. It's a problem for the people who sinned,

and it will likely cause problems for the child. But the child is not the problem. The child is a gift of God, and we should rejoice that God blesses us with good things, even when we sin.

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So in describing the various gifts the Sixth Commandment protects, I've kind of been drifting toward what the commandment prohibits. In its very narrow definition, adultery refers to "voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and someone other than his or her lawful spouse" (Dictionary.com). That's the narrow definition, and this is certainly forbidden by the Sixth Commandment. But, as we noted last week, the Ten Commandments are really a summary of all six-hundred and some commandments in the Bible. So the Sixth Commandment forbids much more than this one particular sin.

Usually the catechism helps us identify the various other sins which are prohibited, but not here. This and the meaning of the First Commandment are the only instances where Martin Luther states only the positive aspect of the commandment, not the negative side. The reason, I suppose, is because he knows that the mere mention of certain sins is enough to tempt us toward them. There's something different about sexual sin, that the mere mention of it tempts us. We may even sin in our thoughts during the course of this sermon. In fact, I assume many of us will. And if that doesn't illustrate our depravity, then I don't know what does.

So I'm going to try, without going into tempting details, to treat the content of this commandment. First, we recognize from various biblical passages that sexual activity is reserved for the relationship of a husband and a wife. Recognizing and accepting this truth will take care of most everything. Instead of naming everything that's out of bounds, we can simply affirm what is in bounds, and if it's not that thing which is in bounds, then it's out of bounds.

It's kind of like a basketball court. The court is in bounds. Everything else is out of bounds. But someone might still ask, "What about the stands? Are they in bounds or out of bounds? And what about the locker room or the parking lot? Are they in or out?" If they're not in bounds, they are out of bounds. "But what about the bench next to the court? That's pretty close." It doesn't matter. If it's not in bounds, it's out of bounds. It would be silly to focus on all the things that are out of bounds. Instead, you focus on what's in bounds, because that is what matters. If it's not in bounds, it is out of bounds.

Basketball is an orderly game. The universe is also orderly. So take that principle, and apply it to marriage and sexuality. If it's not in bounds, it's out of bounds. And this applies to our thoughts and words as well. Marriage is in bounds; everything else is out of bounds.

Sometimes we try to identify some line we shouldn't cross, and we entertain everything up to that line without crossing it. But this attempt is itself over the line. So if there's anything in your mind that you're wondering, *Is this a sin?* It probably is. If you're too embarrassed to ask me later if something is or is not a sin, you should probably just assume that it is. The definition of what is in bounds is really quite narrow, and everything else is out of bounds.

This is the place where the world accuses us of being "sexually repressive," as if we're trying to steal everyone's right to have fun. That's not what we're doing, and that's not what God is doing with the commandment. God is protecting his good gift of sexuality. More broadly speaking, he is protecting his gracious gift of marriage. Violations of the Sixth Commandment look like fun, but they always end in brokenness and shame. They result in broken families, broken churches, shame, distrust between husband and wife, physical diseases, insecurity about one's self, and probably about a hundred other things. God gives us the Sixth Commandment because he wants to spare us from these tragedies. I cannot impress upon you enough the

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importance, both for yourself and for those around you, of abstaining from those things that are out of bounds.

But obedience to the Sixth Commandment is not just about abstaining from certain things. Even more so it is about loving and serving those whom we have been given to. Even within marriage, we should not really think about sex in terms of our own pleasure. Rather, we should think of it as an act of love for husband or wife. Remember that love, even romantic love, is not about our feelings. It is always about service of our neighbor.

Now if you've ever been married, then you know this is much easier said than done. Our selfish desires get the best of us over and over again. God desires perfection, but we fail to meet his expectations, and so we live in constant repentance. The Christian life is a life of repentance. We confess our sins to God, and we rest in the forgiveness that comes through Jesus' blood, for his blood has justified us from all sins.

But it's not merely before God that we repent. We also repent before one another. We confess our sins to our spouses, because we have sinned against them. And even though we know perfection is not possible, we continually strive to do better. We try to love our spouses more purely. If we manage to improve our behavior, it makes absolutely no difference in our standing before God. But it makes a huge difference to our spouses. And that is why we work. That is why we try. That is why we sacrifice ourselves.

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Finally, marriage reflects the relationship between Christ and his Church. We read about this in Ephesians 5. Paul says, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (5:25-27). This actually comes to us as a command. This is how husbands are to love their wives. But we also see God's marvelous grace in it. Jesus loved us when we were unworthy of love. We were sinful and defiled. But Jesus sacrificed himself for us. He washed us in Baptism. He gathered us together and purified us so that he could take this Church as his own bride. We were not clean, but he cleansed us.

Paul's command of love here is directed at husbands. That does not mean, of course, that wives are excused from loving their husbands. There's a nuance in Paul's instructions where the love a wife has for her husband takes the form of respect (5:33). But it's still love.

In marriage, we learn what love is. And this is true for any vocation. Single people also have vocations where they learn what love is. When we are called to love someone, and when we actually try to love them, we learn what love is. And I don't mean that we learn it by succeeding. We actually learn it better by failing, because when we fail, we learn just how difficult love really is. And, especially, when the other person is being rather unlovely, we learn how difficult it is to place that person ahead of ourselves. It's really in those moments when we fail that we see a glimpse of how difficult and great love is. Love calls us to give more than we are willing to give. And in those moments when we see how unloving we are, we see a bit more clearly how loving Christ is, because he did not fail. We get to a point where we stop. We can't give any more. But Jesus goes way beyond the point where we stop. When we fail at love, we see a glimpse of how great his love is.

And that is the love we rest in. When we are unlovely, he loves us. When we do not deserve anything good from him, he sheds his blood for us. He is faithful to us, no matter what. May God strengthen us to follow his example, and may we always depend on this mercy. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.