

Sermon 10-7-18
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Based on the lessons for the 20th Sunday after Pentecost.
Genesis 2:18-25, Mark 10:2-16.

Sex and the Great Divide

Jesus' opponents were always looking for a soft spot in His teaching and practice in order to accuse Him of being a false prophet or false teacher. Therefore as we heard today in Mark 10:2, "Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?'"

In typical Rabbi fashion we then read in Mark 10:3, "3 'What did Moses command you?' he [Jesus] replied. 4 They said, 'Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.'" They told the truth. In the 22nd and 24th chapters of Deuteronomy there are rules concerning divorce.

However, we read in Mark 10:5-9, "5 'It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,' Jesus replied. 6 'But at the beginning of creation God "made them male and female." 7 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 8 and the two will become one flesh." So they are no longer two, but one. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

In order to understand what's going on here we have to focus in on these words of Jesus, "at the beginning of creation." There are two huge demarcation points in the historical narrative of the Bible. The first is in the third chapter of Genesis. The second is at the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For His discussion of marriage and divorce with the Pharisees Jesus used the first one – Genesis chapter three.

In chapter three of Genesis Adam and Eve accept the serpent's words that if they eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they "will become like God knowing good and evil." They eat of the fruit of that tree and catastrophe for the human race results. We all have to face death because of their choice. All the evils of this world proceed from their choice. Our own evil proceeds from their choice.

But notice something. While all the rest of the bible's chapters come after the great disaster of Genesis 3, there are two chapters that come before it. These two marvelous chapters describe the universe as originally created by God, and humanity's place in God's universe. Jesus was referring to the information found in these two chapters when He said, "at the beginning of creation."

Thus, we read in Genesis 1:26-27, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." So, Jesus was referring to the fact that male and female are Yahweh's invention, His purpose for humanity from the beginning.

Now, what exactly does it mean to be made in the image of God? It's many things, but the one thing we're going to concentrate in on is righteousness or goodness.

Yahweh, the Creator, is Himself all goodness. If there is any goodness in you or me or this universe, it all proceeds from Him. He is the source of all goodness. As Creator of this universe He has the right to call good what He wants to call good. And He also has the right to call evil what He calls evil.

When we look at the six days of creation in Genesis chapter 1 we find that at the end of each one, Yahweh looks at what He has made and calls it all good. This means everything is just the way He wanted it. And this tells us exactly what goodness is. It's exactly what Yahweh wanted and still wants. Anything other than what the Creator wants is evil. In fact, that's the definition of evil.

Made in the image of God, Adam and Eve only knew in their hearts a desire and will for the goodness of God. They only knew the will and purpose of their Creator for them. Even in regard to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they only knew their Creator's will for that tree. Don't eat of it.

Therefore, when Satan the deceiver, liar and murderer came along, he had something of a problem. But he was able to deceive Adam and Eve. There are two ways to translate Satan's deception.¹ The first is "you will be like God, knowing good and evil." The second is "you will be as gods, knowing good and evil." Both are true because that's what happened when Adam and Eve ate of the fruit.

From Genesis chapter three onward Adam and Eve and their descendants – including us – have the power to decide good and evil, just like God. We even have the power to define good and evil for ourselves as little gods. We all have the right to sit in God's big chair of judgment for ourselves. And this is where all the world's trouble begins and ends. For one person's good is not another's. And one person's evil is not another's. And in the end the curse of death, disaster and judgment comes down on all of us.

So Genesis chapter three is a tremendous line of demarcation. Whatever comes before Genesis three is good. It's perfect. It's within the will of the one, holy, perfect Creator God. Whatever comes after Genesis three is totally marred by the wicked choice of Adam, the creature Yahweh assigned to rule over all of the universe.

Therefore, in talking about marriage and divorce Jesus used this line of demarcation. First he quoted from Genesis 1:26 and 27. God made us male and female. Is this before Genesis three? Yes. And so the idea and design of male and female human beings is absolutely perfect. Yahweh desired two sexes, not one, not three or any other number. Two!

And then Jesus quoted from Genesis chapter 2 – the part we had in our first lesson this morning. A man will leave the family authority of his father and mother. As he joins himself to his female, he will establish a new unit of family authority. In that unit of authority and through their children that man and woman become one flesh. Again, does this all come before Genesis three? Absolutely. Therefore, the marriage of one man and one woman establishing a new unit of human family authority is absolutely perfect. Yahweh desires one man and one woman – no other combination. This is why marriage is considered a sacrament among Roman

¹ Genesis 3:5

Catholics and an holy estate among Lutherans and other Christians. Sexuality and marriage pre-date the disaster in Genesis three! They are from the beginning.

Now, where does divorce come into the picture? The first mention of it is in Deuteronomy 22 – a lot of chapters and thousands of years after Genesis three.² Therefore, there is nothing perfect in divorce. Rather, it's a product of the huge flaw in human nature resulting from Genesis three. For, we are no longer in sync with Yahweh's goodness. We are now our own gods. And divorce is one of the many destructive things that happen as a result. Yahweh indeed permitted divorce when He gave the law to Moses, but Jesus clarified the reason for Yahweh's concession. It's because of our hardness of heart – our God playing. It was not God's intention from the beginning.

Much to the everlasting shock of His disciples, Jesus, in private, called remarriage after divorce adultery. Jesus wanted us to know that while we may call divorce ok, our Creator does not. Even though Yahweh made a concession to our hardness of heart, divorce is a violation and contradiction of His holy, good and perfect purpose for male and female. For this reason, if divorced persons come to me for remarriage, I will explain this to them and counsel them to seek the Lord's forgiveness for their previous divorce. Without that, I cannot in good conscience perform the marriage.

But I want to move beyond this discussion because there's something much bigger here: BEFORE and AFTER Genesis three. There is sexuality and marriage BEFORE Genesis three and there is sexuality and marriage AFTER Genesis three. The first is the Creator's perfect definition of sexuality and marriage. The second is entirely our definitions and whatever accommodations Yahweh has been willing to make to our rebellion.

Indeed, there is one more accommodation in the Old Testament – polygamy, having more than one wife. In fact, the Law of Moses lays down some regulations regarding polygamy, like a man not taking two sisters as wives.³ But it's clear from Genesis chapters one and two that polygamy is not God's idea. It's ours. He only tolerated and accommodated it. For, finally, in the New Testament Yahweh established a stipulation through the Apostle Paul that no leader in Christ's Church may be a polygamist.⁴ This is why polygamy died out under Christianity. As the leader goes, so go the people.

But there are many things Yahweh has never tolerated nor accommodated in human sexuality or marriage. Rather, He condemns them as rebellion against Him. Therefore, observant Jews refused to engage in them. However, the pagan gentiles did.

As we've seen many times, by the time of Jesus, all the world was pagan except for the Jewish nation. And even though paganism takes many forms, including atheism, all paganism has one root in common – a denial that there is a Creator God. Therefore, people under paganism are ignorant of Yahweh's purposes in human sexuality and marriage.

² Deuteronomy 22:19, 29; Deuteronomy 24:1,3. See Malachi 2:16

³ Leviticus 18:18

⁴ 1Timothy 3:2, 3:12; Titus 1:6

Marriage and the family did survive as lands went pagan. But many other things unacceptable to Yahweh crept in and became acceptable in gentile society. Paul lists some of these things in his letters: homosexuality (including bi-sexuality) orgies, adultery, and fornication.

So, now we come to the second great demarcation point in world history – the coming of Jesus Christ. It was and remains Yahweh’s plan that gospel news of His Messiah’s passion, death, resurrection, ascension into heaven, the pouring out of God’s Holy Spirit and Messiah’s return to judge the world would convert many pagans to the worship of the true Creator and His Son, Jesus Christ.

And that’s exactly what happened across Europe, northern Africa and the Middle East in the first 600 years of Christianity. After 600A.D. Christianity got boxed into Europe by Islam. But with the period of European superiority Christianity was again unleashed throughout the pagan world through the great missionary movements. Even with the present decline of Christianity in Europe and the U.S., Christianity is still on the march throughout the world.

Throughout history and throughout the world, when pagans convert to Jesus Christ, they also convert to faith in the One true God, the maker of heaven, earth and all things seen and unseen. Thus, they learn of the two great demarcation points of history – Genesis three, the fall of humanity into sin – and Jesus Christ – the one who liberates from sin so that we might again walk in the ways of the Creator God. It’s not surprising then that after a generation or two the gentile cultures that adopt Christianity also adopt Yahweh’s teaching concerning human sexuality and the family. This was true of Europe and the Americas for centuries.

However, the great divide still remains in this world. On one side are those who have converted to Jesus Christ and have converted to Yahweh’s definitions of good and evil. On the other side are all pagans who still follow their own definitions of good and evil. And in our own country nowhere is this division more pronounced than over the matters of human sexuality and marriage.

Right now children are being taught in some public schools that they can define their sexuality for themselves. They can even choose to be the opposite sex of what they are biologically. Where is this teaching coming from? It comes from rebellion against Christianity’s historic definitions of human sexuality based on Genesis chapters one and two. It comes from a return to pagan ideology where we are all gods able to define things for ourselves.

There are two things going on in this rebellion. First, since this pagan rebellion acknowledges no Creator, it teaches that the only way any society defines things male and female is by arbitrary and artificial social constructs. Pagans insist that when Christianity defines sexuality and marriage, there is no real God behind the definitions. It’s just a bunch of people in power arbitrarily deciding that the ways of Christianity will be followed.

Second, the Marxist form of pagan rebellion claims that as a result of the artificial social constructs of any society there are always victims. Marxists then incite these defined victims to rebel against the organized centers of social power. In the last fifty years, Marxists have identified, married people, women, homosexuals and now transsexuals as persecuted victims in our society. Marxists, ever eager for power themselves, take up the cause of their identified victims in order to overthrow the

existing centers of social power in a society and establish their own utopia where supposedly there will be no more victims. Power to the people!

In our society this is the heart of the clash. On the one side are pagan cultural Marxists declaring that sexuality can be anything we want it to be. Sexuality is only an artificial social construct. There is no God. We are the gods. So a biological male can declare that he's female.

On the other side, Jesus taught that human sexuality, marriage and the family are not mere artificial social constructs invented by power hungry people in order to oppress certain social classes. No. Sexuality, marriage and the family belong to our Creator from the beginning, not to us. They are Yahweh's gifts to us. Therefore, we are to conduct ourselves in sexuality, marriage and the family according to His ways, not our own ways.

When Lord Holy Spirit comes and converts people from paganism in all its forms to Jesus Christ and the Father, things change. Through the forgiveness of sins believers have a new hope. As it is written in 1 John 3:2-3, "2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure."

Purification from God-playing in matters of sexuality and marriage is difficult. But God is on the side of those in Christ. With Him all things are possible. After all He is the Creator of everything. He is the power behind everything. Therefore, in Jesus Christ, fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, the promiscuous and debauched, those addicted to porn – even molesters and rapists – can be forgiven, cleansed and established on the road to wholeness and goodness. Jesus has died and paid for all such sin. He has been resurrected so that the filthy can be purified. This is the gospel we proclaim anew to our paganized society. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.