

## Marriage No. 7

### “Marriage as One Man and One Woman”

March 30, 2014

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We have been dealing these past Lord’s Day evenings with the Bible’s theology of marriage, or the Bible’s *definition* of marriage. We have found in the Word of God that marriage is an institution of human life, established at the creation, by which the human race is organized in families; that marriage is a relationship of love; that marriage is a covenant, that is, a relationship ordered by sworn commitments and sanctioned by God himself; that marriage is the unique province for human sexual or erotic relationships; and that marriage is the instrument of procreation. We have one more piece of the biblical definition of marriage to add this evening, viz. that *marriage is the relationship of one man and one woman*.

God created the male human being, we read in Genesis 2:7 and then, later, he created the woman, as we read in Gen. 2:22. He then brought the woman to the man and created the first marriage. And immediately we read that *their* marriage was to be the pattern for all marriages:

“Therefore *a man* shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to *his wife*, and they shall become one flesh.”

In the manner so characteristic of the creation narrative the foundations of human life are laid down only in outline; the implications are not spelled out in detail. But implicit or not, it is obvious that what is being described is a *monogamous relationship between a man and a woman*. The first marriage is the culmination of the creation of the man and the woman as “like opposite one another” or “helpers fit for one another.” They were made to complement one another *for the sake of their marriage*. Proof that we are right to read these few remarks in Genesis 2 as *limiting* marriage to a monogamous relationship between one man and one woman is found in the Lord’s reference to this history in Matthew 19. He likewise saw in it the divine intention for marriage: a permanent and exclusive relationship between a man and a woman. Before citing Genesis 2:23, talking about marriage he said, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female...” He was talking about marriage. Further, subsequently in both biblical narrative and biblical teaching marriage is invariably between a man and a woman. When, for example, in Leviticus 18:22 we read that “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination,” the point is that such an act is contrary to the nature of men as God made that nature; it is an act of defiance against the God who made men and women and made them *for one another*.

The Apostle Paul will famously make this same point in Romans 1:26-27:

“For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged *natural* relations for those that are *contrary to nature*; and the men likewise gave up *natural* relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another...”

Don't discount Paul's connection between man's nature and his purpose, between the indicative and the imperative in human life, between what a male or female human being *is* and what his or her life *is for*. The assumption that there is such a thing as a natural order is fundamental to every serious ethical system. Why must we not kill or steal or betray our wives or husbands? Because these acts violate an order we all recognize to be built in to human existence. That there is such a thing as the sanctity of human life, as the obligations we have for one another, as the importance of faithfulness to our word and so on depends upon that order. Deny that natural order and, unless you are a Christian with a Bible in your hand, you have no way of justifying or condemning *any* conduct whatsoever. The only reason for not murdering your neighbor's annoying child and leaving the body on your neighbor's lawn is that they are very likely to hunt you down if you do. So when we read in the Bible that *homosexual liaisons are contrary to the natures of men and women as God created those natures* we are acknowledging what must be acknowledged lest we cast objective morality aside altogether. Everywhere in the Bible the nature of marriage as a monogamous relationship between one man and one woman is rooted in the divine intention for human life, an intention demonstrated in the *nature* of male and female.

However, as we know, marriage, even in the Old Testament, was not invariably between *one* man and *one* woman. We find polygamy regularly in the Old Testament and again in the New. Even very important biblical figures, Abraham and David, for example, had more than one wife. Many, to be sure, did not. Isaac had only Rebekah; Jacob had both Leah and Rachel, but not by his own choice. Joseph had but one wife, as did Moses, Isaiah, and Ezekiel. One wife per husband was undoubtedly the almost universal norm in Israel. But polygamy, especially royal polygamy, was commonplace in the larger culture and it was practiced and, strangely, it was never explicitly condemned in the Old Testament, particularly in the case of Israel's kings. It is worth remembering that polygamy is rare in the western world *in largest part because of the influence of Christianity*, but it is still a common practice in other parts of the world. In the New Testament the problem of polygamous marriages resurfaced because when a man who already had several wives became a Christian he could not abandon the women he had married after his first marriage without exposing them to ruin. A thief could simply stop being a thief and begin to live honestly. But a man with several wives had commitments to those women he was obliged to keep. Nor was there a principle by which he could divorce them. A sinful divorce could not make a perfect marriage out of a formerly polygamous one. [cf. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 755]

Churches around the world still face this problem today. In the New Testament (1 Tim. 3:2) we read that such a man -- a man with more than one wife -- could not be a church officer, a representative Christian man, because he could not set a proper example for the church. But he

could be a Christian in good standing. However, the church would not and never did permit *new* polygamous marriages.

It is this same attitude that Jesus himself expressed about divorce in Matthew 19. He harked back to the institution of marriage in Genesis 2 and said, in effect, that God's intention was for a one man/one woman marriage and that ought to be our rule as well. It isn't always possible but that is why the Law of God protects the sanctity of marriage, condemns adultery, never sanctions polygamy, and allows divorce only for profound betrayals of the marriage covenant. The connection between divorce and polygamy, by the way, is not a forced one. Americans today are very often polygamous, but in a serial way rather than a contemporaneous way. They too have more than one wife, sometimes many more than one; they just have them one at a time. So we 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans cannot look down on polygamy as somehow beyond or beneath us; we simply practice our polygamy differently, in a way designed to produce the same result while salvaging our conscience at the same time! To be sure, as we have seen there are circumstances that justify divorce and, as we just said, some that require the toleration of polygamy, but that is hardly the same thing as approving of either. Generally both are forbidden. It is true that the Old Testament seems to be strangely tolerant of polygamy and, while Israel's kings are warned against taking many wives (Deut. 17:17), there is no explicit general prohibition against polygamy in the law as we might have expected there to be.

1. But, as I said, almost all OT marriages were monogamous.
2. There is never any explicit or implicit *approval* of polygamy.
3. There are numerous indications that polygamy at the very least is unwise and produces sinful and unhappy results. In fact, it is probably safe to say -- I can't say that I examined every case -- the results of polygamy as reported in the OT are uniformly negative in some way. There is the spiritual collapse of Solomon's life that is attributed to his many wives. The jealousy and bitterness between Sarah and Hagar, Leah and Rachel, and Peninnah and Hannah, that was a feature of their being the wives of the same man, seems almost inevitable, as it has proved to be in most polygamous homes. In the same way the husband's preferring one wife to the other, as Jacob preferred Rachel to Leah, caused the misery of the neglected wife. Polygamy, in virtually every case it is reported in the OT, had deleterious effects. While polygamy may not be explicitly condemned in the OT, *it definitely gets a bad press.*

*The entire Bible views monogamous marriage as the divine ideal.* But now comes an entirely different challenge to this understanding of marriage, viz. homosexual or gay marriage. Do you young people, you young adults in the sanctuary this evening, do you realize how revolutionary are the times in which you are living? There have always been homosexuals. Homosexuality is mentioned a number of the times in the Bible, in the OT and NT alike. But *never* until these past few years in the western world, never in the history of mankind, has anyone ever suggested such a thing as homosexual marriage. This is an invention of your own day. The history of the marital

ethics of the entire world is being overturned in a virtual moment. It matters not to modern thinkers in the western world that human society has never thought to do this before. They are sure they know better; a remarkable opinion given the collapse of social health in both Europe and the United States that has followed the introduction of the ideas that have led to homosexual marriage. But intellectuals almost never care if their ideas produce human misery on an unprecedented scale, if their predictions don't come true, and if their arguments are disproved. They know best.

To the modern western intelligentsia the principle involved is that nature tells us nothing about how things *ought* to be. Nature is an accident and accidents can produce no "ought," no moral obligation. Men and women are obviously a matched pair. That is their nature. A part of the male anatomy fits into a part of the female anatomy and human reproduction occurs. The biblical and, for that matter, the human understanding of marriage is built on that very obvious fact. Men and women complement one another in precisely that way that enables a new family to come into being. Obviously a man does not complement another man in that same way, nor a woman another woman. So to allow men to marry men and women to marry women, it was necessary to redefine marriage. And that is what has been happening over the past generation and a half in the western world. They redefined marriage for other reasons, to be sure, than to pave the way for gay marriage -- nobody was thinking about gay marriage when this process was begun -- but having redefined marriage, gay marriage was an inevitable result.

1. *First*, no fault divorce went a long way toward redefining marriage as simply a legally recognized form of companionship. As I said in our first sermon, modern European and American marriage is really more a form of concubinage than of marriage as it has been historically understood. Marriage, if it is to be between two men or two women, obviously cannot be the relationship for which their natures have fit them, a relationship that creates a family because it holds the promise of children. It was this fundamental shift in the understanding of marriage that led some advocates of homosexual marriage, such as Andrew Sullivan, the former editor of *The New Republic*, to admit that homosexuals such as himself had no interest in marriage as marriage used to be; but that if modern marriage -- easy in, easy out -- is what marriage has become, then why shouldn't they have the same right to it as everyone else? If marriage does not create a family, if it is simply a recognized form of co-habitation, when why should homosexuals be excluded?
2. *Second*, when sex outside of marriage was normalized, as it has been over the past generation, it was inevitable that marriage itself would undergo a corresponding transformation. If marriage is not for sex then sex is not especially for marriage. What then is marriage now for? With so many children being born outside of marriage it cannot be said -- certainly as a matter of public policy -- that marriage is for children. No wonder then that so many single adults in Europe and the United States are co-habiting rather than marrying. Or not even co-habiting, simply hooking up from time to time. What is

marriage, in their view, but an unnecessary layer of legal complications? With co-habitation, if the relationship doesn't last, one can simply move out; there is no need to hire a lawyer. Marriage and family as traditionally understood may still be the dream of many, but with a decreasing measure of social support, with the law itself suggesting that marriage is little more than a legally recognized form of companionship, with the uniqueness of marriage being so profoundly compromised, it was an entirely predictable outcome that not only would more marriages fail but fewer would marry at all. In such a climate, homosexual marriage is hardly necessary -- you can live with anyone you please in this culture and suffer nothing for it -- but its cachet, its time-honored status would prove valuable in normalizing homosexuality in the society at large. There was virtually nothing that would make homosexuals appear more normal and homosexuality more acceptable than allowing them to marry.

On the exercise bike the other day I read Dear Abby's reply to a fellow who was asking for advice. (Having read Dear Abby, I can tell you that if there were 100 people in a room and Dear Abby was one of them, she would be the very last person to whom I would turn for advice!) He had lived with a woman for seven years and they had a child, a daughter together. Then the woman died quite suddenly from an illness. They had never married and he now wasn't sure how to speak of his late girlfriend, his daughter's mother. Abby took it all in stride -- far be it from her to pass judgment on the "lifestyle" these people had chosen for themselves -- and suggested, "It would be accurate for you to refer to her as your late significant other, partner, or girlfriend." We are now so used to co-habitation that we are developing the etiquette for it! It is in such circumstances that gay marriage seems perfectly reasonable to most Americans. [*Tacoma News Tribune* March 26, 2014]

The fact of the matter is that homosexual marriage is a development that has been pulled along by powerful cultural undercurrents. In a few years the almost universal convictions of mankind throughout its history have been overturned. Nobody was thinking about gay marriage 30 years ago, still less 40 or 50 years ago. It's a blink in human history. It is the direct result of other fundamental changes in our society's understanding of marriage and of the place of sex in human life. The normalization of abortion and gay marriage are both consequences of the sexual revolution; indeed, it may not be too much to say that abortion and gay marriage, together with contraception and pornography, are *the sacraments of the sexual revolution*. Sex as entertainment, sex without commitment, and sex without consequence is the dream of modern western society. That it has turned into a nightmare, few are willing to notice. They are too invested in this philosophy of life.

So I say, these developments are part and parcel of the conviction of modern culture, a system of thought, and according to that system of thought nature is not a calling; it is something to be made to submit to our will. The heart of modern western society's cultural project is to conquer nature, to render it subject to our will. Andrew Milton reminded me the other day of Ken Myers'

definition of modernity. According to Ken Myers the best way to identify the modern mind -- you and I do not really have a modern mind, but the society around us does -- is to define it as “the eradication of teleology.” (This is the Ken Myers of *Mars Hill Audio Journal*). By teleology Myers means that nature has ends and purposes built into it. Modern life is a protest against teleology. Feminists decry the very idea that “biology is destiny,” as if the fact that women are the only human beings who can have children is an unfair limitation of their personal freedom. And, in the same way, the complementary nature of men and women is not a “purpose” of nature, but something to be ignored in the case of both feminism and homosexuality.

As abortion is an attack on teleology -- that a purpose of sexual concourse is to bring new life into the world -- so is gay marriage. People in our modern society think we ought to be free to define relationships in whatever way we choose. We talk endlessly about the different “lifestyles” that people choose. Why should those who choose marriage as their “lifestyle” be preferred to those who choose another lifestyle? These developments are conceivable only in a secularist culture in which people are seeking to become not happily subject to nature as God made it but, in Descartes’ words, “lords and masters of nature.” Anyone should be able to see that God and God’s will have no place in this philosophy of life. We are our own gods and should be free to create our own humanity. The purpose of something will be whatever we say it is!

It is because it arises so naturally from the *Zeitgeist*, the cultural ethos of 21<sup>st</sup> century America, that even Christian young people are finding it difficult to see the problem with gay marriage. It seems so inevitable in a culture such as ours. Shouldn’t everyone be allowed fully to express his sexuality? Isn’t it unfair to allow marriage only to one class of people? Doesn’t being excluded in this way increase the burden that homosexuals have to bear? Before fashioning a reply to this philosophy of life, several preliminary observations.

1. Opposition to gay marriage is nowadays usually vilified as homophobia: a term that literally means “fear of homosexuals” but has come to mean “hatred of homosexuals.” The *argumentum ad hominem*, alas, is now the preferred technique of our social and political discourse. By demonizing the opposition one avoids having to make an actual argument. What is more, and I’m quite sure a good many advocates of gay marriage understand that the principles of real Christianity prevent Christians from responding in kind. That leaves them at a distinct disadvantage in the public debate. There is the odd pseudo-Christian who shows up at funerals with signs saying that “God Hates Fags,” but the defenders of the sexual revolution know very well that the mass of Christians in the country neither hate homosexuals nor would mistreat them. That is, as it should be. No Christian should despise a homosexual for his homosexuality and the more he or she knows about homosexuality the less reason he will have to despise those who find themselves with such desires.

2. Second, most of what you hear in the popular press about homosexuality is simply untrue. It is a fact of life: revolutions are usually built on lies and that has been true of the sexual revolution as fully as it was true of the communist revolution or the French revolution before it. There is no gay gene -- no serious researcher thinks there is -- and gays are not "born that way," no matter how often that mantra is repeated in public discourse. The causes of homosexuality are, as you might expect, very complex and in some respects impossible to identify. There is some evidence that certain biological factors might slightly increase the propensity for homosexuality *should other causative factors be present*. Most homosexuals -- a very high proportion -- have been victims of sexual abuse or suffered a very sinister troubled relationship with their parents, especially their fathers; but, of course, many others have suffered similarly who did not become homosexuals. There is much in human life that no one can explain.
3. Further, sexual identity is more fluid than advocates of gay marriage want to admit. Now that homosexuality is mainstreamed and ceasing to be controversial more members of the homosexual community are willing to admit this. Indeed, there is an increasing number of people in the homosexual and lesbian communities who now resent the idea that they were supposedly "born that way." They are protesting the idea of biological destiny in the same way that feminists do. Inevitable as that was, people should have realized that protest was coming. You're telling the homosexual he had no choice, he's stuck, he has no freedom, he is what he was born to be. Nobody wants to hear that including homosexuals.
4. But the principal point here is that we are far, far from saying that homosexuals *chose* to be so. They did not. They may or may not choose *to live* as homosexuals, but at least for the vast majority of them, if not all of them, their homosexuality is the consequence of the sins that others committed against them. That should make any Christian a compassionate friend of homosexual men and woman and advocate for their welfare. We don't wish that condition on anyone. It is sad. It is not what human life was intended to be; it is not what *they were made* to be; it is what human life becomes when deformed by sin. It is hardly the only way in which disorder afflicts human life -- there are many, many others -- but it is one way. Every Christian experiences a disordered life in some ways on account of sin. In fact in a number of ways on account of sin. We know of what we speak!
5. True enough, we will never condone homosexual sexual activity, but then we won't condone extramarital heterosexual sex either. In that respect we don't treat homosexuals differently than we treat others: sex is for marriage and is forbidden outside it.
6. We are appropriately sympathetic with the man or woman who wants very much to be married but cannot find a partner. We appreciate how difficult the single life can be for those who would so much rather be married. But, with most human societies throughout the history of the world, we understand that sex outside of marriage is harmful, harmful to the people themselves and harmful to society. It must be so in God's world where human life has been made to work in a certain way, and for God's creatures who must

inevitably be subject to God's judgment! The way of the transgressor is hard. We may wish it were not, but wishing doesn't make it so.

So, what then do we say about gay marriage? What is our argument against it?

*First*, it is forbidden in the Word of God. We begin there because our entire understanding of reality is based on the revelation of the truth we find in the Bible. Who we are, how we are to live, what our lives mean, how they are to be measured, what behavior is right and what is wrong, whence comes our penchant for doing what we know is wrong, what can be done about that penchant: all of this is found in the Word of God and only in the Word of God. There are plenty of signs of this reality in nature, to be sure, plenty of not so subtle hints, but it is in the Bible that we receive full disclosure and the systematic presentation of this truth about human life. The Bible forbids homosexual sex *period*; so it forbids homosexual marriage *in the nature of the case*. It teaches that marriage is the relationship for which men and women are made. Marriage being what it is and what it is for, only a man and a woman together can make a marriage.

I realize that there is abroad the argument that the Bible doesn't forbid homosexuality as an orientation and way of life, only its practice in promiscuous or violent forms. There are others who argue that we simply know much more about this than the ancients did and the Bible can't be our guide in this matter in our enlightened, modern age. I'm more sympathetic with the latter argument than the former. There is more honesty in it. The Bible forbids homosexual practice in the clearest and unmistakable terms and it does it again and again and again. In the Bible the problem with homosexuality is that it is not heterosexuality. The effort to get around that prohibition is the worst sort of special pleading. If I were allowed to use the techniques they use to make the Bible a friend of committed homosexual marriage, I could make the Bible say absolutely anything I wanted it to say. Most people, including most advocates of homosexual marriage, admit the Bible teaches the contrary; but they don't revere the Bible as the Word of God so what the Bible says is irrelevant. A more honest position in my view, however impossible for a Christian to hold.

To Christian young adults I lay down this challenge: where are you more likely to find the truth about human life; in the Bible or from the advocates of the very sexual revolution that is destroying the western world as we speak? Remember, the people who advocate for gay marriage also and first advocated for pre-marital sex, abortion, no-fault divorce, and pornography. All of this is a package; you can't have the one without the other; in fact anyone of them is inconceivable without the others. Try as you might they all rest on the same foundation of moral relativism and the self-assertion of autonomous man.

*Second*, the argument for gay marriage is, in fact, an argument for a lack of purpose in human life, at least any purpose that human beings can know and share. When advocates for the sexual

revolution argue their case -- they rarely really do in any serious way -- their argument reduces to this simple proposition: no one has a right to tell someone else how to live. You may imagine that the argument is more sophisticated than that, but in fact it is not and some of them have admitted as much. They obviously cannot appeal to any higher authority, because they deny that such an authority exists. The Christians may appeal to the law of God, but obviously no advocate for gay marriage can do that. No the appeal is to the authority of the autonomous, the independent self. What they rarely will admit is that this argument has implications they would rather not face and do not face.

1. In the first place, if the autonomous self is the authority for human life then we ought to ban any law that governs human behavior in any way, or, in a less consistent form of the argument, we ought to ban any law that limits human choices except those choices that are harmful to others. But, of course, no one is willing to do that. The secular state may allow virtually any sexual expression to go unchallenged, but it limits a host of other personal choices, including many choices that are not in any obvious way harmful to anybody else. We Americans may be libertines when it comes to sex but we have become Pharisees when it comes to food and tobacco. How then to deal with the fact that porn has done so much more harm to American society than trans fats? No one knows.
2. In the second place, if the autonomous self is the authority for human life, then we can have no answer to those who object to our viewpoint. If there is no God and no law of God, if there is no human nature that determines the ethics of human life, then good and evil are merely opinions, synonyms for "what I like" and "what I don't like." Ethics, such as they are, thus have become simply a matter of power. Might makes right. The late post-modernist philosopher Richard Rorty admitted that his arguments were not different in kind than those of the Nazis, who also had a social agenda, though he was sure his cause was better. *But he couldn't demonstrate that his cause was better.* Not believing in an authority to which all human beings are subject, truth is simply a word for what people think who happen to agree with you. There being no objective right and wrong, right is inevitably reduced to whatever those in power say may or may not be done. But the fact is, on this basis, while one can certainly say that one behavior or another is *illegal*, he cannot say that it is *wrong*. He is left with no answer to the Muslim fundamentalist who believes women should never go to school, should be married off by their fathers to much older men, should never show their faces in public, never drive a car. He has no answer for the jihadist who thinks that it is right and noble to kill the largest number of civilians possible to advance the cause of Islam in the world. And, in fact, he has no answer for the evangelical Christian who objects to gay marriage. Nothing can be right or wrong because those things do not exist.

The fact that no human being can actually think or act on the basis of this philosophy of life should give any thoughtful person pause before embracing it. Rorty himself was notorious for making truth claims and moral judgments while all the while arguing

against the possibility of doing either. Einstein, a bit more honestly, said that though there may be no moral difference between the murderer and his victim, we should act as if there were. The autonomous self is a philosophy of life with immense implications, horrifying ones in fact; so horrifying that no one embraces it consistently; only enough to get what he or she wants at that particular time. We never thought it was going to come to gay marriage when feminism and no-fault divorce made their appearance on the landscape of American society. What do you suppose it is that no one imagined we would come to 30 or 40 years from now when we introduced gay marriage into American life? Christians should be smarter than this and far more serious about life, about truth, and about morality. Christian young people should be sharp enough to see that the argument for gay marriage rests on and can only rest on the philosophy of the autonomous self with all its fearful and dismal implications.

Sexual purity is an appallingly difficult thing to achieve. We Christians should be the very first to admit this. We are the first to admit this. Those who aspire to purity are the ones who will understand the human condition the best. Powerful temptations abound to stoke desires that are already difficult to control. But such is the law of God and such is the life that holds promise of God's blessing. A life of sexual license is a life that stands under the judgment of God and the proof of that is found not only in the Bible but also in the observation of human life. We are swiftly finding out as a society how well life works when sex is detached from marriage and when law and custom protect the fulfillment of sexual desire more than they do the sanctity of marriage and the home. People still imagine that they can have both, a sexually licentious life and a happy home. They are finding out in a thousand ways that they must choose the one or the other.

Look at the world around you. Young people especially, look at the world around you. Is this world the world modern university types tell you it is? Or is this world the world the Bible describes for you? Be honest.