

The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”¹⁹ Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh.²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.²³ The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”²⁴ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.²⁵ The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

In a study of our culture today, roughly sixty percent of millennials (people between 20 and 35 years old) are not married. There are a number of reasons why young people today are choosing not to get married, or choosing to get married much later in life. One reason is that many of them have seen the lack of success in their parents’ marriages. If it didn’t work for their parents, why should they expect it will work for them? So they question whether marriage is a good thing. Another reason is that many young people don’t think they can afford to get married. This may be real or it may be that they haven’t learned how to budget their money wisely. Another reason is a fear of their part of losing their independence. It’s true, as we heard in the epistle lesson this morning, you do lose your independence to a great degree. But is that a bad thing? Another reason is that they are afraid of making the wrong choice. They are looking for the perfect spouse who never comes along.

I’m afraid that many young people will be missing out on a very good thing. Marriage is a very good thing. I remember sitting with Selma and Walther Thun, who had just celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary. They sat side by side on the couch, holding hands and you couldn’t have slipped a playing card between them. They loved each as much on that day as they did the first day they were married, and maybe more. I can appreciate what they had. I love my wife more today than I ever have, more than the first day we got married.

The beauty of marriage is expressed in these words. “**And they will become one flesh.**” How can this be? How can two people lose their independence and become one with each other? It’s a miracle that God holds out to all who faithfully work on being married to each other before God and not giving up on it.

Two Become One

I. God made us “like-opposites”

So let’s put this into context. In Genesis 1, we read about God’s creation, and what he made on each of the six days. He made beautiful forests and clear-flowing streams. He made majestic mountains and fire-ball sunsets. He made all kinds of fish and birds and animals. And on the sixth day he made man. He made them male and female. He made two perfect people who were very

different from each other and yet equal before God in every way. He made them both in his image, both holy and good.

In Genesis 2 the Lord gives us a retelling of the sixth day of creation and explodes that day out in detail. He made Adam first, from the dust of the ground. He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. He put him in a beautiful garden with good things to eat and he gave him work to do in the garden. He gave man a commandment to keep by creating a fruit tree that was off limits for human consumption. All this, like the rest of all he made, as good. And then there is a shocking statement made by God. **“The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’”** It wasn’t good, because God wasn’t finished yet.

Then God brought before Adam all the animals and birds so that Adam could name them. Adam was not some ignorant caveman. He was an intelligent human being who could look at a creature and give that creature an appropriate name. In this process, Adam discovered what God already knew. He was alone. There was something missing. Mr. Elephant had Mrs. Elephant but he had no one with whom he could share his life and joy.

I know we are talking especially for married people, but let me speak one moment to those millennials or others who aren’t married. It’s o.k. to be single. Paul makes that perfectly clear in 1 Corinthians 7. If you are o.k. being single and you are not tempted with sexual temptations, then stay single. Sometimes people get married, thinking that this man or this woman is going to bring them all kinds of joy and happiness. That’s a mistake. Your joy in life should come from being a child of God. Your contentment should come from your relationship with Jesus. He is the one who meets all your needs. If you get married thinking that someone else will meet all your needs, you will wake up about the third week of your marriage and be disappointed. And if you are single and looking for that perfect person who can meet all our needs and make you happy, you will never find that person. But if you are looking for someone to share your life with, someone to love the way God loved you, someone you can pour yourself into in a way only marriage lets you do that, then get married. Because God said that it’s not good for the man to be alone.

Then he says, “I will make a helper suitable for him.” The word for helper is not a weak word. God didn’t make woman so that man would have a slave to serve him. The Hebrew word is often used for God himself, as in Psalm 46.1: **“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”** The word translated suitable can be translated as “like-opposite” or an “opposite match.” It’s like two gears in a working engine. The two gears are not the same. They are like-opposites. And because they are opposite matches, they work in perfect oneness.

Let me give you an example of why that’s a blessing. God made me with certain strengths, and a certain kind of personality. I have found in my marriage that my wife in many ways has some very opposite opinions and feelings from what I have. I know that can end up in conflict, but it can also end up making me a more complete person. When I look at a certain situation in life, or if I have to make a decision in life, I find myself thinking, “What would Linda say about this? How would she feel?” And (this may surprise you!), sometimes I even ask for her opinion before charging ahead! Having that like-opposite in my life makes me a more complete person. It makes me a better person. Here’s an exercise for you to do as husbands and wife. Go home and make a list of how many different ways your spouse makes you more complete and a better person.

Or, you could go home today and stubbornly insist that you are always right. You don’t need anyone to bounce your ideas off. You don’t have to share your thinking with your spouse because you are fiercely independent and will jealously protect your fragile ego against any suggestion that someone might just have a better idea. That’s what your sinful nature does. Every

argument you ever had started with the sinful premise that you don't need a like-opposite helper in your life, only someone who meets all your needs and grovels at your feet like a dutiful servant should.

In spite of that, marriage is a good thing, a beautiful thing. When God instituted marriage in the garden, do you think that he didn't know what was going to happen to marriage when man fell into sin? Of course, he knew. He also knew that the forgiveness that he pours out into your life every day has the power to transform your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. His forgiveness is more powerful than any argument you may have against each other!

This like-opposite helper relation you have with your spouse is especially powerful when the two of you come together to listen to God's Word and pray. You study a portion of God's Word and one of you sees this application for your life, and the other sees another application for your life and you are both enriched. You have a vision into God's Word that you wouldn't have by simply reading it yourself. Jesus said in Matthew 18:19: **"Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven."** There is no more powerful application of your oneness than when you come to your Father in prayer. Marriage is a good thing, a beautiful thing.

That's why God made you like-opposites, and it is also why he gave us a covenant for marriage.

II. God united us in a covenant

This story is more beautiful than any fairytale story where the frog became a prince and they lived happily ever after. Our text: **"So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man."** What I find interesting is that God never explains in scripture why he just didn't make them both out of the dust of the ground. I think he just wants us to wonder and think and ponder this in our hearts. Matthew Henry in his commentary said this: *"The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved."* That's much better than anything I could have thought of.

And what was Adam's reaction? Well, he didn't ask for a do-over! **"The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man.' ²⁴ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."** Verse 24 is quoted by Jesus and by Paul in the New Testament when they talk about what marriage is all about. It's about a choice and a covenant that a man and woman make with each other to be united together and to become one flesh.

A covenant more than a promise. It is a legal, binding contract. Two people can live together and they can love each other, but unless they have made this legal contract with each other, they can't call it a marriage. Their life together has no legal status before the court of law and it has no moral status before God. Jesus takes this covenant one step farther and says, **"What God has joined together, let not man separate"** (Matthew 19:6) God hears our vows and then puts his seal on it and makes it permanent.

What does this mean? People will argue that marriage is more than a piece of paper. It's also much more than a personal relationship. A covenant relationship is both personal and legal at the

same time. A covenant relationship is more permanent and binding than just a personal relationship, and at the same time more personal and intimate than just a legal relationship. It is a binding vow to BE loving and to BE faithful no matter what the circumstances.

Do you see why this is so important? If you don't have a covenant relationship holding you together, it means that you can walk away from your family anytime you want. It means that if love starts to grow a little cold, you can look for someone who is going to meet your needs in a more meaningful way. From the other perspective, it means that your spouse has to live in constant fear that you will walk away. It means that you have to prove yourselves to each other day after day. If either of you mess up just once, it might be over. Do you want to live under that pressure every day? Do you want your children to live under that pressure every day?

The problem for all of us who are married is that sometimes we treat our marriage more like a consumer relationship than a covenant relationship. When I expect my spouse to meet my needs and make me happy and perform up to my expectations, instead of thinking about what I owe my spouse because we are in this blessed, God-given covenant relationship, then I am treating my marriage as a consumer relationship.

That's the point that Jesus made with the Pharisees in the gospel lesson for today. They treated their marriages as consumer relationships instead of a covenant relationship. They argued wrongly from a sentence from Moses that they could divorce their wives for any reason at any time. And what did Jesus say? That's now what God said at the beginning. He quoted this passage from Genesis and said, "See, they are no longer two, but one."

Friends, maybe you don't fully understand how important that covenant relationship is, but God does. God has made a covenant with you, because he wants you to live in peaceful assurance that he will never give up on you. He made a covenant with you in your baptism and in the Lord's Supper which he offers you here this morning. What does he say to you in those covenants? He says, "I want you to live as my child every day. But when you sin against me, I want you to know what I am going to do. I am going to forgive your iniquities and remember your sins no more. I won't count your sins against you. You can count on me to live up to my covenant with you."

Through this covenant of marriage, two become one, and that is a blessing. Marriage is a good thing, and those of you who have withstood the tests in your marriage can testify to that. A doctor once told me that when a broken bone heals, it will never break at that point. The glue that holds the broken bones together is stronger than the bone itself. The bone may break on one side of the bone, or the other, but never where it was put together. The covenant of marriage is like that. When God puts you together, that bond does not break. It may break on one side or the other, but not where God has put it together.

I have been married for 39 ½ years, and I can't imagine that it can get any better than this. I love my wife more than I ever have, and I thank God for my marriage every day. It is a good thing when two can become one! Amen.