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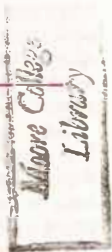


Back to God Hour

**NO LONGER
TWO**

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DENOMINATIONAL BROADCAST
OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES
OF AUSTRALIA



NO LONGER TWO

"They are no longer two but one. . . ."

Matthew 19:6

I am curious whether you would be interested in hearing some new ideas concerning marriage. I mean really new ones. Ideas that used to be considered new with respect to marriage several years ago have been pretty well accepted, so we cannot consider these ideas really new anymore. I am thinking of the idea of "open marriage," for instance. That was a marriage relationship that supposedly opened both partners to all kinds of new kinds of possibilities. Also, there has been talk about some kind of a renegotiable marriage contract, one that would come up for renewal every two or five years.

Mostly the talk over the last decade, and even longer, has emphasized the individuality of each marriage partner. For instance, women should be allowed to develop in terms of who they themselves are; they should have their own careers, for example. Husbands should not stand in their way—wives are human beings, too.

The feminist movement has injected many of the commonly accepted ideas concerning marriage into the current situation: We cannot talk about marriage anymore without stressing the equality of husbands and wives. One of these days husbands will be required to pay their wives for the work they do—at least they will have to pay into the social security system for all the work their wives do for nothing.

And then, for some of us, there is the agitation that has been caused by the attempt to pass the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution. That too has had its impact on marriage, and there are some who paint a dire picture of what will happen to marriage if that amendment is ever passed.

So there are many things being said about marriage these days, and even more things being thought and wondered about. Many people are actually very confused about marriage. Maybe you are one of them. I know I am sometimes. Sometimes people come to me and talk about marriage in ways that

seem very strange to me, but they talk so persuasively and are so convinced themselves of the value of their viewpoint that they nearly succeed in convincing me. And sometimes, when I read the things that are being written about it and when I see material about marriage on television, I wonder what the truth really is with respect to this subject.

But as I said, the somewhat unsettling and so-called "new" ideas about marriage have been around for quite a while now, and it is hardly accurate to call them new anymore. And that's why I asked whether you would be interested in considering some ideas which, in contrast to what is being said these days about marriage, seem to be new. They are certainly new in the sense that they are nearly novel.

When I become confused about marriage, I always find that it helps to think about these "new" ideas I want to talk with you about. For they give me insight and perspective I can get nowhere else. Actually the ideas I am discussing are not new at all—they are the oldest ideas there are so far as marriage is concerned. They are ideas that come from the biblical information we have about marriage.

When one looks at this material in the light of the present situation regarding marriage, the ideas I am referring to are revolutionary and exciting. And I wonder if things are beginning to change somewhat nowadays, so that people who perhaps five years ago would have rejected these ideas might now be willing at least to consider what the Bible says about the subject. When we consider this, we find the Bible's viewpoint so useful that adopting it will cause our marriages to become much more satisfying than they presently are. They will become more stable, I suppose, but stability and endurance are not the most attractive things about marriage. A marriage must be good, even exciting, wholesome and enjoyable, if it is to be what we want marriage to be. And this new idea, which is actually very old, can make marriage all of these.

So then, let's take a look at the biblical ideas concerning marriage, but before we do I would just like to observe that it is not particularly strange that these ideas are often forgotten these days. For one reason

or another—perhaps it is the basic perversity of human nature—people have always tended to overlook the ideas I am going to discuss here. Even when Jesus Christ was in this world conducting His ministry, His contemporaries had forgotten these very ideas, and that is astonishing, for the people who forgot them were people who prided themselves in their knowledge of the Bible. Oh, they knew the Bible all right, but they didn't want to know or remember the basic ideas about marriage that the Bible clearly reveals. I say this because of a conversation some of the religious leaders had with Jesus Christ when He was here; it is recorded this way in Matthew 19:

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" He said to them, "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery" (vv. 3-9).

This conversation is very intriguing because it shows how easy it is for people to forget the most fundamental point the Bible makes regarding marriage. That fundamental point is just this: "They are no longer two." Before I discuss this, I should tell you what had happened regarding marriage among the Jewish people from the time of Moses to this time when Jesus talked about marriage and divorce with the religious leaders.

In Deuteronomy 24, the opening verses talk about the possibility of divorce for the Hebrew people:

"When a man takes a wife and marries her,

if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house. . . ."

The sentence goes on further than that, but I will stop right there because in what we've read so far we see the situation that developed among the Hebrew people at the time of Moses. A man would give his wife a divorce document and simply tell her to leave. The basis of his action was apparently that she "finds no favor" in her husband's eyes, or he found "some indecency in her."

When Jesus was conducting His ministry, He found His contemporaries talking about these kinds of things, and the arguments centered around the interpretation of the ideas "finds no favor" and "some indecency." There were two schools of thought about this matter among the people, one of them very strict, one of them very liberal. The liberal position interpreted these ideas so loosely that a husband could divorce his wife for just about anything she did which he didn't happen to like. And this was the discussion the religious leaders tried to get Jesus involved in, too. They failed in their attempt.

They failed because Jesus Christ rejected their discussion with the simple statement that Moses' provision should not be considered the important thing to think about when it comes to marriage, because his provision had merely been an adjustment to the stubbornness of the people he led. When we think about marriage, we should not even think about it in terms of what kind of circumstances might possibly justify divorce, but we should think about the great mystery that is at the heart of marriage. So Jesus turned them aside from the discussion that was raging at that time—and it was very similar to the discussion that is raging among us at this moment—and He turned their attention back to the very beginning when He announced, "They are no longer two. . . ."

They are no longer two. . . this is a new and startling idea regarding marriage. What is the Bible saying here? What was Jesus saying when He reminded His followers of this fundamental idea? Well, let's

look for a moment at its origin. This is found in the second chapter of the Bible, Genesis 2:18-25—

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, 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. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him. 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; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This is at last bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

Now there are many elements of the material that we just read that deserve attention, and I cannot go into them all. But there are several things that stand out. First of all, God wanted man, a male, to be accompanied through life by his mate, a female. Animals, though much like man, are not able to be man's companion. Second, woman is, in terms of her creation, utterly, entirely, related to man. She is flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone. There is, consequently, no absolute difference between man and woman—they are very closely related. And thirdly, because of man's need for companionship and because of his closeness to woman, an individual man and an individual woman become one flesh together in marriage. This occurs when there is leave-taking from the parental families and a cleaving to one another.

If we have questions about the origin of marriage, if we wonder where it came from, here is our answer.

Marriage is an institution that is tied into the very nature of man and woman. It existed from the very beginning, and it was designed for the mutual enrichment of those involved. It is important to notice that in the description of the origin of marriage in Genesis 2 there is no mention of reproduction as such—of the necessity to replenish the race. No. A man and a woman come together and they become one flesh because of their natures, because of the way they are.

Now Jesus rejects the discussion which the religious leaders were trying to get Him involved in, and He forced them to look again at the way it was at the beginning. He provided them, and He provides us, with a very important commentary on what we find in Genesis 2. He emphasizes that the two are one flesh by saying it over in just a little different way: They are no longer two but one. And He adds, as a conclusion that follows naturally from what has just been stated, "What God has joined together, let not man put asunder."

This is an intriguing and useful idea: When a man and a woman are joined in marriage, they are no longer two but they are one. Going back to Genesis 2, their oneness is expressed in the fact that they are one flesh. Let's think about this for a few minutes; maybe when we do we will be able to think about marriage in our day more usefully than we sometimes do.

The first thing that comes to my mind when I think about this idea is that it is impossible for a husband and a wife, a married couple, each to be what they were before they were married. Marriage changes people. And by that I do not mean that life becomes different for them because they now have to live in one another's presence whereas before they were only together occasionally. I'm not thinking of husbands leaving their clothing in a heap somewhere and of wives letting their unmentionables dry over the bathtub. I'm not thinking of the fact that husband and wife develop a sex life together. I am not thinking of the fact that they must make decisions together and learn to give and take. But I am thinking of something more basic and fundamental: Husband and wife become one; they actually become one.

Earlier I mentioned the sexual element of marriage, and obviously this element of human personality is directly related to the oneness a husband and wife have. But it would be a mistake to assume that this means that their oneness depends solely on their health and psychological disposition which enable them to enjoy this element of their marriage in the way it is usually discussed these days. The fact is that this element of marriage is not a constant over the years, and sometimes for one reason or another it is nearly completely lacking for a period of time. Even so, a husband and a wife are always a male and a female together; and together as male and female, the Bible says they are not two, but one flesh.

It follows from this, doesn't it, that the modern emphasis on the individuality of each marriage partner and on the necessity of each of them expressing himself or herself is different from what we find in the Bible. I do not mean to suggest that the modern emphasis on the individuality of the marriage partners is necessarily wrong; I don't believe it is. But it would be wrong to absolutize this individuality. We can only talk about the individuality of a husband and of a wife after we have first of all recognized that because of their marriage they are no longer two; they are one—God has made them one flesh.

The second thing I think about when I think about this idea—no longer two—is that marriage is a great deal more mysterious and profound than I tend to think of it. We romanticize marriage, don't we? Or we naturalize marriage—we make it a temporary arrangement of convenience. We do all sorts of things with it, and now I see that probably most of them are wrong. Marriage is overwhelmingly wonderful. I say that even though I am well aware that in fact none of our marriages are perfect, and sometimes we go through times of great exasperation so far as our marriages are concerned. Everyone has this. So I am not talking about how your marriage or mine may be right now, on this very day. I am talking about what marriage really is, deep down.

When I look at my marriage in the light of the Bible, I begin to realize that it is something that God has given to me and my wife as a gift, and it is something

which He does. Yes, God is the one who has made marriage, not man. He has so constructed us as individuals that we have a sexual dimension to our persons which enables us to express our full humanity. And He has arranged human life so that individual men and individual women can now be involved in this marvelous relationship.

Consequently a married person must assume that some very basic things are happening to him (or her) because he is married. Living with one's wife or husband is not the same as living with a roommate. And given the sordid quality of our time, I must say that living as husband and wife is not the same as two men or two women living together in a relationship they mistakenly call marriage. Marriage, according to the Bible, is a relationship of two people of opposite sex who live together as husband and wife in a situation of total faithfulness to one another. It seems strange to have to say this, but it must be said today. And when this situation exists for two people, they must assume that each of them is being changed by it—they are different people from what they would be if they had remained single—they are no longer two but they are one flesh.

The third thing I think of when I think about this is that because of it I must never consider breaking my marriage. Divorce is evil first of all because it is unnatural. Its impact on human beings is as profound as it is because when two people go their own way after being one flesh, they mutilate themselves. And I am not saying this figuratively. They really do mutilate themselves. They suffer all of the injury that accompanies trying to take apart what God has joined together.

It is this too which makes adultery, unfaithfulness, such a horrible disfigurement of our humanity and a defilement of what we really are. When the Apostle Paul talked about what a devastating impact visiting a prostitute would have upon a man, he described the damage in terms of the fact that having relations with a prostitute was a violation of the "one flesh" idea which is useful only in connection with marriage. He says in 1 Corinthians 6:15-18:

Do you not know that your bodies are mem-

bers of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two shall become one flesh." But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body.

There are many ideas in what you've just read, but the important thing now is to notice that prostitution is condemned because it is a violation of the mystery of marriage—of the one-body idea. It is a mockery of something which God has made sacred. Adultery and fornication are evil because they are attempts to duplicate outside of marriage what is meaningful, good, and useful only within marriage.

Yes, there is a lot to think about here, and wouldn't you agree that the idea we have been discussing—they are no longer two, but one—is a totally new idea these days? It has been forgotten. Or perhaps it has simply been rejected. Have the results been good? You can answer that question as well as I can. I don't see much good where I live. How about where you live?

I wonder what would happen if people would begin to think about marriage in terms that the Bible uses. Marriage would be sacred then, and it would be mysteriously holy. If we would realize what marriage can do to two people and if we would build on the fact that it brings them together in a unity that profoundly affects both of them, wouldn't we deal with marriage very differently?

So much to think about indeed! And one thing that must be remembered in all of this is that if God made marriage so good and wonderful and if He created us with the ability to get the most out of marriage, surely we can expect Him to help us when we try to make our marriages better.

Yes, this is truly a new idea these days. Marriage is holy and mysterious. It is the mysterious union of a man and a woman in the most profoundly helping relationship there is. And it has been created by God.

No wonder Jesus said once, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." "Yes, Jesus, that's the way it ought to be.

PRAYER

Lord, we confess that we have forgotten and overlooked the great teaching you have given in the Bible concerning the wonder of marriage. We have discovered today that marriage is a mystery, truly and actually—it's a mysterious element that is related to our natures, to the way we are made. Now we understand why there is so much damage in our society—so many are mistaken about marriage. They think that it is temporary. They think that they can do with it what they please.

Open our minds to what we have learned today, bend our wills so that we will be able to obey you now that you have shown us how to live in our marriage, and overcome our stubbornness. We like to go our own way in these things. We have made up so many new ideas, and many of them are simply wrong. Forgive us, and help us make our marriages holy.

For Jesus' sake, Amen.



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