

# Marriage

10 Feb. 2008

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Ps. 106: 1, 2, 23

Ps. 103: 7

Baptism: Ps. 105: 3, 4

Ps. 128: 1 - 3

Ps. 119: 24 - 26

Ps. 119: 13 - 15

Scripture reading: Gen. 6: 1 - 9; 24: 1 - 9; 39: 1 - 12

Text: LD 41

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

If husband and wife do not love one another, their marriage is adulterous. Adultery does not start with flirting and divorce, but with a failure to love your wife.

Now, it is easy to say that as regenerated people, people who were made alive in Christ, God now only requires of us to love Him and to love our neighbour. And in a sense it is indeed as simple as that. The problem is, however, that we do not know what *love* is until we are instructed by God's law. It is the law that reveals to us both the nature and the application of that love which God requires of us.

A husband and wife cannot say: "We love one another and we enjoy one another's company, therefore we do not need the instruction of the law!" If your love for one another is not purposely and intentionally in obedience to the commandment, your love is adulterous.

Marriage is not determined by our feelings or opinions, but by God's law. If our marriage is not according to *His* rules, it is sinful. Therefore if a man does not love his wife and seek her wellbeing, he is already an adulterer. If a wife is not a help to her husband, or if she is not subject to him, she is adulterous. We have to acknowledge God's purpose for marriage, or else we are breaking the commandment.

Thus husband and wife are not allowed to act as they want to just as long as they stay married! Marriage is not preserved just by staying together. And love is not that which is natural to our feeling, but that which God prescribes in His law.

It is true that the law in itself cannot work this love in us. This love which the law requires of us, Christ alone can work in us through His Spirit. Yet it is just as true that He will not sanctify us without the careful instruction of these commandments. Love is not a blind and uncontrolled feeling that governs itself, but the fountain of obedience to God.

God revealed His love to us in Jesus Christ. Through that which God has done and given us in Christ we see the riches of God's love for us. In that sense the command to love God and our neighbour is new to us **in as much as we came to a better understanding of the law** through that which has been revealed to us in the death of Christ. At the same time the law itself has not changed; only our understanding of it has increased by the fuller revelation of God's love for us in Christ.

The death and resurrection of Christ, and all that He has done and is doing for us, does not provide us with a different law. He does not now require of us a *different* love than that which was revealed from the beginning.

Do you love Christ for all that He has done for you? Then you will obey His commandments.

“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments...” - 1 John 5:  
3.

If you love God, you will love your wife.

Knowing God's love for you in the death of Christ, you will also love your wife.

With this in mind we now turn to the seventh commandment.

## You shall not commit adultery

We will note...

1. The spiritual relation between husband and wife
2. The fences which God has placed around marriage
3. The exceptional gift to stay single

In the first place we note...

## The spiritual relation between husband and wife

In dealing with the seventh commandment we have to go back to the very beginning and institution of marriage.

God created man in His own image; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and said:

“Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it...” (Gen. 1: 28)

The creation ordinance to *multiply* and to *fill the earth* had to be exercised within the marriage bond only. God joined Adam and Eve together as husband and wife and said:

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2: 24).

God instituted marriage as a bond between one husband and one wife. And because it is God who joins husband and wife together, no man may break this bond (Mt. 19: 6).

When we consider the purpose of marriage, it soon becomes clear that marriage was not instituted for the sole purpose of multiplying. Marriage is not only a sexual relationship, but first of all a spiritual relationship; a relationship of love and faithfulness. Marriage is a fellowship in loving service toward God and toward each other in a bond of love and truth. Marriage is therefore much broader than just a physical relationship.

Now, for this very reason that our marriage requires first of all a spiritual bond and unity, we may marry only in the Lord.

This principle has been revealed right from the start, and I would like to remind you of a few examples.

Directly after man’s fall into sin, God established enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. He drew the line of separation between the children of Satan and the children of promise. And we see how this line of separation is worked out in the following chapters. On the one hand there are the descendants of Cain: proud, violent and godless. On the other hand we find the descendants of Seth who starts to call on the name of the Lord.

And then we read this morning what happened when the descendants of Seth started to marry the descendants of Cain. We read in Gen. 6:

“...that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose”.

We must not image that this is some fairytale about angels having intercourse with woman. There is nothing in the text or in the rest of Scripture to support any such idea. The giants were also not caused by the mixed marriages; they were there also before the mixed marriages started - verse 4. Only, they became more violent after the mixed marriages started - verse 5.

The text simply continues to deal with the seed of the woman over against the seed of the serpent. It shows us what happened when believers, sons of God, married unbelievers.

The descendants of Seth saw that the daughters of Cain were beautiful and they took for themselves any wife they wanted to choose. They chose for themselves beautiful wives from the seed of the serpent.

The result was destruction. It is that mixed marriages of believers with unbelievers that are presented to us as the cause of corruption and finally of total destruction. It is that mixed marriages that caused the immorality; and the godly seed became nearly extinct. Yes, the godly seed would have totally disappeared from the earth, if it was not for God's intervention.

Holy marriage, marriage in the Lord, is an indispensable means to ensure godly families and to raise a godly seed. When the enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman is denied or ignored, the gates are flung open to immorality and the most violent destruction. That is what Gen.6 clearly teaches us, as it connects the destruction that came to those mixed marriages.

We also read another passage this morning where Abraham made his servant swear an oath:

“Please, put your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac” (24: 3, 4)

We see the same again in the next generation:

“...Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, and said to him: ‘You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother. May God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of peoples; and give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham” - Gen. 28: 1 - 4.

See how the blessing of the covenant is linked to this commandment not to marry the heathen daughters of the land.

But Esau took for himself daughters of Heth, daughters of the land, and Rebecca said to Isaac:

“I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like these who are the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?” - Gen. 27: 46.

Later, when the law was given through Moses, it was no new law when mixed marriages were expressly forbidden by God.

“When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you...and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriage with them. **You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me**, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly” - Deut. 7: 1 - 4.

This law, that God's covenant people had to keep themselves separate from the heathens, is still upheld in the New Testament where the apostle Paul says that we shall marry only in the Lord - 1 Cor. 7: 39.

Boys and girls, dear young people, brothers and sisters in the Lord, if marriage is not only a physical relationship, but first of all a spiritual relationship of love and unity, how then can you join yourself to the seed of the serpent?

For this reason the apostle Paul writes:

“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Billial? **Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?**...Therefore, ‘Come out of among them and **be separate**, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty” - 2 Cor. 6: 14 - 18.

Again, do you see how the promise of the covenant is linked to this commandment not to be joined together with an unbeliever? Then God will be our Father and we shall be His sons and daughters.

If marriage requires first of all a spiritual bond of love and unity, how then can you marry the seed of the serpent? Yes, she may be beautiful. And yes, she may have good manners. She may be so sweet and dear to you, but God commands you by the mercies of Christ, to marry only in the Lord. That is: you may marry only that lady who is a true sister in Christ; only that daughter who is already united with you in the same faith and living hope. Then you will be able to serve the Lord together and, if He grants you children, to raise them as a godly seed in the fear of the Lord.

Do not deny or ignore the enmity which God has put between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Keep that holy separation and **be separate**, says the Lord.

We have now followed the line from Gen.1 to the fall of Adam, and from there we saw how the enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent is worked out in the genealogies of Cain and Seth. We saw the frightful result of the mixed marriages before the flood, when believers, sons of God, married unbelievers. We saw how this same topic of separation runs through the history of the fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and how the covenant promise is connected to this command not to marry a heathen, and we were reminded of how clearly mixed marriages were cursed by the law, that it will arouse God's wrath to destroy you suddenly.

Finally we saw how the same law is upheld in the New Testament. You shall marry only in the Lord. You shall not be yoked together with an unbeliever.

The sin and iniquity to marry an unbeliever becomes all the more clear to us when we consider this, that marriage is not only a physical and sexual unity, but first of all a spiritual bond of unity and love. How then can you unite yourself in unity and love to the seed of the serpent?

We know what Paul says of those unhappy marriages, where husband and wife hear the gospel only later in their life, and where only one of them believes. Then you are not able to undo the marriage. From your side, as a believer, you should then stay faithful and uphold the marriage. If the unbeliever in such cases departs, let him depart, says Paul. The believing brother or sister is freed from that marriage if the unbeliever divorces - 1 Cor. 7: 12 - 15.

But his teaching in that passage, does not at all take away from this law which he again establishes in that same chapter that the believer may marry only in the Lord - 1 Cor. 7: 39.

The spiritual relationship between husband and wife is first of all a relationship in the Lord, sharing the same faith and living hope. That is the only bond that truly unites: our unity in Christ. That applies so much the more to the close and intimate unity of marriage.

The very act of marrying an unbeliever is adultery. But there is more to it. It starts already with friendships. Who are your friends? Are they maybe among

the seed of the serpent? If marriage should first of all be a spiritual bond in the Lord, will you then find her outside of the church?

Don't become desperate, but wait on the Lord, and He will hear.

In the second place we note...

## The fences which God has placed around marriage

The command to *multiply* is a command which may be obeyed only in the bond of marriage; and the impulse for procreation, which is in itself holy and good, may be satisfied only in this bond. We may not separate this physical bond from the spiritual bond. We may not think that the spiritual bond in marriage is something that we exercise to the honour of God, while the physical bond has nothing to do with religion. On the contrary, the physical bond between husband and wife should be just as holy and just as devoted to God.

Now, in order to protect marriage from defilement God has put up certain fences. The creation ordinance to be fruitful and to multiply does not give unlimited scope to procreation. Procreation is fenced in. It is allowed only in marriage with one wife. And, as we saw, marriage itself is fenced in: only in the Lord.

It is only within the marriage bond that a man may know a woman, and only his wife may he know. And in his choice of a wife he may not be guided by impulse or fancy; not by the beauty of the daughters of men, but by the principle of godliness. Our love is directed by the desire to serve God and also to secure a godly seed.

Procreation is a divine institution and the impulse is natural to man, but it has to be regulated by godliness. God does not want to see the earth filled with godless seed, but with holy seed.

The prophet Malachi speaks about this and says:

“Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. As for the man who does this,

whoever he may be, may the LORD cut him off from the tents of Jacob - even though he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty” (Mal.2: 11, 12 - NIV).

And then the prophet continues to mention yet another sin. He says:

“...the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. Therefore take heed to your spirit that you do not deal treacherously” - Mal. 2: 14 - 16.

He speaks of two sins: mixed marriage, and divorce. In this context he comes with the statement that God has made only one. The original Hebrew text actually does not say He made them one. It simply says: He made one. He made one, while He still had spirit left over. The prophet is speaking about the institution of marriage at creation. He says that God made only one wife for Adam, although the power of His Spirit was not exhausted by making one woman. He had enough Spirit to create a multitude of wives for Adam. But the fact that God, when He instituted marriage, made only one wife, proves that it is wrong for a man to seek many wives. And then the prophet asks this question: why did God create only one wife for Adam? And his answer: Because He seeks godly offspring. Or as the Hebrew literally says: He seeks seed of God.

In his institution of marriage God was concerned to establish a godly offspring. Or as the prophet literally says: seed of God.

There you have the same expression once more which we dealt with in Gen. 6 where the sons of God married unbelievers. Sons of God, seed of God. It is the same thing. And again the prophet speaks of the sons of God, or seed of God, as being put in danger by breaking the marriage institution. First he mentioned the sin of mixed marriages; marrying “the daughter of a foreign god” and then afterwards he deals with divorce.

Do you follow his argument? In dealing with the seventh commandment he goes back to the very first marriage as instituted by God. Look at that, he says. God made man one. He made him male and female. But why did He make one only, if He had the power to make more wives? God, He says, wanted to ensure seed of God. Break this marriage institution, and see what happens to children who were supposed to be raised for God! That is his argument.

When God instituted marriage, one man with one woman, His concern was to secure a godly offspring.

He fences off marriage from third parties and limits procreation to the marriage bond of one husband with one wife. And he does this, amongst other reasons, for the sake of the children.

This applies not only for breaking *out* of the marriage bond, but also for breaking *into* it. When Joseph was single he refused to break into the marriage of Potiphar.

We learn also something else from Joseph's example. When the wife of Potiphar said to him: "Lie with me", he refused and said to her:

"How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

Clearly Joseph's faithfulness was grounded in the fear of God. He shunned evil, for he feared God. How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? He was first of all living before the face of God.

The fear of the Lord is basic to all the commandments. If we live before the face of the Lord, we know that nothing is hidden from His eyes; not even the thoughts of our hearts. And therefore, when our Lord Jesus expounds and applies the seventh commandment, He says:

"...whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt.5: 28).

Note the sharp edge of this saying. He does not say, "whoever look at a woman in order to commit adultery with her", but He simply says, "in order to lust after her". He is not even speaking of the *intention* to lie with her, no, it is the **lustful desire** upon which He places His finger.

Lustful desire in itself is already under the curse of God's law; even the lustful glances at a woman; even if you would never think of touching her.

There again we see the depth of God's law reaching to the most inward thoughts of our heart and emotions. Not only those who consider the act of fornication are condemned, but also those who admit polluted thoughts are reckoned adulterous before God.

And so marriage is not only fenced off from the seed of the serpent, also not only fenced off from divorce and fornication, but even fenced off from any polluted thoughts that are not in line with the holy institution of marriage.

In the third place we note...

## The exceptional gift to stay single

The apostle Paul says:

“...It is good for a man not to touch a woman” - 1 Cor. 7: 1.

What he is saying is that it is good for a man not to marry.

Now, this may seem to contradict Gen. 2: 18 where the Lord says:

“...It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him”.

When we, however, hear Paul out in 1 Cor. 7, it soon becomes clear that he is not contradicting the creation ordinance of marriage. He is speaking about an exception. First of all he speaks about the exceptional gift which God has given only to some people to stay single. Those people are not burning of desire to marry. Now, we have to note that *that* special gift of which the apostle speaks is not given just for the sake of being single. When God gives someone this gift of which the apostle speaks, He enables him to stay single for a very specific purpose in exceptional circumstances.

The exceptional circumstance in which Paul finds himself is the heavy persecutions that the church had to endure. His own history of suffering is unsurpassed.

He says:

“I suppose therefore that this is good **because of the present distress** - that it is good for a man to remain as he is: Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless **such will have trouble in the flesh**, but I would spare you” - 1 Cor. 7: 26 - 28.

He is not laying down a general rule for all people. He is not telling us that marriage causes trouble for the flesh. Far from it! He is speaking of a great exception with the exceptional circumstance of a tremendous wave of persecution rolling over the church.

Imagine that the apostle Paul was married. We know he wasn't, but imagine he was. What immense pain would that have caused both him and his family! He was for years in jail. When he was out of jail he was chased and persecuted with the most cruel persecution. What would there remain of his married life? What anxieties his wife would have to bear; not to speak of himself! In that circumstance Paul would simply not be free to go on his mission journeys in the way he did. Consideration for his wife and children would make much of his work

impossible or very hard, to say the least. It is in *those* circumstances that he says: I say this **because of the present distress** - verse 26. Married people will suffer *severely* in such a circumstance. It is a euphemism when he says: such will have trouble in the flesh! And therefore, in that exceptional circumstance he wants to spare them such suffering.

In *those* circumstances Paul was able to serve the Lord the better staying single.

The Roman Catholics, however, turned this teaching of the apostle Paul into the most cruel doctrine when they taught people to stay single if they want to serve the Lord better, and made young people, who were not gifted by the Lord to stay single, to make vows of celibacy. The apostle Paul himself calls that a doctrine of demons, when he says:

“...the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, **forbidding people to marry...**” - 1 Tim.4: 1 - 3.

No wonder that the most wicked and immoral corruption broke out in those monasteries!

The apostle Paul is *not* telling us that in general it is better to refrain from marrying. No! He gives inspired advice in an exceptional circumstance, and even in that exceptional circumstance, he says, that **in general** it is still better to marry because of the fornications. Because: not all would be able to control themselves if they would stay unmarried - even during that persecution! Many will burn with desire and sin.

If you are looking for the *general* rule, that has already been given by God from the beginning:

“It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”

It means that in general a man is able to serve the Lord better when he is married, than when he is unmarried. For that very reason God made him a helper; a helper in order to serve the Lord all the better, and not to detract man in his service to the Lord.

*That* then is the general rule: man is able to serve God better when the Lord provides a helper to him.

In marriage husband and wife are united in a wonderful covenant of marriage, bound together in the service of the Lord.

Dear young people, you are free to marry, but only in the Lord. Do not unite yourself to the seed of the serpent, but seek the Lord in prayer that He may provide a wife, a husband, in the unity of faith.

Remember also the fences which God has placed around marriage. Abstain from sexual immorality. Do not seek a wife or a husband in passion of lust, like the unbelievers who do not know God. Seek your companion in the Lord, that he or she may help you to serve the Lord, and - if He may grant you children - to raise a godly offspring to the Lord.

When a brother or a sister in the congregation wants to marry, we make an announcement. Consistory mentions to the congregation the names of the brother and sister who desire to marry. And then follows this announcement:

“(They) have indicated their intention to enter into the married state, according to the ordinance of God. They desire to begin this holy state in the Name of the Lord and to complete it to His glory. If no lawful objection is brought forward, the ceremony will take place, the Lord willing, on...” such and such a date.

How then shall they “**begin**” and “**complete**” their marriage to the glory of God?

Together with David we sing:

“How can a youth preserve his way, O LORD,

And keep it free of evil and transgression?

By guarding it according to Thy word” - (rhymed version of Ps. 119: 9)

Amen.