

God Gives What Is Fit for Us

Genesis 2:18-24

by Michael G. Lilienthal

Dear men and women, God's creation,

Today we approach the account of God's creation of woman and the institution of marriage. Has it ever struck you that the two go hand-in-hand? There was no marriage until there was woman. This, of course, was because prior to the creation of woman man was alone and "there was not found a helper fit for him." Of course, in the socio-political climate of today, this should be enough for us who believe Scripture to be the inspired and inerrant Word of God to see that "marriage" according to that same Scripture is precisely a lifelong commitment between one man and one woman (Gen. 1:27) to love and respect one another, exemplifying the relationship Christ has with his Church and the price he paid to redeem her (Eph. 5:22-33), to provide companionship for one another (Gen. 2:18, 24), to raise children, perpetuating to them the faith and instruction God blessed their parents with (Gen. 1:28, Prov. 22:6), and to bless one another with the gift of sexual satisfaction (Ex. 20:14, 1 Cor. 7:1-5). Now, this ought not to be viewed as a checklist, but rather as comprising facets of a unified whole, composing a beautiful diamond of biblical, Christian marriage. Unfortunately, centuries of history and politics, coming to a head now within the last decade, have so whipped and shaken around the question, "What is marriage?" that now, I believe, we must recognize that the answer has splintered and shattered. There are, in fact, two answers to the question: the Church's answer (as I said above), and the State's, which

comes ultimately down to two things: 1) the right to a certain way of filing taxes, 2) domination of the word “marriage.” So the thing we must recognize now when speaking with the world (i.e. when the Church converses with the State) is that when each of us says the word “marriage,” we don’t mean the same thing. And neither will it help to try to force God’s definition of “marriage” down the throats of those who are opposed to it. I think the best course of action we can take is to learn from the institution of this estate in this portion of Genesis, and to shape our minds and our lives by it. Allow me to read this text again, and try to notice what’s missing from it.

Read Genesis 2:18-24

What’s missing is the word “marriage,” or “married,” or “wedding.” We get those concepts out of it, but the concepts are a deduction from the facts: the woman was a “helper fit for” man, she was “brought...to the man,” and a tradition was established, that “a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” In fact, this text even lacks the word “husband,” and in the original it lacks “wife,” for “wife” and “woman” are the same word in Hebrew, as “man” and “husband” are likewise the same word. It’s only by human language and the convenience of classification that we have come to differentiate the two: we needed a convenient way to speak about a woman who was not a wife and a woman who was.

The point of all this is that the seas will only become more muddled when we argue about the terminology. Let the State worry about the dead letter, those promiscuous words which are coaxed into every other man’s bed and mean nothing; we are blessed with the spirit. We are blessed with the gracious gifts of God – and

that's really what all this is about: God has graced us, has seen our need and filled it, he gives us what is fit for us

I. For Every Part of Life

There has been a lot written about the fact that man, the crown of creation, was made on the last day of creation. God was fixing up the place, planning everything, then rolling out the red carpet for the one for whom he had prepared this whole world: man was the royalty for which God was refurbishing the ballroom. Taken that way, how significant isn't it that this whole creation had nothing for man as a companion? The king arrived at the ball without his queen. What was this whole grand affair if the king had no dance partner? And so God was prompted to find "a helper fit for him."

And it's interesting the way God went about this. God is omniscient, so he should have known what the ultimate best fit for Adam would be. Why didn't he just make Eve right away and be done with it? The process was important.

Backtrack a moment, and if we look a few verses prior to this we read, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it" (Gen. 2:15). Before man had a helper, he had an occupation. Notice, this was before the curse on man: "By the sweat of your face / you shall eat bread" (Gen. 3:19). Manual labor itself is not a curse: in fact, it was a blessing! It was the way man could take dominion over the earth and reap his food from it. What was fit for man in this perfect world was that he work for his food. And then, when God ordained to create a helper for man, he didn't immediately send Adam to sleep, but he gave him another job – and this one was different from his first job; this wasn't manual labor, this was an

intellectual pursuit. He was to observe the world and catalogue it; it was an “opportunity to exercise his brilliant mind,” which God had created him with.¹

So now see we have a number of things fit for the man, given to him by God: 1) physical labor, exercise for his body, 2) food and nourishment for his life, 3) intellectual pursuits, exercise for his mind. These three stand out most clearly, arching over everything else given to him: think of a few of the others: a beautiful new world to explore, fellowship with God his creator, an altar at which to worship (as Luther describes the tree of the knowledge of good and evil). But another thing was lacking: companionship, a “helper.” Unfortunately the English terminology aligns “helper” with “assistant,” and so it becomes easy to think of a “helper” as a bagboy, a servant, a shoeshine, a maid. While that’s what the English words get across, that’s not the Scriptural concept. $\Upsilon\text{Z},[\text{e}$ is help in the sense of providence or rescue, alliedhood against enemies, giving what is needed (if this means assistance, then that falls under its purview, but it is so much more). This sort of help is not a crutch, an object to bear you up. It is a friend who carries you when you need it. This companionship was necessary for the man. The one who was “fit” for him, or “complementary” to him was provided because Adam had a gap in his life: this $\Upsilon\text{Z},[\text{e}$ filled that gap, and as the proverbial gift which keeps on giving, she not only filled this gap, but was ever-present to fill any need that ever arose, and likewise Adam was given his third great occupation, that of reciprocating in this relationship and filling the needs of another. The two became one

¹ Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible: The Old Testament*, Vol. I (St. Louis: CPH, 1923), 6.

flesh, therefore, because they had originated as one flesh. They were destined for an indissoluble union with one another, complementary to one another like two pieces of the same puzzle. This they needed, and this God provided.

Now we must be careful to avoid prescribing Adam's particulars on ourselves – we are not our parents. His specific occupations are not ours. Otherwise, every one of us would have to be gardeners, and every one of us zoologists, and every one of us married. If you would legalistically seek to make each person fall into these jobs, then you would have to condemn Jesus, too, for he was a carpenter and not a gardener, a student and teacher of Scripture and not a zoologist, and a decided bachelor. Take this last concept, that of marriage: St. Paul seems to praise the opposite estate when he says: "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Cor. 7:8-9). To Paul's mind, it seems, marriage is nothing but a guard-post against sin. What it seems Paul is saying is that only those who simply cannot control their lustful, sexual passions should get married. In reality, that's not Paul's point. He merely sees the benefits of celibacy in his personal situation, and realizes that celibacy is a beneficial situation for many because the life of God's people is to be leading toward a heavenly existence, leaving behind all earthly concerns; yet he also concedes that celibacy is not best for everyone, as he stated earlier: "I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another," and he goes on, "Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches" (1 Cor.

7:7, 17). So the overarching truth remains: man must have an occupation for his body, for his mind, and for his heart and will, according to his own personal situation.

II. Out of His Grace

All these God provides for out of his grace. Notice how this history of woman's creation begins: "It isn't good *for the man* to be alone" (Gen. 2:18, Beck, italics added). God wasn't concerned at this point with his perfect picture of the world; he was concerned with what was good *for the man*. Man was alone, and although in a perfect world, was not complete. God sent precisely what that man needed. And Adam's joy at being fulfilled in this way by God's grace may be seen in the verse which exploded from his lips (notably the first human love poem ever recorded):

This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.

Adam yearned eagerly for his $rZ,[e$ and it finally came. This same yearning is seen in Psalm 121: "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help [$rZ,[e$] come?" and the answer: "My help [$rZ,[e$] comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth" (1-2). Everything necessary for our lives comes from this same God; he provides help for our bodies, for our minds, for our hearts, and over all this, for our souls: for how was Psalm 121 ultimately fulfilled? Our ultimate help came in the form of Jesus Christ, who filled our need of sin and guilt by providing us with his purity and innocence. He was bound up to the cross, where he, as one with our flesh, paid our debt—our debt became his. That crucifixion was so much more than a public execution. It was also the greatest

divine marriage ceremony where Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became a husband to his Church, those who believe in him. This is why Paul asks human marriages to reflect Christ in his letter to the Ephesians. In that cross we see the ultimate marriage bond: all our needs were met by our *12,*[e, Christ. He is the *12,*[e fit for us – for who else can match our souls so well? That King took his bride, his dance partner, his companion, as the worst of peasants and made her his Queen.

See how God's grace abounds: it's like the proverb of giving a man a fish versus teaching a man to fish; in the former his need is met temporarily, while in the latter it is met continually and indefinitely. God didn't just put a peg in a one-time need when he arranged this estate we call marriage, nor did he do so when he sent his Son. Each of these was designed to *keep on* meeting our needs. Each of these is a gift that keeps on giving. Jesus' death led to his resurrection, which proclaimed sins forgiven for all men for all time, and it made effective the means of grace which he ordained: now we may continually and indefinitely receive the blessings of this forgiveness through Baptism, through the Lord's Supper, and through the preaching of his Word.

Marriage between man and wife means that the two who have become one flesh may continually and indefinitely receive blessings from one another – in fact, blessings which (in a Christian marriage) comprise all of man's necessary occupations: for body, for mind, for heart and will, and for soul. This fact led Luther to say, "Marriage is not merely to be placed on a level with other estates; it is to be put ahead and above them all, whether that be emperor, princes, bishops, or anyone else. Whatever status the

spiritual and civil estates may have, they must nevertheless humble themselves [to the estate of matrimony].”²

Marriage is not for everyone. Indeed, each person’s personal context will define what is best for him. One person’s well-being will not depend on the same physical routine as another’s, while one person may require a different intellectual regimen than another, and one person needs more personal contact and companionship than another. But there is one need that is identical across the board: “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” and this need is met by one and the same $\Gamma Z, [e$: all “are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23, 24).

God has arranged certain ways for our needs to be met, and he does not permit us to seek out our own solutions contrary to his ordination. All of these are gracious providences, gracious givings. Just as we can’t use our own means to atone for our sins but must rely on the gift of God (putting up no idols of ourselves and our sinful works), likewise with any need we have, we are not permitted to selfishly take what we want by our personal desires – for this puts our ego on the throne which belongs to God, and we bow to ourselves as lawgiver and say, “God didn’t know this or that would come up or be necessary for my life; only I know what’s best for me.” As Paul continues in his first letter to the Corinthians he addresses this: “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry” (1 Cor. 10:13-14).

² Martin Luther, *Luther’s Large Catechism*, trans. and ed. F. Samuel Janzow (St. Louis: CPH, 1978) 46.

Let Satan and his world quibble about the dead words. God's living Word remains, and his Spirit continually provides life because of the meritorious death of his Son Jesus Christ. Ultimately the world is arguing over smoke. They want a word and exclusive rights to it. Even if they take it, don't despair, because all they have is the wrapping paper that covered the precious gift which is given to us by God, and will never be snatched out of our hands. Take heart in what Jesus promised: "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward," which is fit for us, and is given to us by God out of his grace, "is great in heaven" (Matt. 5:11-12).

Amen.