

Spiritual Maturity – 2.3 – Marriage and Transformation

Recently in officiating at the wedding ceremony of the daughter of my close friends, they asked me to speak from two passages of Scripture. The first portion was Genesis 1:26-28, 2:7, 18, 22-24 – that deals with marriage and becoming “One Body.” The second passage was 1 Corinthians 13 – the “Love Chapter.” This speaks to the transformational process all Christian’s indwelt by the Spirit are involved in that is called “Sanctification” – becoming the living image of Jesus as His nature and character are developed within us and exhibited in Spiritual Fruit.

This is more of a devotional message rather than a highly referenced study:

1. Marriage in the Community of Faith:

- a) God does some interesting things in the community of faith. Not the least of which is how God takes divergent people and knits us together as a community. Renown Christian author and mystic Henri Nouwen was quoted in an online devotional where he compared the Christian community to “A Mosaic That Shows Us the Face of God”:
 - i) He observed that “a mosaic consists of thousands of little stones. Some are blue, some are green, some are yellow, some are gold. When we bring our faces close to the mosaic, we can admire the beauty of each stone. But as we step back from it, we can see that all these little stones reveal to us a beautiful picture, telling a story none of these individual stones can tell by itself.”
 - ii) Nouwen says that this is what our life in community is about. Each of us is like one of these little stones, but together we reveal the face of God to the world. No one person can say: “I make God visible.” But others who see us together in a community of love can say: “They make God visible.” Nouwen concludes that “Community is where humility and glory touch.”
 - iii) Each of us is an integral piece of this composite mosaic picture... each of us has our part to play with no one being more or less important than another. We all have our place and our purpose.
 - iv) As we gather here together to celebrate marriage, our community of faith is a mosaic demonstration of our Lord Jesus – we are His fragrance and His image presented to the world; and we hereby invoke His Presence in the life of the Spirit in each of us.
- b) These days, many rightly ask, “Why marriage?” What is marriage really all about, and why is it so important... especially in the Christian Community? Institutionally, marriage is more

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than merely licensing physical pleasure or securing our personal comfort; and there are certainly other means to deal with the important legalities of property, children and inheritance apart from marriage.

- c) God has much to say about the importance of marriage as revealed in Scripture where it is clear that humanity is part of something that is way bigger and more important than the individual parts. Like Nouwen's mosaic, marriage in the Christian community forms an image of the Kingdom of God. And this is rightly so because humanity has been created in the image of God and as such we are a reflection of God. Being in "His Image" describes a Spiritual paradigm that includes both personal and social relational aspects.
- d) Humanity was created with an internal and intrinsic need to live in relationship. It is not by accident that every culture supports relational intimacy within three contexts: 1) in the context of God; 2) in the context of a mate; and 3) in the context of a community. It is within these three contexts that an individual's identity is defined... where we find meaning, purpose and fulfillment; where our ideals and values are interpreted and displayed... where individuals are complimented and completed.
- e) We are going to look at two passages of Scripture that I hope will shed some light on the mystery of marriage, and why God has established this relational institution.

2. The Oneness of Identity:

- a) Our first passage is from the Book of Genesis – This reading is attributed to the historical Moses, who lived during the 15th century BCE – approximately 3,500 years ago. Gen 1:26-28, 2:7, 18, 22-24:

Then God said, Let us create humanity in our image, and after our likeness. Thus, God created humanity in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.

The Lord God formed the man from the soil of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life... and man became a "Living Being."

The Lord God said, It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion for him... one who's form and nature matches, reflects, complements and completes him. So the Lord God created a woman from the essence of the man, and he brought her to the man. Then the man said, This one out of all created beings is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she will be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man. That is why a man leaves his father and mother and unites with his wife, and the two become one.

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- b) Most of us have heard this story before, and although too often some theologians create much consternation from the order of creation or the theological concept of “headship.” However, I would down play that here. One could logically argue that woman having been created last means that she is the crowning achievement of God’s creative expression. For our purposes today I think it’s more important to focus on aspects of our identity – first as an individual; then as a couple; and finally as a family – where relationship and community is shaped by our having been created in the Image of God.
- c) The first aspect of this story has to do with a Personal Identity:
- i) It is intriguing that each of us is created uniquely different. Each person has our own distinct DNA, distinct fingerprints, and a distinct retina scan pattern... from which it seems intuitively obvious that God delights in individuality since He created each of us with an amazingly distinct individual identity. Because of this uniqueness, many scientists have refuted the secular-humanistic view of evolution and have turned to the intelligent design concept of creation as such distinct personal characteristics really don’t make much sense apart from a creative being that made us that way. From a Christian perspective, our personal identity and our unique sense of who we are, is formed by God.
- d) The second aspect to consider has to do with a Shared Identity:
- i) The story reveals that a husband and wife are both made in the image of God [Imago Dei] – this means that two distinct beings have a common identity as a married couple, with a unique but similar personal nature. In marriage our individual personalities are connected and interwoven with one another. When a man and a wife have committed themselves to one another in marriage, their identity is being reformed both as individuals, as a couple, and as an extended family. In this extended family resulting from this marriage, we gain new parents and grandparents, new brothers and sisters, new cousins and friends... all of whom are united through the bond of love of a husband and wife. In this marriage a relational miracle is occurring around us at this very time... as we join together to celebrate the marriage of our dear ones... born out of the love of a husband and a wife.
 - ii) The Scripture says that in marriage man and wife we become “one flesh” or more

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correctly, “one integrated being.” This “Oneness” is a reflection of the relational life within the Trinity of “Father-Son-Spirit” who Scripture declares as “One God.” From this association we can observe that the text reveals the divine intention of a shared identity for husband and wife as compatible, equal, and inter-dependent partners reflecting the relational intimacy and unity observant in the Trinity. In order for this marriage partnership to endure the stresses of the world amid the strains of individual desires and expectations it is necessary that all actions and decisions from now on are to be made in the context of their relationship together. As such, the interests of the individual must be deliberately and purposefully submitted to the greater good of the marriage relationship. This is a key relational matter... especially in our fiercely independent culture. In marriage we need to rethink everything in terms of what is best for both for our shared identity to form and flourish.

- e) A third aspect to consider is the recognition of a Transitioning Identity:
- i) God is never static relationally; we are constantly morphing. Nothing remains static in the world, or in our hearts and lives. There is a constant dynamic of *changing, transitioning, and transforming*. We have already observed that when a couple marries a fundamental relational change occurs, but now we need to realize that the two individuals we have known and the relationship we have grown comfortable with also must change. As “husband and wife,” you are hereby declaring that you have left your old life behind in favor of a new life that you are building together and transitioning toward. Your old life as you have known it has ended, and a new one has begun. It is often difficult for newlyweds to embrace this changed state of life. However, it is crucial that we as parents, family, and friends must purposefully respect and encourage your process of transitioning into your new relational identity. Transition is the process that follows the initial change and precedes the ultimate transformation where your new identity together becomes the “new normal.” As family and friends, we must deliberately and consciously choose to relate to you differently – as a married couple. The old form of relationship in which we previously operated, has changed and is no longer appropriate.
 - ii) In this new relational identity the role of parent is understandably one of the hardest to

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change and transition with the declaration of marriage – parents must now become coaches, confidants, counselors and cheerleaders. Parents have done their part in bringing their children into maturity... who are now purposefully taking responsibility for their own life, and the decisions they make from now on they will make together... and we must encourage and respect that. The role of friend is another difficult relationship to change – we who have been their friends must be mindful that a husband must now think first and foremost of his wife, and likewise a wife must think first and foremost of her husband. While we can still enjoy their friendship, we must recognize their priorities and responsibilities have changed. When we recognize and allow them this consideration in transitioning, something wonderful happens – they can become the new creation that God intended them to be.

- f) The final aspect of the story we will consider is a Transformed Identity:
- i) God is all about transformational life. He delights in making us into something we were not before... not merely better but wondrously better. As modern-day disciples of Jesus, we know that God is at work transforming Jesus' nature into our lives, and that He has adopted us as His own sons and daughters. It is true that in marriage, "one flesh" is a Supernatural transformation. While it is obvious that the bodies of a man and a woman are made for each another – we obviously fit together physically; but we also fit together emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. While it is easy to focus on the physical side of marriage as Oneness, it is especially important to understand that marriage is about the whole person including the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of our life that require to be nurtured and transformed together.
 - ii) The marriage commitment that a husband and wife enters into together, allows for the deepening of their relationship on all these levels – physical, emotional, relational, and Spiritual. Marriage involves the entirety of the individual in a transformational process where the two progressively become *One* through the sharing of a lifetime of events, circumstances, and experiences together in dependence and submission to God. Marriage as we've described it is a noble and joyous calling. It takes a lot of work and personal investment, but you'll find that life together will be so much richer and way

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more wondrous than any life alone. There is only so much a person can do alone or for themselves, but it is nearly limitless what one can do when submitted to each other under God's Grace and care.

3. Transformational Love:

a) Our second passage is 1 Corinthians chapter 13. The Apostle Paul wrote this passage about 2,000 years ago, and it is a powerful testimony to the nature of love. While most of us are familiar with this chapter, it is crucial that we see it in its context in Scripture. This passage is preceded by Chap 12 which speaks about what Spiritual life is all about; and it is followed by Chap 14 which speaks about life in the community of faith. Because of this context, we see that Paul is telling us that love is the bridge between "Spiritual life" and "life in the community of faith."

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.

When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a darkened mirror; but then [when perfection comes] we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

b) In this passage are listed 16 elements that describe what love is, and equally important what it is not. In our self-help approach to life it is easy to argue that if you apply some of these elements most of the time, and most of the elements on a regular basis – that any relationship will be improved. However, our goal as Christians is not merely improvement but to have these elements incorporated in such a pervasive manner that it fundamentally

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transforms who we are and how we live.

- c) In the writings of the Old Testament, the Hebrew word used to express God's love is Hessed. Hessed love refers to the enduring quality of God's love for humanity... it doesn't change, it is never abandoned, God's faithfulness is the one constant we can rely upon.
- d) In the writings of the New Testament, the Greek word used to express God's love is Agape. Agape love refers to the transformational quality of God's love for humanity. God was not content to leave humanity as broken imperfect creations when we emerged from the Fall in the Garden, and through the atonement of Jesus God has opened the way for an entirely different way of living and loving. It is not accidental that Jesus' relationship to the Church is often described in Scripture with marriage imagery, as this is the most powerful relational intimacy we can know this side of eternity. Agape is the kind of love God has for us, and it is the kind of love we should have first for God and then for one another.
- e) I'd like you to contemplate again for a moment, as I re-read the 16 elements of love from this passage... drink these descriptions in:
 - ^{1Co 13:4-8a} Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, love does not boast, love is not proud.
 - Love is not rude, love is not self-seeking, love is not easily angered, love keeps no record of wrongs.
 - Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
 - Love always protects, love always trusts, love always hopes, love always perseveres.
 - Love never fails.
- f) I'd like for you to imagine the person you would be if your heart was constrained and motivated by this kind of love. Imagine how wonderful it would be to have a heart like this. Imagine how amazing it would be to live with a person like this. This is God's purpose in marriage, that the two would be transformed into a completely different way of thinking and relating in love... by the Grace of God. This is God's goal for marriage.
- g) These 16 elements of love are the components of relational intimacy, and they form the basis of a marriage life and love together. These elements frame the type of Love that Scripture declares God has for humanity, and it is also the model that we should have for each other. When it comes to demonstrating such love, Christians recount the example of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as the highest expression of *Agape* love. Jesus' sacrifice opened the opportunity

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for relational intimacy for each of us with God that we accept through faith. It forms the basis of our hope of eternity that we expect with God. Agape love here and now provides the means for enduring and selfless love as evidenced in healthy relational intimacy in marriage.

- h) When a husband and wife stand together in their community of family and friends and profess their love for one other... transformational Agape love is at work. As much as husband and wife love each other, we also as your family and friends profess our love for you. As a community we are proud of you, we are proud of the people you have already become – and are yet becoming. We pray your love will sweeten and grow stronger as you walk together through life. We remind you that you must constantly care for your marriage relationship. Always be on the lookout for anything that would harm it or weaken it... there are many things that would seek to separate you. Instead, do the things that will promote your relationship, deliberately refrain from anything that does not promote it. Be vigilant, and be strong – and when you are being tempted [for temptations will come] remember your promises here today to each other, and remember those here that stand with you and believe in you. And remember that God loves you, and has blessed you and the marriage relationship through which He has called you together.