

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, June 28, 2020

Marriage Vows

Lord willing, six days from now, we will assemble for the wedding of two of our faithful friends. For today's sermon, we will take a closer look at the scriptural vows that they intend to make before God, so that everyone present at that wedding will have fresh clarity in our minds. Every aspect of marriage is grotesquely misused and abused by the world around us - Satan's deception is endless on this topic - and so it is important that we refresh our minds in the plain word of God.

As I said, these are scriptural vows, meaning that they are taken straight from the scriptures that pertain to the duties of husbands and wives. Before we dive into the details of these vows, let us first consider this question: do we have scriptural authority for vows in the first place? The fact is that we do not have a precise scriptural pattern for how to execute the wedding itself, and the scriptures do not provide a specific set of vows to recite. However, the scriptures clearly establish the fact that marriage involves the making of a covenant: "... yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant." (**Malachi 2:14**) A covenant, by definition, is a binding agreement; a contract; a promise. Covenants are typically sworn to (either verbally, or by signature), and are sealed by a witness. Consider the everlasting covenant of grace, wherein God the Father and God the Son swore to the covenant, and the Holy Spirit witnessed and sealed it. (**Ephesians 1:3-14; Romans 8:14-16**) Although the scriptures do not provide the verbatim terms of the marriage covenant, they certainly provide the requirements for the behavior of husbands and wives; therefore we vow to be obedient to those commands, and we do it before many witnesses: the assembled church, the holy angels, the spirits of just men made perfect, and God Almighty. (**Hebrews 12:23, 24**)

Husband:

Do you take this woman to be your wedded wife; to love, nourish, and cherish her above every other creature, and to render unto her all due benevolence; to daily edify her in Scripture, dwelling with her according to knowledge, giving honor unto her as unto the weaker vessel; to have your heart wholly trust in her; to provide for her temporal good; to hold her in no bitterness, do her no cruelty, and deal not treacherously with her – but rather to conceal her faults, failings and infirmities; and to keep yourself only to her as being heirs together of the grace of life, until the day comes that Christ returns in power and glory or that God Almighty sees fit to separate you from her in death?

Wife:

Do you take this man to be your wedded husband; to love, nourish, and cherish him above every other creature, and to render unto him all due benevolence; to reverence and obey him as your head, even as Christ is the head of the church; to adorn yourself with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, being in subjection unto your husband in the Lord willingly and cheerfully, doing well, and not being afraid with any amazement; to hold him in no bitterness and to do him no cruelty; and to keep yourself only to him as being heirs together of the grace of life, until the day comes that Christ returns in power and glory or that God Almighty sees fit to separate you from him in death?

I will cover each element of the husband's vow, but since there is quite a bit of overlap between them, I will only cover the unique elements of the wife's vow.

Husband:

- Do you take this woman to be your wife ...
 - Let's remember the basics here: "... *Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?* 6 *Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*" (**Matthew 19:4-6**) Humans are created as either male or female, and they are only to be cleaved together (spiritually and physically) in marriage (one man with one woman) - that holy institution from which humans are to reproduce, and preserve the heritage of God in the earth by teaching it faithfully to their sons and daughters. If the Lord has appointed marriage for a man, he leaves the headship of his father, in order to establish a new body, wherein he takes on authority and accountability to rule his house well in the sight of God. In addition, God appointed this holy institution to perpetually teach mankind about the covenant relationship between God and His elect people. "*This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*" (**Ephesians 5:32**)
 - This is the heart of the whole matter. We could stop the vows right here, and this covenant would already be binding, because these matters were established at creation, and are written on the hearts of men: If you leave the headship of your father to cleave to a spouse, then you absolutely owe God obedience to all that He has commanded regarding marriage, whether you explicitly acknowledge each point or not. Consider the direct and straightforward way that the scriptures speak to this matter:
 - **Genesis 24:67** "*And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted*

after his mother's death." Comforting; simple; sober; final. Once it's done – for better or for worse - there are no do overs!

- One other point: if a person has a living spouse, then they cannot make a binding marriage covenant with any other person; God will not regard it as marriage – he will regard it as adultery. (**John 4:17,18**)
- ... to love, nourish, and cherish her above every other creature ...
 - **Ephesians 5:25-33** *"25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. 28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. 29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: 30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. 31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. 32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband."*
 - Gill: *"Husbands love your wives: which consists in a strong and cordial affection for them; in a real delight and pleasure in them; in showing respect, and doing honour to them; in seeking their contentment, satisfaction, and pleasure; in a quiet, constant, and comfortable dwelling with them; in providing all things necessary for them; in protecting them from all injuries and abuses; in concealing their faults, and covering their infirmities; in entertaining the best opinion of their persons and actions; and in endeavouring to promote their spiritual good and welfare: this love ought to be hearty and sincere, and not feigned and selfish; it should be shown in private, as well as in public: it should be chaste and single, constant and perpetual; it should exceed that which is bore to neighbours, or even to parents, and should be equal to that a man bears to himself; though not so as to hinder, and break in upon love to God and Christ: many are the reasons why husbands should love their wives; they are given to be helps unto them; they are companions of them; they are wives of covenant; they are their own wives, yea, their own bodies, their own flesh, nay, as themselves; they are their image and their glory; and especially the example of Christ, in his love to his church and people, should engage them to it."*

- Part of nourishing and cherishing your own body is this: when you find a problem, you don't ignore it – you fix it. You fix it in the least painful way that you can. That's what we are supposed to do with our spouse; that's what we are supposed to do with one another in Christ.
- ... and to render unto her all due benevolence ...
 - **1Corinthians 7:3-5** *“3 Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. 4 The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. 5 Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.”*
 - What is this benevolence that is due? The direct context in this passage is clearly speaking to the use of the marriage bed. Why is that a focus? Because it is such an intimate and sensitive subject; it brings extreme emotions into play (both positive and negative – joy, love, fear, insecurity, etc.); further, it is directly related to the matters of the womb – conceiving, carrying, bearing, and raising children - and the intense experiences and emotions that attend those matters (again – positive and negative). So it is easy to see that when spouses mistreat, hold hostage, or in any way weaponize the marriage bed, it can make a breach that infects every part of their marriage. Don't do it! You have no right, because your body is not your own! Now, as I said, the marriage bed is the direct context of benevolence in this passage, but that is only one specific application. Benevolence is a much larger concept – it is good will; it is love put into action; it is kindness - longsuffering and patient kindness. It is a selfless consideration of your spouse that measures what they need, and then kindly supplies that need. This is the benevolence that is constantly due between spouses.
 - The English word “benevolence” only occurs one time in the Bible; however the Greek word - “eunoia” (yoo'-noy-ah) - appears twice. The other occurrence is found in Ephesians; chapters 5 and 6 contain a beautifully instructive passage on submission. The passage begins with: “Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God ...” – followed by practical examples about how that submission applies to wives and husbands, children and parents, masters and servants – and then summing it up that we are to render submission and obedience: *“Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With **good will** [benevolence] doing*

service, as to the Lord, and not to men: 8 Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.” (Ephesians 6:6-9) My friends – this benevolence is due from all of us, and particularly within the body of Christ. Truly then, your body is not your own! You are a happy, lively member of it, and you must therefore render due benevolence to the rest of the body. Good will put into service - patient, considered, selfless kindness put into action.

- ... to daily edify her in Scripture, dwelling with her according to knowledge, giving honor unto her as unto the weaker vessel ...
 - **1Peter 3:7** *“Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.”*
 - It is incumbent upon a husband to prayerfully search the scriptures, so that he is able - in word and deed - to dwell with his wife according to **that** knowledge – a counseled, working, experiential, knowledge of the precepts of God. He cannot rule his house according to worldly wisdom, or base passions and emotions. He must establish the policies of his house on sound doctrine with scriptural reasoning. These ought to be things that he freely and frequently discusses with his wife such that they are aligned, and she can operate in confidence and good conscience, knowing that she is pleasing her husband **and** her God. Where there is misalignment, there is opportunity for patient, scriptural work - together. This is the brick-by-brick work of building your house upon the rock. (**Luke 6:48**) Hear her questions; hear her concerns; help her to understand the scriptural standard that applies to any given situation; when you find her in distress toward someone, you must dig in and provoke her to selfless, charitable thoughts and actions of love – no avoidance behavior – you have signed up to be a fierce defender of the peace in this body; be prepared to perfect your own understanding when she helps you to see a thing where you are wrong.
 - Furthermore, dwell with her according to the knowledge that you have of her frame and circumstances, including the fact that she is the weaker vessel. Honor her, by using that knowledge to help and not hinder her! Conform yourself so that you can communicate scriptural help in the way that is most useful to her; the scriptures are not your personal sledgehammer; scriptural grandstanding or intellectual knife

sharpening is never going to be useful to your wife, so don't do it! Honor her as a vessel that is to be treated more tenderly; honor her as a part of your own body, and an equal heir of the grace of life!

- When husbands and wives are at odds with each other, it is altogether consuming; the heart and mind are a tangled mess, and your prayers are hindered; it is like a war happening inside of your own body. Humble yourselves – lay down your pride, and run to make things right with one another. Plead with the Lord to help you to do that.
- ... to have your heart wholly trust in her ...
 - **Proverbs 31:10-12** *“10 Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. 11 The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. 12 She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.”*
 - When the Lord gives you a godly wife, it is a blessing beyond measure. Her job is to strive to put on the mind and behavior of the virtuous woman; your job is to trust her, while kindly guiding and nurturing her in that path. You owe her forthright, scriptural communication that identifies clear expectations, so that she isn't aiming at a moving target, and battling against the whims of your mood. When she falls down, you should not bear hard on her, but rather, you must help her back to good footing. This trust is not emotional human speak, it is real work for you both!
- ... to provide for her temporal good ...
 - **1Timothy 5:8** *“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”*
 - Despite the fact that we live in the midst of a culture of lazy, proud entitlement - this is a no brainer. Not only should he labor hard to ensure that his wife and family are well provided for, but he should work with his wife to determine what is the most needful way to diligently use her time and skills, whether that is working within or without the home at any given point in their lives. Providing for her temporal good is not a call to luxurious, opulent living, or to having a “kept wife”. How can you order the affairs of his family such that they are appropriately cared for, and living within their means, while still leaving enough resources for the needs of others, and the ministry of Christ? (**Philippians 2:4**) How can you order your house like Stephanas did, being addicted to the ministry of the saints. (**1Corinthians 16:15**)
- ... to hold her in no bitterness, do her no cruelty, and deal not treacherously with her – but rather to conceal her faults, failings, and infirmities ...
 - **Malachi 2:13-17** *“13 And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not*

and the perfect shall remain in it. 22 But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it."

- The women of this world provoke and entice to adultery (physical and spiritual) with their words and their deeds; they have roaming, thankless, and discontented eyes, and they desire to draw others into sin with them. They forsake their best friend who provided and cared for them; they subjugate their husband, guide, and governor – despising and casting off his authority – whether they remain “married” or not.
- ... to keep yourself only to her as being heirs together of the grace of life ...
 - **Proverbs 5:15-21** *“15 Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. 16 Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets. 17 Let them be only thine own, and not strangers’ with thee. 18 Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. 19 Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love. 20 And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? 21 For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings.”*
 - That speaks for itself, whether talking about fidelity between spouses, or between professing believers and Christ.
- ... until the day comes that Christ returns in power and glory or that God Almighty sees fit to separate you from her in death
 - **Matthew 22:23-33** *“23 The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, 24 Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. 25 Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: 26 Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. 27 And last of all the woman died also. 28 Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. 29 Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. 30 For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. 31 But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, 32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. 33 And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine.”*

- My friends – the nature of our relationships of flesh will cease when we exit this world. Your marital relationship will cease at that time. Our hope isn't to continue those same relationships in eternity; our hope – as heirs together - is to dwell with Christ our Lord. That doesn't take away from our duty toward one another in this life; that doesn't take away from our joy that we have these relationships of faith while we make our pilgrimage. However, it should make very clear that we cannot view these relationships with fleshly sentimentality. We've just discussed how imperative it is to love and be faithful to your spouse, and yet these relationships can never take preeminence over our fidelity to Christ; if they come into real conflict, then the relationship of flesh is to be forsaken in favor of Christ. That eternal, spiritual view is what Christ expressed when he said: *“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:26)*

Wife:

- ... to reverence and obey him as your head, even as Christ is the head of the church

...

- **Ephesians 5:22-24,33** *“22 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. 24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. ... 33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.”*
 - This obedience should be borne of mutual love, and the comparison to Christ as the head of the church puts a major highlight on the duty that the husband has to love his wife and dwell with her according to knowledge. This obedience is required; a husband's misbehavior is no excuse to forsake it. It is to be rendered unless it comes in direct conflict with clear duty to God.
 - Gill *“they should think well of their husbands, speak becomingly to them, and respectfully of them; the wife should take care of the family, and family affairs, according to the husband's will; should imitate him in what is good, and bear with that which is not so agreeable; she should help and assist in caring and providing for the family; and should abide with him in prosperity and adversity, and do nothing without his will and consent: and this subjection is only to her husband; not to any other man, nor to her children, nor to her servants, or any brought into her house;*

A true Christian's foremost concern lies in properly ordering his own spirit. This will do more to fix the affections, and earn the esteem of a husband, than studied ornaments or fashionable apparel, attended by a froward and quarrelsome temper. Christians ought to do their duty to each other, from a willing mind, and in obedience to the command of God. Wives should be subject to their husbands, not from dread and fear, but from desire to do well, and please God. The husband's duty to the wife implies giving due respect to her, and maintaining her authority, protecting her, and placing trust in her. They are heirs together of all the blessings of this life and what is to come, and should live peaceably with each other."

- The phrase: "not afraid with any amazement" ought to help us to lock in on the meaning of "reverence". "Not afraid" is the Greek word "phobeo"; the same word that is translated as "reverence" in Ephesians 5. The word "amazement" comes from the Greek word "ptoesis", meaning: "with terror". And so I believe that the instruction here is simply this: a wife should be in subjection to her husband, obey him, and have appropriate reverence – a fear borne of love, whereby she is afraid to do wrong by him, or to him – but that is not an all consuming fear with terror; she knows that he is a fallible human being – he is not God; she knows that he does not hold her eternal soul and eternal joy in his hands; she knows that she ultimately serves, and will answer to God. Therefore – she can settle her heart in the face of any distress, and put on the spirit and works of charity; when her husband is struggling, she can be confident that she is able – and **duty bound** as his "help meet" – to respectfully entreat him - to say fitting, scriptural, spiritual words to him. He needs that from you! That can seem like a daunting task, and yet it is needful, and he will love you all the more if you are willing to replace the servile fear of man with the words and actions of love.

1Peter 3:8-11 *"8 Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: 9 Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. 10 For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: 11 Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it."*

I love you all. Amen.