

JESUS PROPOSES "BE MY VALENTINE"

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February 4, 2012

Happiness is what everybody wants. Psychologists shower us with books on how to attain it. The Bible is God's happiness book He has given to the world. What it has to say about our beginnings may seem to modern man as simplistic, but what it says is not simple; it's profound:

"And God said, Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: . . . so God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:26, 27).

We are created with an honorable origin. We are not descended from primitive forms of life or from animals; the Bible tells us that the first created man was Adam, and "Adam . . . was the son of God" (Luke 3:38), and we are sons of Adam. Our maleness and femaleness is created "in the image of God," and the Bible is also clear in its teaching that "God is love" (1 John 4:8), which includes God's plan for holy sexual love. It's surprising perhaps but it is clear that the holy love that the Bible says is agape includes sexual love (cf. Eph. 5:25-33).

We conclude immediately that if we let God have His way with us, our relationship together as male and female will be the greatest happiness that we can enjoy in this life.

But the Lord did not create Adam and Eve together at the same time. Genesis chapter 2 is a

close-up enlargement of the story of chapter one, telling how God created Adam first, and how Adam later discovered that he was lonely:

"Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. . . . Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him" (Genesis 2:15-20).

How completely contrary to the theory of evolution is this delightful truth! Since "God is love," He made a woman to take care of man's loneliness, and she was to find her happiness in his love. And what He did for lonely Adam, He has continued doing ever since for every son of Adam who not only feels his loneliness but is willing to look to God for guidance in finding the right one to be his, for life. What happened is briefly described:

"And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man" (vss. 21, 22).

That last clause is what impresses us deeply. The Lord God took a personal interest in the happiness of Adam; He is infinite but He is also personal in dealing with us because He gave His Son to be ours forever. God is linked closely with the human family; the Good News that permeates the Bible assures us that He takes exactly the same personal interest in every one of us on earth as He took in

Adam in the beginning. It's part of His gift "in Christ"; let's not refuse the gift and think we can manage better on our own.

The Bible does not teach the "deist" version of who God is, that He is an Absent Landlord who created the universe, wound it up like a clock, and then has gone off to let us manage on our own. David in Psalm 139 says that from the moment we are conceived in the womb of our mother, the infinite but personal God takes an interest in the development of that embryo into the person that we are:

"You have formed my inward parts; You have covered me in my mother's womb. . . . I am fearfully and wonderfully made. . . . My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth [a metaphor for describing what is beyond human knowledge]. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written. . . How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!" (vss. 13-17).

There in that psalm is the source of the healthy self-respect each of us is to know. It's the foundation of happiness. Our first parent, Adam being a "son of God," that is the category in which we are to think of ourselves—temporarily exiled from the ultimate glory of that status, but by the grace of God en route in our return.

Genesis describes how Adam felt when God had performed this "surgery":

"And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (verses 18-24).

The Love of One Man for One Woman and Vice-versa

Imagine Adam's delight when he first saw her! He had never dreamed that any creature could be so beautiful. Jesus said of them and of all married couples since, "The two will become one" (not the "three" or more, cf. Matthew 19:5, TEV).

Any man who is not proud and self-sufficient knows that if he has found such a one to love and who loves him, that same "Lord God . . . brought her to" him. "A man can inherit a house and money from his parents, but only the Lord can give him a sensible wife" (Proverbs 19:14, TEV; He is the best Singles' Agency). For a man to love one such woman is the "commandment of God;" and John says, "His commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). It's the most delightful experience a man (or woman) can have!

"Grievous"? The "commandment" is written within our very nature as humans!

You fall in love; could anything be less "grievous"? It is natural for the man who loves a woman to desire to become "one" with her, and for the woman who loves him to desire the same with him. Love is always exclusive, we are created by God to love but one. His plan works like this: "Close

your heart to every love but mine; hold no one in your arms but me” (Song of Solomon, 8:6, TEV).

Even from the tender years of childhood, we feel the drawing of sexual attraction. Unless it is confused and perverted by indulgence in selfishness, this inward desire of man is for one woman only, and woman’s desire is for one man only. We call this “love.” Unless we choose to invite Satan to wreck it, it lasts forever. “Love is as powerful as death; passion is as strong as death itself. It bursts into flame and burns like a raging fire. Water cannot put it out; no flood can drown it. But if anyone tried to buy love with his wealth, contempt is all he would get” (vs. 7). Love is pure and holy, yet inexpressibly delightful in its “one man” and “one woman” exclusiveness.

Polygamy is not natural. Not only is it true that it was never God’s plan for us, but it’s also true that it is contrary to the original nature of man and woman. Adultery is also unnatural, contrary to the spirit of love which is man’s and woman’s greatest happiness. Both are evil inventions at war with true human nature.

The Bible “Song of Songs” reveals how this kind of love is natural to all human hearts unless Satan has been invited in to corrupt it:

“Let the king have sixty queens,
eighty concubines,
young women without number!
But I love only one,
and she is . . . lovely” (6:8, 9, TEV, emphasis added).

Poets sing, “Ah, sweet mystery of life . . . love!” It’s implanted deep in the human heart by the true God who Himself is love. That “true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world” (1 John 1:9) awakens this mystery of love within us; it takes Satan’s hauling in mud and filth to cover up this God-given urge to pure and holy love. It’s not possible for a man or woman to turn to the corruptions of harlotry, adultery, fornication, or polygamy, unless first of all he or she stamps out the bright shining of that “true Light” in the heart. The “Light” has shone from Creation, and it shines most brightly at the cross of Christ. Christ died to make love become ours “in Him.”

True or False: “Adultery (or Fornication) Is Easy”?

An enemy, Satan, has fooled many into thinking that sexual sin is the easiest thing in the world to do. Is it not natural, they ask, for even little children to start playing with sexual thrills at an early age?

However common such practices may be, they are not “natural.” Only where the light of the gospel of Christ is hidden is it possible for children to fall into ways so contrary to God’s love for them. Teaching fear and terror will not keep a child from sexual sin, but the clear true gospel of God’s love revealed in a Savior who died to redeem will do it. It works! “The gospel of Christ . . . is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16), and little children are ready and capable to believe.

No, it’s not “easy” for men and women or youth to commit sexual sin, because they must beat back all the waves of grace and mercy that the Holy Spirit of

God rolls upon them before they can proceed in the path of such transgression. Sex without God's love is never "easy," for it is actually a form of spiritual suicide. (Is suicide ever easy for a sane, healthy, happy human being?). Transgression of the divine commandments against fornication and adultery systematically destroys one's happiness, our very life. Something happens behind the scenes if we are alert: the Lord loves us so much that He sends His Holy Spirit to resist us in our suicidal purpose, and that makes it hard for us so to destroy ourselves.

The Bible and numerous traditional religions around the world agree in one vital point: God made the first man and woman to enjoy each other in a pure and happy life-long love. These traditional religions also agree that man lost this original happiness through sin. But from that point on they disagree as to how that pure happiness can be recovered, and they even disagree as to whether or not it can be recovered.

The popular idea is that the "Paradise" of happy sexual love is lost forever; but the Bible teaches the "good news" that love in happy marriage is possible. And especially today when there is increased knowledge of the significance of agape, the marriages of those who believe in Christ will be especially happy. Those who "come out of Babylon" and await the return of Jesus will know God's original plan for our happiness more clearly. In other words, the gospel is unending good news, and worldly tradition is the bad news that you can never really be as happy as God intended you to be.

Wouldn't it be a tragedy to prefer the bad to the good! The result: fornication; adultery; prostitution; plenty of marital unhappiness and quarrelling thrown in for those who try marriage. But sexual sin becomes possible only when people disbelieve the "good news" of God's Word.

God intended marital romance to fill with life-long joy. But wrong man-woman relationships fill the world with sorrow. Why has something so wonderful become so full of misery and pain? Here is evidence of an enemy, Satan, fighting against God.

The loving Creator intended marriage to be a "helpmeet" arrangement, in others words, an unending blessing, a union of two lives where fornication, adultery, abortion, or prostitution simply cannot exist. But the brutal facts are that these things flourish in our modern world.

Why, oh why, must this be so? An enemy has done this," says Jesus, sowing tares in the good garden the Lord planted (Matthew 13:28). By corrupting and poisoning male-female relationships, Satan has succeeded in making life nearly a hell on earth for multitudes.

Consider the usual pregnant, unmarried girls and the torture that millions have gone through: (1) The girl's shame before family and friends kills her inner sense of self-respect and dwarfs her personhood for life; (2) her education is always handicapped even if by a miracle she later can resume it partially; (3) she must endure pregnancy and its attendant burdens without the help God intended her to have—a loving, sustaining husband, and the admiring, congratulating support of happy relatives

and friends; (4) even if she marries the father of her child, the beautiful happiness God intended is crippled by a sense of guilt and loss of respect for the man who made her pregnant; (5) her inability to rear the child in an ideal situation of parenthood leaves a life-long nagging sense of failure, because she never knows the joy of motherhood as God intended—that her child should truly revere and respect both parents forever; (6) in too many instances she is deprived of marriage and feels she must turn to prostitution in order to support herself and child.

How else can her life be described except in terms of slow murder and suicide or at best, slavery? What is the difference between murdering a person when her life is half over, or depriving her of half (or more) of her real life while she still struggles for existence?

And don't forget, the man who made her pregnant won't get off easily. Not all punishment is reserved for a hell after ones dies. If he runs away and leaves the girl to care for the child, he cannot repress an inner guilt.

When Satan tempted Eve, he planted the bomb that would bring untold misery upon the human race. Immediately Eve's former kindness and love toward her husband were distorted. In its place she found enmity in her heart toward her companion and the deadly virus of bitterness, wrath, anger, self-pity, evil speaking, and malice took root. Forever since that awful day in the Garden, God has been dealing with the effects of that enmity Satan instilled in human hearts. The perfect

analogy of marriage through which God wanted to teach the human family about His lovingkindness (hesed) toward us was warped. Throughout the Old Testament witness we find God referring to Himself as the divine husband seeking His estranged wife. Demonstrating His hesed, He calls His bride, wooing her to return to His loving arms.

Through unique "oneness" with His people God intended that the marriage relationship would illustrate His love for mankind. He wants us to become "one with Him" by giving ourselves to Him totally, as He gave one hundred percent of Himself to us on the cross of Calvary. Just as in a healthy marriage, if we consent, He will so completely identify with us that our hearts and minds will be blended with His so that "when obeying Him we shall be carrying out our own impulses" *The Desire of Ages*, p. 668. In such a total union we find unrestrained love and devotion that expresses loyalty both to the partner and the covenant. It is far greater than an emotionally immature, sensual relationship, which so many think of as "marriage." Christ does not desire the lovely flower girl, cute as she may be, who is unable to appreciate His gift of divine love. Such an immature marriage between God and His bride would be based on a corrupt contract, upon promises the bride made but was unable to fulfill. No, God wants a mature bride. Only a self-forgetful, total devotion to and concern for the divine Groom will result in a lasting marriage in which we can stand before our Divine Lover naked and unashamed. All barriers are removed and we are ready to receive Christ's robe of righteousness.

God's greatest desire is to impart His character to His bride. The everlasting covenant is a confession of God's commitment to saving His people from sin (Matt. 1:21), and replacing it with lovingkindness (hesed). In the gift of His Son to the human family, God magnificently displayed the truth of hesed. He demonstrated His lovingkindness through the gift of His life to the world so that, through faith in His atonement, sinners like you and me might have eternal life with Him.

Can you imagine Jesus Christ saying to His people, "Be My Valentine"? If it seems far-fetched to you, consider what the Bible says so clearly:

(1) Psalm 45 likens a man's love for a woman to Christ's love for His people.

(2) The Song of Solomon is a dramatic poem about the love of Christ for the church, as a bridegroom loves his bride.

(3) The Book of Hosea again represents God's love for Israel as that of a husband for an unfaithful wife.

(4) Ephesians 5:23-33 in a very clear way compares the true love of a husband for his wife to the love of Christ for His church as His Bride-to-be. Indeed, Paul admits, "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (vs. 32). Vs. 27 says that it is His purpose that His Bride have no "spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that [the church] should be holy and without blemish" The language is borrowed from the Song of Solomon.

(5) And right there is a great big problem: a false view of righteousness by faith declares that genuine

righteousness must always be imputed vicariously, that it can never be truly imparted. The difference? A lady wears a leopard-skin coat externally; it is never a part of her, it is vicarious, imputed. The leopard wears a leopard skin coat as a part of himself, it is imparted. The false view says that sin can never be eradicated until we see the Lord coming in the clouds of heaven and He zaps us. But the Bible teaches that vicarious imputed righteousness must and will also become imparted righteousness.

And that brings us to (6), Revelation 19:6, 7:

Heaven's Hallelujah chorus will finally sing out with joy, "The marriage of the Lamb [Jesus] is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints."

And (7), there is a different word for "righteousness" in the Greek—it's imparted, at last. Yes, Jesus will say, "Be My Valentine," and at last the corporate body of His church will answer, Yes.

God is still actively wooing His bride. He is longing for the day when she will have made herself ready through self-surrender to His lovingkindness. When her commitment to Him produces an unwavering loyalty and allegiance that cannot be shaken, no matter what Satan attempts, then the divine wedding can finally take place (Rev. 14:12, 19:7). When His people mature enough to recognize His lovingkindness for what it is—motivating power to overcome all sin—the bride finally will be ready to wear the Bridegroom's robe

of righteousness, to receive His wealth for her poverty and rags (Rev. 3:14-22; Isa. 55:1-3). The union will be complete.

This will never happen through coercion or through promises of obedience, no matter how sincere those promises may sound. Our contrite hearts must be filled to overflowing with the gift hesed from our divine Husband. Then it will outpour to those around us, streaming forth in those last rays of divine mercy to a dying world (Christ's Object Lessons, pp. 415-416). Then we will all with one voice sing, "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" indisputably as King and Lord in our hearts and lives, as well as in all the world.

But a new understanding of God's good news has begun to permeate the world of pain and sorrow. The last book of the New Testament tells of a fresh understanding of "the everlasting gospel" proclaimed by an angel flying "in the midst of heaven," "to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" (14:6, 7). Being "everlasting," it's not new, but this understanding is new. It sees the gospel not as a mere pardon from an indulgent "God" who doesn't care if we sin, but as a message that enables us to overcome the sin itself and return to the original heart-reconciliation with God and with one another that He intended for us. The ten commandments metamorphosing into ten promises of victory is the result.

A second angel "follows" that first, declaring that "Babylon is fallen." Popular confusion about the pure gospel is finished through the mighty agency

of this proclamation of a pure "everlasting gospel" (vs. 8).

A third angel warns against Satan so deceiving many that he will inspire people to renew the persecuting rage that prevailed in Europe during the Dark Ages; and in that crisis the truth will emerge clear and victorious to the mind of every honest person on earth.

Finally, Revelation describes a great enlarging of this threefold message in that of "another angel [who comes] down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth is to be lightened with his glory" (18:1). What's ahead is good news. It includes healing for wounded marriages, and guidance for new ones.

What we want is God's "good news" for marriage.