

## *To God Alone Be The Glory*

Last Sunday we didn't get to spend enough time on mothers and women, and on June 19 we won't get to spend enough time on fathers and men. So we're making up for this a bit today. Consider: none of us would be here were it not for a mother who carried us in her womb for the better part of 40 weeks and then gave birth to us. Add in recovery time. How long does it take to recover fully from child birth? Six weeks to a year? That was a lot of sacrifice to make sure each of us could have a life. God blessed us through our mothers.

But when Bible-believing Christians celebrate mothers and fathers, it's only natural for us to turn our thoughts heavenward. There on his sapphire throne sits God who long ago came up with the idea of gender. Sometimes people get the impression that God doesn't know what it's like to be a woman because we refer to God as "him." Some people have tried to make God seem more like a woman by calling God "her." But God understands both women and men equally well because he is, depending on how you want to look at it, either both male and female, or neither male nor female, or beyond both male and female. Of course, I'm not talking about Jesus, who is true God and who was male while on earth and remains male to this day. I'm talking about the Triune God, who is one being even though he also revealed himself to us in

the Bible as three distinct persons. From God's mind sprang the concept of male and female.

Peek into God's mind for a human moment. Can you picture him in eternity, coming up with ideas on how he would bring about creation and keep it alive? Creating life was going to be so much fun for him, once time started, that he decided to share such joy with us. He would create some of us to be males and some of us to be females, and only when a man and a woman came together would they be able to procreate, to carry forward the creation of life. That's when the concept of motherhood and fatherhood was first thought up—way back before time began, or at the very latest by the fifth day of creation when the sea creatures and the air creatures sprang to life at God's command. Since God created both male and female, he understands the joys of being a male and being a female.

Ever since sin came into the world, God has also observed the frustrations of being a male or being a female. He acknowledges the loneliness as well as the contentedness of being single. He understands what it's like to have your spouse take you for granted. He has experienced the vexation of being ignored by one's spouse. He knows what it's like to be treated inconsiderately, or to be spoken at unkindly, or to have one's spouse blatantly do the opposite of what you said you prefer. He

understands the tensions between husbands and wives because his spouse, the Church, has wronged him many times in the history of the world.

We've been peeking at this from God's perspective, but now look at it from ours. You and I are the ones who have treated the Lord badly. Think back to last week. You remember what you did, right? Yeah, God saw it too. He sees everything we do. What did you do wrong last week? Was it coveting? Did you want something that God doesn't want you to want? That's the opposite of being content and satisfied with what God has given you. It's one thing to say, "I really do love God the most. And I credit him with creating my interest in such and such. Now I would like to purchase this book or these supplies or apply for that job in order to explore this interest further. But I'm going to keep my life in balance because God has given me other responsibilities too." This is not coveting. But to want something, and then be dissatisfied you didn't get it or can't get it—be careful, you might just be over the line. Wanting more and more money can lead even Christians into schemes, like working too many hours or gambling. It's hard to gamble just for fun without dreaming what you'll spend the money on (not impossible, but pretty hard). According to 1 Timothy 6:6-10, we need only food and clothing. Almost everything else is just stuff we want because it makes our lives easier. Coveting is a way of saying to our Lord,

the Church's spouse, "You aren't providing well enough for me. I want more!" Yeah, that's coveting.

So how about your mouth last week? Did you manage to say only what was true? (You didn't lie or deceive anyone?) And of the true things you said, were they all loving so that others were built up by what you said or moved in a positive direction? Did you keep things private that should remain private? Did you speak up against wrongdoing in a loving way, like we're supposed to (Matthew 18:15-18)? The Lord, our heavenly Bridegroom, gave us a mouth so we could use it to praise him and be a blessing to others. The angry words or the snide words or the smarty-pants words we speak aren't just heard by people. They are also heard by the one who created speech and allowed us to learn how to speak. How we treat others, that's how we treat God (Matthew 25:31ff).

We've scratched the surface of just two commandments and we're smelling pretty bad. We, the Church, are the bride of Christ. But we don't look pretty when our behavior is examined. Don't you wonder sometimes why Jesus' doesn't just break off the engagement while there's still time before Judgment Day, I mean Wedding Day? I sometimes do... until I remember that "*God is love*" (1 John 4:16). He set his love on us before time was created. When mankind sinned, rather than let us suffer the eternal

consequences, he chose to punish a Substitute. We know this Substitute as Jesus, the Son of God and Mary's son. How fitting then that this same Substitute took on the role of 'husband to the Church,' to rescue us from hell.

What a wonderful picture Jesus makes of the perfect husband. Wives can be pretty nasty, you know. Sometimes they don't even realize they are belittling the man they married by the way they talk to him. There's no "me-too movement" for the times when women are cruel to their husbands, but it's just as sinful, just as unacceptable. What's a godly man to do? Do like Jesus. Take that concept of grace you know so well as a Christian and apply it to your wife. Out of pure grace, choose not to count any of her shortcomings against her. Or try this: remember back to the day you married her. She was so beautiful. She had spent hours, even weeks, getting ready. And it wasn't just to look pretty. She wanted to look pretty for you. Now take that picture of your beautiful bride and lay it over the top of the picture of your wife when she's nasty to you. Do this because you love her. Do this because you understand that this is what Jesus does for you daily, not counting any of your sins against you because you are his dear bride. Then you can say to your wife, "What a Beautiful Bride You Make!" \*If you want your children to understand what God does for them daily through Jesus, do this for their mother. There's no better way to extend Mother's Day

and Father's Day into a year-long celebration. The efforts you put into making your children's mother happy last Sunday—try doing this all year long. Then it will become clearer and clearer to you how much the Lord loves you, his Bride. Your family may even celebrate you all year long.

When the Lord was trying to communicate such ideas to us, he had the apostle John write it down this way. <sup>1</sup>*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.* The old must be sent away (pass away) because it is tainted by sin. The new is completely pure: so will our home in heaven be. \*The sea is something that cannot be controlled by man, especially when whipped up by the wind. Rebellion is hard to control, especially when whipped up by emotion. In this picture of heaven the sea is a symbol of rebellion. Rebellion doesn't exist in heaven, so the sea doesn't exist in this picture of heaven.

Now we come into the picture—the new us, not the nasty us. <sup>2</sup>*I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.* O people of God, WHAT A BEAUTIFUL BRIDE YOU MAKE!—now that the Lord Jesus has washed away all your sins by his cross.

Up until Judgment Day, I mean Wedding Day, we (the Church) are, in a sense, merely engaged to the Savior. We don't get to move in together with him because the wedding hasn't taken place yet. But then John reports what happens after Wedding Day: <sup>3</sup>*I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with the humans, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."* I wonder how much more this would mean to us if we didn't have such nice homes and so many conveniences. You see, our prosperity makes it more challenging to long for heaven when we have it so good on earth. But if we keep reading the Scriptures daily and/or keep attending worship weekly, we will stay well connected to our Bridegroom-to-be until he takes us home to the dwelling he has been preparing since before time began. Words simply don't exist to describe that place adequately, so God tells us what it's not like. <sup>4</sup>*He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.* <sup>5</sup>*He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"*

It's a nice promise to hear, but how do we know all this will really happen? Life keeps going, day after day, year after year. Is Wedding Day really

coming? Listen to John. <sup>5b</sup>*Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."* God said all this will happen, and God doesn't lie or change his mind. That's what he's getting at when <sup>6</sup>*He said to [John]: "It is done."* Let's see now: where have we heard those words before? It is done, finito, finished. Ah, "It is done. *It is finished*" (John 19:30). Those are the same words Jesus spoke from the cross just before he let go of his life. Just as Jesus has completed paying for all our sins there, so he sees us in heaven with him already. For him it is done. So for us it will happen.

Jesus can keep such promises because, as he explained to John, *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End*, always been, always will be. He loves to make promises, such as: <sup>6b</sup>*To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. Are you thirsty for God? Do you want him to quench that emptiness that has been left in our souls by the nowhere-ness that sin always leads us to? Already now God lets us taste his truth, the water that brings life, the water that brings us to God. That water is his Word. So already now we can imagine what it will be like to have our thirst quenched, what it will be like for us on Wedding Day.*

[Read CW219 together.]