

^[1]**A Marriage Planted to Grow: Try Me**

AIM To reflect on a God who is very much into togetherness

REASON ^[2]Because independence is a very big thing

SR [NASB] ^[3]**Gen 2:18-24**—The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.” ^[4]Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; ^[5]and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. ^[6]So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. ^[7]The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. ^[8]The man 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.”
^[9]For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

SUMMARY ^[10]**The only kind of love is Jesus**

Americans use the fourth day of this month to do a great lot of singing, shouting, picknicking, and ^[11]fire-working. The singing, shouting, picknicking and fire-working, and, in particular, the fire-working, are a way to acknowledge that we are an independent nation. But during this singing, shouting, picknicking and fire-working it is very unlikely that many of the celebrants give great thought to the origins of creaturely independence. If they did, it could possibly, indeed it would, quite probably, either raise their temperatures or dampen their fireworks.

Why might they become either angry or sad, or both, perhaps? Because the first time our universe was exposed to arguments for creaturely independence, this is what it sounded like:

^[12]**PP37:** Lucifer argued to the angels of heaven that though laws might be necessary for the inhabitants of the worlds, angels, being more exalted, needed no such restraint, ^[13]for their own wisdom was a sufficient guide. They were not beings that could bring dishonor to God; all their thoughts were holy; ^[14]it was no more possible for them than for God Himself to err.

Before we continue, and I do intend to continue—despite the grave risk of being both misunderstood and drawn and quartered—before we continue, I may advise you that our thesis today is not that Fourth of July fireworks are in support of Lucifer. Someone could [mis]understand that from the truth we just shared. Our thesis today is not about America, or George Washington, or the other George, the English one, or tea, or tea parties of yesterday and today. It is not about politics, except that it is a message about God, the Lord of all human life, ancient and modern, political or a-political. Our thesis is already categorically stated: **the only kind of love is Jesus.**

Continuing then, on creaturely independence and how we were first introduced to it: “it was [Lucifer’s] object to secure freedom for all.” What was Lucifer arguing for? Independence. The first advocate of creaturely independence was Lucifer. Angels, he said, were being tyrannized. If angels could be free from God’s tyranny they would all be happily independent. The argument proved very

persuasive among the angelic hosts. It works especially well when people convince themselves that the opposite of tyranny is independence. So, down with tyranny and up with independence! Let the fireworks go ‘crackle, crackle, boom’!

The divine invention known as family reflects an aspect of God’s nature and being that varies significantly from the oft heard clamor for independence.

According to the independence noise, kids want to be independent of their parents; parents want their kids to grow up to be independent so that they, the parents, can at last be free from their [the children’s] tyranny. Cowards choose marriage to escape loneliness. Or they choose, as a couple, to have children, whether by birthing or adopting them, so they can be famous when the kids grow up. Or they choose to have none so they won’t be bothered with poopy diapers. Single as family adds to the clamor, because singles think it’s great to not have to be bothered; you don’t have to account to anybody, you can take care of yourself and leave the rest of the world to take care of itself. Clearly, there is a lot of noise to be heard in favor of selfishness, whatever the family structure we choose for ourselves. But God’s concept of family includes not one shred of such self-centeredness. Family, as God ordains it, is a master stroke against Satan’s scare tactics that inspire this range of self-absorbed ways of thinking of survival.

Incidentally, what was the inspiration for Lucifer’s original freedom campaign? And what is there about God’s family institution that could possibly

counteract it? ^[15]DA21—“Sin originated in self-seeking. Lucifer, the covering cherub, desired to be first in heaven.” In other words, notwithstanding his counsel to the angels that God’s so-called love-rule was not in their best interests, it was not their best interests that he sought, but his own. And what does family have to do with that? You shouldn’t have asked, because now Lena is going to be upset. She doesn’t like these texts at all. But I’ve got to keep trying to help her accept the whole Bible as God’s word.

We’re going to talk about the levirate law. The levirate law is so called because it’s about your brother-in-law, which, ^[16]in Latin, is *levir*. In fact it’s about your dead brother-in-law: **Deut. 25:5, 6**—^[17] “When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be *married* outside *the family* ^[18][She must marry her husband’s brother]. And . . . the first-born whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother.” This idea of being required to marry your brother-in-law may seem quite awkward to you. The reason Lena objects is not because she dislikes my brothers. She thinks they are all quite nice people. But she doesn’t want me dead. She prefers me alive. Nevertheless, people still die, even beloved husbands. And God cares about people enough to remember them even when they are dead. He has an explanation as to why he wants the surviving wife to marry her brother-in-law. And here is His answer: ^[19]v. 6—“it shall be that the firstborn whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead

brother, so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.” God can love, you see, for longer than you thought. He doesn’t stop loving you when you pass on. He doesn’t forget you, and He doesn’t want anybody else to. He doesn’t shrug His shoulders and go on to the next funeral. He says, ‘we need to do something to establish the name of this family member.’

God is very much into life, and from the day of our beginning on Planet Earth He set us up to live in family: when He made heavens and earth, and bird and bee, and flower and tree, and postum and tea, and you and me; when the Lord of all love, Himself the Trinity, the eternal family, made life companions named Eve and Lena, He didn’t do it quietly. First he brought the beasts to me in a grand, un-solemn cacophony: there were creatures of four feet and two, fish and bird, ram and ewe, dog and bitch, foal and filly, bull and heifer, tom and tabby, and He brought them all to me. Was He up to something fishy? He had never heard the phrase. He was simply up to making me. He was making me so I could live out in flesh and blood the meaning and the heart of deity: making me so I could taste and see how He is good; He was making me to smell and feel, to sniff and hear His caring soul, His to-the-hilt involvement with His world. For that is what He is and who He is—God, involved; God in three in one; God with us, is He.

God, you see, doesn’t have any blind spots in his field of vision. And if humanity was to truly appreciate this caring involvement that is so totally true of

God, original with God, then God had to make humanity male and female.

So the Lord God formed man from dust, breathed life into him, set him to stand next to Him, and stride along with Him as he sensed the powerful reality of his own physicality. Then, in the perfect manner of making the point, God brought to the man, in procession, the creatures of the earth—this fantastically variegated and polyphonous panorama of feather and fur, and roar and buzz and cackle, and gallop and soar and plunge and cavort, and red and yellow, black and white and green, and high and low, and wet and dry, and in between! Every living creature! And Adam named them all (Gen 2:19).

Then God put the man to sleep. And as he slept that gorgeous, glorious, indescribable panorama passed in magnificence before his unconscious mind while the God of involvement busied Himself with still higher joy. Something higher than bulging biceps, wings and pecs and six pack abdominals, something beyond physicality. The man dreamed the first of perfect dreams: of cuddly koalas and star-destined eagles; birds that swam and fish that flew, and each foal for his filly and each ram for his ewe. ‘So totally different from and exactly like each other’ dreamed the man, as a smile played around the corners of his lips.

Then he found that his eyes were open, and his mouth too, from slack-jawed amazement. For his eyes were saying that his dream had come true. Here was one like him yet not like him. Like him enough to share with him all he would share

with her; yet different enough to enthrall; like him enough to be of him, part of him; yet different enough that he could give her all and yet not be selfish! So is God love. And so are we made for family. And spouses, children, and even the dead brothers, and sisters-in-law of the levirate code, only function to extend the workings of this privilege beyond anything physical—the privilege of being like God, of caring involvement with all the rest. Because it is not selfishness, but sharing; a sharing with someone outside of you, whether spouse or sibling, or cousin, or brother-in-law who, by God’s mystery, is still part of you. Family is how God designs that men and women may participate in and contribute to His universal law of life: **DA21**—

But turning from all lesser representations, we behold God in Jesus. Looking unto Jesus we see that it is the glory of our God to give. “I do nothing of Myself,” said Christ; “the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father.” “I seek not Mine own glory,” but the glory of Him that sent Me. John 8:28; 6:57; 8:50; 7:18. In these words is set forth the great principle which is the law of life for the universe. All things Christ received from God, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: through the beloved Son, the Father’s life flows out to all; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life.

God’s life-law is a circuit, the circuit of beneficence: everything that flows in flows out again, nothing held back. Everything through Jesus: all given to Him, nothing held back. The Father trusts the Son. He gives Him everything. Because the Son is Love. Because Love seeks not her own, but the good of all. Love gives

to serve and receives to give, and the circuit keeps flowing. That is why marital bliss is marital bliss. And that is God's context for the beginning and continuation of family that we call parenthood.

Kristen Fischer published a piece in *HealthlineNews* online, Oct. 16, 2013, entitled "Little Miracles Can Cost Big: The Economics of In-Vitro Fertilization." Fischer says that people pay \$15,000.00 upfront before they start taking medications to begin the process they hope will lead to pregnancy and holding a baby of their own in their arms. That's America. I read that in Canada it costs \$7,750.00-\$12,250.00. And then? Well, after we pay our money 2/3 of us will still not conceive anyway. We know that. But we try. Why? We don't even have half a chance of succeeding. And it costs thousands of dollars. And we still try. Why? Is it because we're rich? No. Is it because we're fickle? No. Is it because we're stupid? No. Is it because we have such a poor sense of values? No. It's because God made us for connections that go on and on and stretch far and wide, and that care about everyone because we are all one, because we are family. Because it helps us to understand Him. Because it allows us to mirror and reflect the eternal mystery of the eternal deity that is eternally one and eternally family. We get the baby craving from God Himself. Because *God created humans in His own image: Gen. 1:26-28*: Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created

him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply. . . .” Why do humans want babies? If you don’t want babies forgive the rest of us. Because God made us to be family, and wanting babies is fundamental to that. Why do humans want babies? Because God is like that and He made us like Himself. In making us He shows how He is; and in making us He declares how we will be. ‘I make babies,’ He says—‘big Adam and Eve babies whom I will help to make more babies, because I love making babies. And you will love making babies because you will be like Me.’

If we wanted to be distracted we might note another explanation available today about wanting babies. The evolutionary biologists agree that getting babies is related to survival of the species, trying to keep the human species around. So you have to have kids, so you have to reproduce. Then some of them say that’s why we have rape--rape is a smart reproductive strategy [Randy Thornhill & Craig T. Palmer, *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion*, MIT Press, 2000]. Does that turn you off? You may like it neither more nor less than the levirate law. I’d have you know it’s a twenty-first century answer, with two editions of the book in successive years. If you’re looking for sophisticated answers about giving and sharing and multiplying the connections there’s one for you: it’s about keeping the species around by whatever means possible [including the wisdom of rape].

But we would only consider that crude claim if we want to be distracted. We

do not. So we keep the focus where it belongs: on God who, from the moment of our first existence on Planet Earth, invents family so we may receive everything and yet not be selfish; and give everything and yet not be wasteful; God who lets us know that He, God, is our Father, so that all the stretched links and multiplied connections across the face of time and geography connect to Him, and we are one. One family, deriving our common name from our common Parent: **Eph 3:14, 15**—“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.”

So here's the question, Christian: do you still believe in all those connections? Or is your family defined by your last name? Or is it your ethnic identity? Or is it your passport? Is God through making you? Men and brothers in this room today, is God through making you? Are you complete? Are you complete as He judges completion? How have you, through the days and years of your life and living been measuring your own completeness? What are your standards—standards of manhood, standards of completeness? Is Arnold Schwarzenegger your ideal? Or would you prefer something more bionic? How have we been defining our standards? What makes us men? What makes you a man? Or perhaps, da man? When is your manhood manhood? Maybe it's when you've got enough footballs, right? Or basketballs, perhaps—cause they are bigger. . . . Or maybe you're a more modest type, less arrogant: so you don't want to

knock anybody over with bone crunching tackles. Your measure is baseballs—they're smaller You're more humble, less inflated. You won't have any Patriots' style deflate-gate scandals. So that while people are wondering why the NFL ever needed to have some particular law about the specific amount of inflation footballs need, you know you must be the better Christian, because you have no interest in relative levels of swollenness. You are the person God was thinking of when He told Paul to say that God-love, genuine love, is not puffed up, not inflated.

So we're over here in our corner, "gods many and lords many" (1 Co 8:5), determining our levels of goodness by measuring size and pressure and inflation and deflation. And feeling like inferior members of the pantheon because ours is too deflated; or feeling like inferior members of the pantheon because we can't win—because ours are too inflated . . . too much pressure. . . . While God is in His corner called the Universe, called Reality, called "whatsoever is true, honest, just, pure, lovely . . ." (Phil 4:8); God over all in His corner, which is to and fro throughout the whole earth (2 Chr 16:9), trying to accomplish two things at once with us: 1) He's trying to save us from the folly of our comparisons: measuring ourselves by ourselves, comparing ourselves among ourselves: "but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding" (2 Co 10:12). There is no proper sense in it. As the

KJV says, “[they] are not wise.” And if they are not wise, then they must be . . . otherwise! So God is working to save us from our “other-wisdom.” But that’s not all He’s trying to do. He’s also seeking to, #2) show us a more excellent way, a way that is totally alien to our tests and measurements. But even as He waves His blood-ridden arms before our faces we cannot even notice Him, so utterly absorbed are we in our little science on the relative size and pressure of our big and little balls

Sisters of mine, daughters of God in this room today, I know, I know you couldn’t care less about any of those scientific preoccupations of the men on the sofas bearing the weight of their remote controls through whole seasons of football and basketball and baseball and hockey too, I suppose, though hockey doesn’t qualify because they use a puck, not a ball. I know, though, that you give not the slightest thought to those matters of dimension and weight and rates of inflation. Why? Why don’t you care? I see. You don’t care because women are different. Different. Girls are not boys—generally speaking—girls are not boys; and women are not men. They are different. Different from what? Well, you know, . . . Men are from Mars

Ah, I see. You’re not different. You’re just from a different planet. That’s why we can’t get along. This is not sociology; or psychology: this is astronomy! Women are different because they’re from a different planet!

I used to have a friend once. Until we lost her. A brilliant woman who was dissertating in Women's Studies. She and Lena and I and others worked at Adventist Information Ministries [AIM]. One day at work I said something that startled her. Surprised her so much that she called a friend over, another doctoral student, and asked me to repeat what I had just said. It was new to her, if not news to her. It was a remarkable thing to say. An astonishing thing to say. What was it that I had said? I had said that God doesn't give us multiple models of the ideal He has for our living, for our being. There isn't a woman model on how to work and rest and fail and try, and a separate man model on how to laugh and cry and live and die. Social studies, psychology, gender studies, etc. notwithstanding, the model of Himself that God has given to us all is Jesus. God does not offer us one Jesus for Venus, and another one for Serena. You think I'm getting me tennis confused. . . . You want to correct me. You're not going to, because what you just heard is true: Venus and Serena and Martina and Maria all have the same model to follow. So do you and I. God does not have one Jesus for Venus and another one for Mars. There is ever only one Jesus, and He is enough for the Universe: "God is love" (1 John 4:8) is simultaneously both all-encompassing and entirely exclusionary. "God is love" is both all-embracing, and at the same time denying any other possibility of love. God is love. Anything else, everyone else is a fake, is a fraud, is nothing. We know Him in Jesus, through Jesus, because of the full revelation of Himself in

Jesus: **The only kind of love is Jesus.**

Where does that love find you today? You've already heard 1600 theological expositions on *agape* as the real thing. Then besides *agape* there's *storge* and *eros* and *filos*. But *agape* is the real thing—*agape* is God-love. So because of the theologians and their fascinating exegesis you go away believing that it must be Hollywood that invented sensual desire, attraction and passion; and Uncle Arthur must be the one who invented parental love. I'm here to clear up the confusion today, dear saints. To apologize for the exegetes, and clear up the confusion: **the only kind of love, is Jesus.** Uncle Arthur didn't invent parental love: parental love is divine—"Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him" (Ps 103:13); and though none of us has ever seen the Father's face, we still know that parental love because He sent us Jesus—"No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him" (John 1:18). **The only kind of love is Jesus.** The love that draws the prodigal home to his father is Jesus. And the love that binds two souls together even as one in the mystery of marriage, is Jesus. And the love that leads a child to forgive her mother for abandoning her and her father for abusing her—that is Jesus. And the love that is evoked in our contemplation of the world's natural wonders is Jesus:

God is love" is written upon every opening bud, upon every spire of springing grass. The lovely birds making the air vocal with their happy

songs, the delicately tinted flowers in their perfection perfuming the air, the lofty trees of the forest with their rich foliage of living green—all testify to the tender, fatherly care of our God and to His desire to make His children happy [SC10].

He's written it on His world. Has He written it on your heart, brother, my sister, dear visitor today? Is He through making you? Do you want to be complete in Him? He is still performing miracles Are you through with Him? Is He through with you?