

## Introduction

The concept of Oneness is the heart of the Holy Trinity and the essence of Christianity. Our Lord Jesus Christ, before going to the cross, in His last prayer, communicated a number of things with the Father and prayed specifically for the establishment of Oneness among the disciples "*that they may be one as We are*" thus confirming its existence in the Holy Trinity and the need for its establishment among His disciples and followers. This Oneness, according to our Lord, has its source and is secured in the knowledge of God. "*Keep through Your name those whom You have given Me that they may be one as We are*" (John 17:11). A few verses later, the Holy Spirit through St John records, "*I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me*" (John 17:20-23). Thus we learn the importance of Oneness in the eyes of God and the urgency of its presence among the disciples, all

believers and subsequently between spouses. Along with praying for Oneness, He also prayed for sanctification and glorification, the three being interdependent and interrelated. This lecture will address Oneness in marriage through the following points:

1. Oneness and Covenant.

1. Examples of Covenant based Oneness

1. The Holy Trinity

2. The Incarnation of the Logos

3. The body of Christ

2. Conditions for the establishment of a Covenant

1. Before God

2. Before witnesses

3. Pondering its value

4. Pondering its seriousness

2. Oneness and Permanence

3. Oneness and Identity

4. Oneness and Openness

5. Oneness and Barriers

1. Fear of Rejection

2. Selfishness

3. Ignorance

In the book of Genesis chapters 1 & 2, after God had created everything, He found everything good except

for one thing which He saw needed. So, He created Eve and only after that God saw everything was "*very good*" (Genesis 2:15). From that moment on and with the creation of Eve, the human race was sealed in the mode of relationship with God, and with one another and the importance of marriage was thus established. "*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh*" (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:31). Just like diamond which has many facets; so does oneness in marriage carry many aspects such as physical, emotional, spiritual, financial and intellectual.

### **Oneness and the Covenant**

Marriage is a covenant and not a contract. Signing an agreement contract before marriage annuls the essence of marriage; because in material life every signed agreement presupposes a disagreement and subsequently a guard against the breaching of such an agreement. Marriage, however, is a mystical and mysterious unity and covenant. In the Old Testament a covenant between any two people would be established by blood, slaughtering an animal into two parts and walking down the blood path between the two halves. Thus such a covenant would not be broken except by the death of one of the partners. God used this method in establishing

the covenant with Abraham; God being the ONE to walk down the blood path signifying the coming redemption through Jesus Christ and the sealed covenant between God and humanity.

The prayers of the Crowning Ceremony, specifically called so because of the essence of the ceremony revolving around the process of crowning the bride and bridegroom as kings, prophets and priests, depends largely on the scripture in Mathew 19:4-6 *"And He answered and said to them, 'Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."*

Mentioning divorce at the onset of marriage may not sound a suitable choice of scripture. On a deeper level, this gospel emphasizes the Oneness in marriage which is the work of God in a mystical and mysterious way *"this mystery is great"* (Ephesians 5:32). *"Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate"* (Mark 10:9).

## **Examples of Covenant Based Oneness**

- a. *The Holy Trinity*: No matter how we try to explain the oneness in the Holy Trinity the pen and thoughts fall short of doing a perfect job and the questions of "how" and "why" remain unsatisfied and we have no choice but to receive the mystery by faith and in faith.
- b. *The Incarnation of the Logos*: Christ's humanity and divinity are perfectly united in a mystical and mysterious way without mingling or alteration.
- c. *The Body of Christ*: The church, the body of Christ, is described by St. Paul in Ephesians 5:31 as unity in diversity and likened to the unity between the bride and her groom. This scripture is also read in the crowning ceremony. "*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh*" (Ephesians 5:31). Looking circumspectly into this interrelationship we discover a unity among three persons: Christ, the bride and bridegroom legitimately giving this unity a supernatural, mystical strength and power. "*Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken*" (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

## Conditions for the Establishment of a Covenant

1. *Before God*: Marriage has to take place in church before the altar of God. The crowning ceremony opens with the prayer "In the name of our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ, the founder of the statute of perfection and the author of the law of graces, we complete in this orthodox assembly and before the altar of the Lord of hosts the union of possession and the marriage of the blessed Orthodox son, the virgin (...) to his betrothed, the blessed Orthodox daughter, the virgin (...)." "Now since you have been present at this blessed time before the sanctuary of the Lord of Hosts and His holy altar and this Orthodox gathering". The Western tradition of receiving the bride from her father is not quite exact because the bridegroom in reality receives her from Christ. "Receive, O bridegroom, a bride who is yours, Jesus Christ has given her to you."
2. *Before witnesses*: A marriage must be attended by people who are to be held accountable and responsible witnesses and not mere observers.
3. *Pondering its value*: In marriage, a change of the self is brought about by the Holy Spirit whereby mutual ownership is given over to love

and possession but not to manipulation and aggravation.

4. *Pondering its seriousness*: Once the covenant of marriage is established, there is no going back but rather, going forward in unity and growth in love and understanding of each other. The type of love in marriage based on respect for one another at all times is the same type of unconditional love that Christ has for His church. The priest recites: "According to this rite and this law, so also the rest of the fathers, the believers, took one wife in purity and cleanness for the sake of descendants and childbearing." The concept of "Covenant" makes marriage unbreakable and divorce inapplicable in an environment of mystical and mysterious unity.

### **Oneness and Permanence**

Permanence implies security in marriage. This security should be one that emerges out of love and reflects the wonderful mystery of oneness with joy, confidence and growth in love. Permanence is not about having a secure position without enjoying the emotional warmth that exists in it. A marriage that lacks love is permanence of misery and unhappiness and a timed bomb for considering divorce. However, God expressed His rejection of divorce overtly in Malachi 2:16, "*For the LORD God of Israel says that*

*He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence,' Says the LORD of hosts. 'Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.'".*

## **Oneness and Identity**

It is written in the Holy Bible, "*And the two shall become one flesh*"; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh" (Mark 10:8). The question: "Which flesh the male's or the female's?" presupposes loss of identity or melting of boundaries. However, the mystery of oneness, by definition, is retention of identity whereby the couple will be "us" and not "you and me" both complimenting each other (1 Corinthians 12). In the mystery of the Holy Trinity, each hypostasis has its distinct identity. In the Incarnation both the divinity and humanity of Christ carried their identity without mingling or confusion. Therefore, it is only logical and acceptable to see this unity and identity together without any loss. Also each hypostasis has its distinct role and boundary. Judgment has been given to the father, Redemption to the Son, and Consolation to the Holy Spirit. Creativity resides in the growth of this oneness in marriage and destruction in the lack therein. Attempts to negate the identity of any of the two will result in resistance expressed in emotional divorce whereby a couple live under one roof but are totally



emotionally detached. God intended unity between a man and a woman; otherwise He would have created two men or two women. His Holiness Pope Shenouda expresses this unique identity saying "it is not for a lion to chirp nor a bird to roar."

## **Oneness and Openness**

The concept of being naked and unashamed (Genesis 2:25) represents vulnerability, acceptance, openness, accessibility, innocence, freedom and excitement. It is the ability to uncover all one's thoughts and ideas without the fear of being rejected or put to shame. This should be the grounds on which to stand when looking for a partner to share life with. Searching for someone to change or turn into a serving slave will not lead to oneness nor subsequent success in marriage.

## **Oneness and Barriers**

### *1. Fear of Rejection*

After creating Adam and Eve, God's command to them was not to eat from the tree in the centre of the Garden of Eden. That command was not so much a prohibition in itself but an establishment of the concept of "boundaries". Satan, however, deceived and deluded them into thinking the opposite (Genesis 3:7). Exactly as he said, their eyes were opened but to their nakedness and

shame. They hastened to cover their loins. One would wonder why they did not seek to cover their eyes with which they saw the fruit, or their ears with which they listened to Satan or even their mouth with which they ate. The loins signified their differences onto which their eyes were opened. Those differences became a hazard and a potential to conflict. Thus the need for protection emerged out of fear of rejection. In reply to God's calling of him, Adam replied that he "was afraid" and that he hid himself. Adam's response emphasized the need for protection out of fear not only from his wife but also from God. The same thing happens in marriage when the oneness is threatened by fear of exposing thoughts, ideas and the concealment of those negative feelings thereof. It is important to learn to deal with our differences making them work for us and not against us. This can only be achieved through love. Love covers an array of mistakes.

## *2. Selfishness*

Selfishness becomes evident when the motives behind a marriage are imperfect, colored by personal benefits or egoistic precepts. An abusive person is someone who does not understand the perfect desires behind marriage.

Therefore, such a person is always in search of what satisfies his ego. Once this ego is threatened, they appeal to physical or emotional abuse as an ego defense mechanism. St. James describes this clearly in his epistle *"Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, 'The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously'? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" (James 4:1-6).*

Wars, strife and hatred spring from one source which is selfish, imperfect motives. In Christ we are set free to love and serve without being afraid of being hurt (Galatians 5:13-15). St. Paul admonishes using freedom loosely and abusively. In Luke 13 we see love in action. In the prayers of the Crowning ceremony, the

priest's advice to the bride groom is to "Excel in doing all that is good for her. Have compassion on her and hasten to do that which will gladden her heart" Christ's belief that the world will know we are His disciples if we have love for one another.

### 3. *Ignorance*

Not knowing what to do better is a very serious barrier to oneness and a threat to marriage. The remedy to this ailment is our Lord's teaching "*Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets*" (Matthew 7:12). Wanting to do what is right and actually doing it are two totally different things. To have a great, happy and joyful marriage requires ability to forgive, understand differences, clarify and define expectations. Practicing comes before acquiring. Practice virtue and then you will acquire it.

## **Conclusion**

To experience the God-given gift of oneness in marriage, spouses need to know that oneness is an unbreakable covenant with God intended to be a permanent building the foundation of which is love, openness, tolerance and understanding. The lack of such a strong foundation will inevitably lead to the

formation of strong barriers resulting from fear, selfishness and ignorance.

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