

MARRIAGE

Respect for matrimony has crashed in our time. The reason for this has been the general detachment from that set of values whose foundations are in God's Word. At the same time, man has become a shirker of responsibility, a hedonist, and a seeker after his own benefit. In this type of world, a person thinks he doesn't need the security and order in his life that Christian marriage provides.

In the congregation of Christ, the concepts of marriage and family have remained unchanged on a scriptural foundation. Living in this world, however, we are in continual contact with values that oppose the values of God's Word, and they find a sympathetic response in our sin-corrupt hearts. Many persons ponder matters relative to marriage and ask, "Has God really said that?"

COURTING AND ENGAGEMENT

When a child grows into youth, an attraction toward the opposite sex awakens. This is a result of the fact that God created people as male and female. There is nothing wrong and no reason to prevent the attraction of girls to boys and boys to girls. But our time has so overemphasized sexuality, that youth is stripped from many children, and they do not have the opportunity to grow to responsible adulthood. Patience in this area of life is not characteristic of our time, rather one should be able to experience everything immediately. Thus, many are driven into loose human relationships of short duration. Actually, a recently published study indicates that the situation among young people is not as gloomy as one would conclude on the basis of public discussions, literature, and magazines.

Young people get to know each other in life's normal environment. It is completely natural that believing young people seek their future spouse where they meet each other—at services, camps, and opistos (folk schools). It is a precious matter when one finds his life-companion from among the believing young people. It is good to get to know each other in the everyday environment. In this way, one is spared from many sad surprises.

Courting is directed toward marriage, so light-minded "flirting" is not appropriate for a believer. In such there is no question of love, or even of infatuation, but of selfish momentary pleasure, which causes sorrow and tears to the courting companion. The matter in consideration is serious enough, that a person who has fallen into this has reason to examine his heart and the foundations of his faith.

Courting, above all, is getting to know one another. When courting companions discuss matters openly, they come to know each other. In this manner, it becomes clear if, on life's important issues, they have such mutual understanding that would form a foundation for lifelong marriage. Many have said that during courtship, especially, they discussed matters of faith. When they noticed that they had a similar understanding about the most important things, it drew them closer and united them. If courting becomes too close physically, the intellectual or emotional familiarization, openness, and closeness suffer. In this way, the courtship is impoverished.

When the young people have become well acquainted and convinced that it is they whom God has intended to join as helpmates for each other, they become engaged. Scripture scarcely speaks of courtship, because, in its culture, parents selected spouses for their children through a spokesman.

Engagement makes the courtship public. It makes known to everyone that the engaged couple intends to marry. Scripture discusses engagement at length. It is used to describe the covenant between Christ and those who believe in Him. Paul reminds the Corinthians that he had served as a spokesman for them, "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2). Like this biblical description, the engaged couple promises to be faithful to each other as they await the wedding, the beginning of married life.

Day3L5R05_Marriage, The Treasure Hidden in a Field

Although young people court each other with the right attitude and even get engaged, it can happen that they do not become a married couple. It can become clear, little by little, they are not suited to each other. Separation is painful, but it is not wrong. It is still possible to separate amicably, respecting one another. This possibility no longer exists in marriage.

In spite of the fact that young people court each other with serious intentions, things can happen to them that may remain as burdens on their consciences. “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” If this takes place, it is good to remember, that there is an open fountain in God’s congregation for sin and for defilement (Zech. 13:1). It is good if the courting couple together would discuss matters with the confessor.

GOD INSTITUTED MARRIAGE

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Gen. 1:27, 28). Scripture relates how mankind was created in God’s image as man and woman. Both are crucial to human existence. We are responsible to God and created to live together with each other. Unity is realized most deeply between spouses. The description of Creation illustrates this, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).

The relationship between a man and a woman includes both emotional and physical unity. The woman was created to be a helpmeet for the man (Gen. 2:18). I have read that the Hebrew word in question means “help that is facing you.” Spouses are equals and can examine themselves in each other as in a mirror. Their mutual life contains the whole richness of life. Because of the fall into sin, however, it can never be realized as illustrated in the Creation narrative. For that reason, we need the gospel, which is the great treasure and source of strength of a believing home.

MARRIAGE IS LIFELONG

The Pharisees came to Jesus to argue about divorce and referred to Moses, who had allowed a man to write a bill of divorcement to put away his wife (Deut. 24:1). Then Jesus answered, “For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mark 10:5–9).

Therefore, although the courts may grant a divorce and, in this manner, undo a covenant that was once made, the marriage shall still remain in force before the face of God. Already, during the Old Testament, Prophet Malachi rebuked the people for breaking their marriages (Mal. 2:14–16).

According to Matthew, in Jesus’ discussion with the Pharisees, He allowed divorce because of adultery (Matt. 5:31–32). Luther discusses this matter in his writing regarding marriage. He points out that adultery is a sin unto death. According to Mosaic Law, a person who broke the marriage vows was to be stoned to death (Lev. 20:10). On the other hand, however, Jesus did not approve the stoning of an adulteress (John 8:3–11), but forgiveness was greater than the Law.

A couple of decades ago, divorce was discussed at length at a speakers’ meeting. At that time, the speaker-brothers held to the above mentioned quotation from the Gospel of Mark. Marriage is lifelong: what God has joined, let not man put asunder. This does not lessen the seriousness of the sin of adultery, but provides an opportunity for a person to return, repent, and receive forgiveness for a grievous transgression.

LUTHER'S TEACHINGS ON MATRIMONY

Luther did not consider matrimony to be a sacrament in the manner of the Catholic Church. He also fought against celibacy for the clergy and considered the vows of monks and nuns to be against God's will. In his manuscript, "On Matrimony," he states that God's Word, "Be fruitful and multiply," is not a commandment, but a godly deed. Obstructing or neglecting it is not within our power. It is just as unavoidable as that a man is in existence, and more unavoidable than eating and drinking, keeping one's body clean, sleeping or staying awake. It is nature planted into a person. Luther continues later, "The world says of matrimony: 'short joy, long regret.' But say what it wishes, for what God creates and wills, that is an object for it to mock....Solomon says, 'Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing'" (Prov. 18:22). They who understand this, firmly believe that God has instituted matrimony, put man and woman together, and ordained the bearing and care of children. They have God's Word regarding this (Gen. 1:28).

Luther writes in the Large Catechism that the Sixth Commandment has been directed especially toward those who are married. "Let us carefully note, first, how highly God honors and glorifies the married life, sanctioning and protecting it by his commandment. He sanctioned it above in the fourth commandment, 'You shall honor father and mother; but here, as I said, he has secured it and protected it. Therefore he also wishes us to honor, maintain, and cherish it as a divine and blessed estate. Significantly he established it as the first of all institutions, and he created man and woman differently (as is evident) not for lewdness but to be true to each other, be fruitful, beget children, and support and bring them up to the glory of God."

THE EVERYDAY CHARACTERISTICS OF MARRIAGE

In marriage, couples continue to learn the art of living together throughout their lives. As selfishness is part of our nature, it does not naturally follow that two persons will adapt to living together "as one flesh." In everyday life's many forms, the dissimilarities of the spouses are felt. Difficulties also are encountered there. When differences of opinion arise and arguments raise their heads, it is easy to forget what was once promised "before the face of God and in the presence of the congregation."

"Who's the boss at our house?" is a vain and wrong question. It is the same question that the disciples presented, "Who is greatest among us?" By saying, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister" (Mark 10:45), Jesus set himself as the example for the disciples, who were quarreling about their positions.

Scripture counsels, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. 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. Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything" (Eph. 5:22-24). In the same manner, Scripture counsels, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it (Eph. 5:25). This advice shifts the question of authority and of station aside. Serving each other replaces it. In speaking of the husband being the head of the wife, the Greek New Testament uses the same word as the point of a plow, which receives the bumps and the blows when cultivating. The word, which is often referred to, now receives broader content. To be the head means to protect and support.

Both spouses have their own duties determined by gender. However, we cannot make a pattern that, as such, would adapt to every marriage. The pattern of living in a home is determined by the weaknesses and strengths of the members of the home. The most important thing is that they compete in honoring one another (Rom. 12:10).

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Conservative Laestadian families are often known for their numerous children. Probably no other factor connected to our lives or teachings has drawn so much attention from outsiders. In this matter, we also experience heavy pressure from the world. Scripture does not teach family planning, but it guides us to regard children as God's gifts (Ps. 127:3–5). When He created man and woman, God said, "Multiply, and replenish the earth" (Gen. 1:28). The understanding of the believers in this matter is based on God's Word. We think as Luther did, "I believe that God has created me and all other creatures." Children bring difficulties and work to the family, but also God's rich blessing. Life feels worth living, when it has the content that God intended.

THE GREAT MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE

When he gave advice to spouses, Paul compared matrimony to the fellowship of Christ and His congregation. These analogies to submission, faithfulness, and all-sacrificing love strip us of our false notions of personal privilege, selfish entitlement, and success. On the other hand, they give the foundations to marriage that will last through changing times and amid turmoil. They give marriage a special sanctity and join the spouses more closely, as well as bring the gospel of the glory of Christ to everyday trials and temptations. In a believing home, there is an open fountain against sin and defilement. The believing home is God's kingdom in miniature and a part of the large family of God.