

IN RESPONSE - MARRIAGE DEFINED

by Dennis Prutow

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Pastoral counseling can be immensely gratifying. Premarital counseling can be and often is the most satisfying. This is especially the case when a young couple comes back a year or so later and says something like this, "You really prepared us for life together. Thank you." In this series I'm giving you a summary of what I do in premarital counseling. Others will undoubtedly do better in this area. Because of requests, I proceed.

My normal approach is to announce four premarital counseling sessions. I require these as a matter of course if I am going to officiate at a wedding. Most of the young people I've had the privilege of counseling do not consider this an imposition but rather a necessity. I also indicate that if we discover areas of special need, we may extend the counseling to five or six sessions at either my request or the request of the couple.

At present I also request the prospective bride and groom each read three books. The first is *The Intimate Marriage: A Practical Guide to Building a Great Marriage* by R. C. Sproul. This book is available through Ligonier ministries. The second is *The Act of Marriage: The Beauty of Sexual Love* by Tim and Beverly LaHaye. You can easily obtain this book on the Internet at Amazon.com. The third is *Ideal Marriage: Its Physiology and Technique* by Dr. Theodor H. Vandeveld. This book is a classic first printed in 1928, second edition 1980. It is out of print but can be obtained at many city libraries or through interlibrary loan.

Those thinking it improper to use a book like *Ideal Marriage* because it is not written by a Christian will find help from *The Act of Marriage* which is also available in local libraries. I recommended these two books to a couple in the congregation I serve. They took to the latter book and ignored the former. "You saved our marriage," was the response to the LaHayes' book. I like to begin each of my premarital sessions with a brief discussion of what the couple is learning from each of the books.

There are four subject areas I want to cover in my premarital sessions. They are: Marriage Defined, Marital Love, The

Marriage Bed, and The Marriage Ceremony. I point couples to Scripture and analyze God's Word as we look at each subject. We look at the first three areas in this short series.

What is marriage? Here I follow Dr. Jay Adams.¹ We analyze two principle texts. Malachi 2:14 says, "The Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant." Malachi speak to the husband regarding his sin. He has deserted his wife. He has deserted his *marriage covenant*.

What is a covenant? A covenant is a binding and solemn agreement between two or more individuals or parties into which persons enter by taking vows. In marriage, a man and a woman vow to God and to each other. They make certain promises to God and to each other. Marriage is first and foremost a *covenant*.

Marriage is therefore not affected by sexual relations. As I have heard Dr. Jay Adams bluntly state, "Gerbils copulate; they never marry." Fornication and adultery do not constitute marriage. A man caught in adultery confessed to me, as an excuse for his sin, "I've never felt more married." The supposed good feelings did not constitute marriage.

This professing Christian attempted to justify his adultery with Genesis 4:1. There was apparently no formal ceremony; yet there were sexual relations. The ceremony comes in Genesis 2:22. God brings the woman to Adam. Also, in Genesis 4:1 Adam has sexual relations with *his wife*. The covenant of marriage authorizes this intimacy. Intimacy does not constitute marriage. When a man and woman take their vows, the minister may pronounce them husband and wife and introduce them to the congregation as Mr. and Mrs. Marriage is a covenant.

Malachi 2:14 also indicates the covenant involves companionship. Marriage is a covenant of companionship. The

root of the word translated *companion* refers to the spiritual companion in Psalm 119:63. It is translated *friends* in Daniel 2:13, 17 and 18. Marriage is therefore a covenant into which a man and a woman enter to be spiritual companions and to be best friends. These are two aspects of marriage which are quite important.

Marriage partners must be friends and companions first of all. An elderly man and woman in our congregation married each other after their spouses were taken to be with the Lord. They married because they sought companionship. This was and is a laudable reason to marry.

Marriage partners must also walk together before God. They must be spiritual companions. It is a good idea to discuss and settle biblical and spiritual differences before marriage as much as possible. I know young couples who have avoided church because of differences over baptism or predestination. Although professing Christians, they avoid church because they do not want to face the issues which divide them. They are not *spiritual* companions. They will not experience all the fullness of marriage God desires. How so?

This covenant is reflective of the covenant of grace by which God embraces His people. Jesus says with regard to the cup in the Lord's Supper, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me" (1 Corinthians 11:25). We grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ as we live in covenant with Him. Similarly, couples may grow in their love, devotions, and affection for each other as they faithfully live in covenant with each other. Marriages which grow *in this way* will grow better and better.

Proverbs 2:17 adds to the picture. The adulterous woman "leaves the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God." The Bible speaks of marriage as a covenant of companionship from the perspective of both husband and the wife.

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¹ See Jay E. Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 11-12.

IN RESPONSE - MARITAL LOVE, PART 1

by Dennis Prutow

Marriage is a covenant, a covenant of companionship. As already mentioned, this covenant reflects the relationship between Christ and the church. The permanence of the latter relationship should also be reflected in the marriage covenant. This is why marriage vows contain the phrase, "until death separates us." The hard-line feminism prevalent in our cultural pushes easy divorce, easy sex, and confusion of role. Discussion in these areas is essential even for young people who grow up in strong, traditional Christian homes. In this lesson we look at Genesis 1:27 and move to Ephesians 5.

"God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." What does it mean to be created in the image of God? Notice God created man, generic and singular, in His image. What does this image include? This image includes man, generic, as male and female. This image includes man, singular, as also plural. The *him* of the end of verse 27 is equal to the *them* at the end of the second part of the verse.

This reminds us of the Trinity. God is one in essence. There are three persons in the Godhead. There is unity and diversity. Humankind, specifically marriage, reflects this unity and diversity.

Which aspect of the Godhead is more important? Is unity within the Trinity more important than the individuality of each person? Unity and diversity are equally important. They are equally ultimate.

This is true in marriage. Unity within marriage is not more important than the individuals in the marriage. The reverse is not true either. The individual and the expression of individual gifts are just as important as the marriage itself. Individual personality and gifts are not forsaken or submerged in or by marriage. Neither is marriage simply a convenience of house and bed. The individual is as important as the marriage and the marriage is as important as each individual. You cannot play one against the other. To do so is to destroy the image of God.

Within the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are equally important. They are of one essence and

equal in power and glory. In a similar way, husband and wife are equally important. Husband and wife are of the same essence. "The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man (Genesis 2:22). Husbands are not innately more important than wives or visa versa.

In addition, each person in the Godhead has particular roles and tasks. For example, the Father has the plan of salvation. The Son executes the plan of the Father in accordance with the will of the Father. The Holy Spirit applies the benefits of Christ's work to the hearts of God's elect. These tasks are equally important. Further, the Father does not do the work of the Son nor does the Son do the work of the Spirit. Each person of the Godhead has His role within the scheme of redemption.

So it is that husbands and wives have differing roles within marriage. However, the role and task of a husband is not more important than the role and task of a wife or visa versa. Neither are these roles and tasks exactly the same. A husband certainly cannot bear or nurse children. Neither can a wife bear children alone.

Husbands and wives should therefore not vie for power within a marriage. They should not vie for center stage. Life does not revolve around a husband neither does life revolve around a wife. This is also true when children enter the picture. Children are notoriously ready to demand center stage. They want family life to revolve around them. Husbands and wives should not act like children in this regard.

It is therefore important to see that married couples have a unique and special opportunity to reflect the image of God to a watching world. Single people do this too. The single life is a special gift of God. Paul was single. He says, "I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that (1 Corinthians 7:7). Yet one of the greatest challenges in marriage is to reflect the image of God to a watching world in a way single people cannot.

Christian marriages paint a picture before the watching world. The covenant of marriage portrays God's covenant and

God's image before the lost and fallen world. Marriage also illustrates the special, unique and exclusive love of God.

Ephesians 5:18-33 takes us in this direction along with helping us understand the God ordained roles of husbands and wives and the proper power under-girding His covenant, image, and love.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and being subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.

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IN RESPONSE - MARITAL LOVE, PART 2

by Dennis Prutow

With Ephesians 5:18-33 before us, we look at the roles of husbands and wives in light of (1) the work of the Holy Spirit and (2) the picture God is drawing in marriage. Paul exhorts, "Be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). He then describes the fullness of the Spirit in four ways. "Be filled with the Spirit" (1) "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," (2) "singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord" (verse 19), (3) "always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father" (verse 20), (4) "and being subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (verse 21, [literally, NASB margin]).

The fullness of the Spirit is described by speaking to one another the Word of God, having a song in your heart to God, giving thanks to God in all situations, and having a submissive spirit. In other words, submission is a fruit of the presence of the Holy Spirit. An attitude of submission gives a witness to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart.

The word *submission* means *place yourself under*. It is an action we take when we place ourselves at the disposal of others in the work place (Ephesians 6:5, Colossians 3:22, 1 Peter 2:18). Similarly we place ourselves under the authority of others in government (1 Peter 2:13). Again, having a submissive attitude is a witness to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the human heart.

"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). What was Jesus' attitude? "He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). Christ was submissive to the will of the Father. He placed himself at the disposal of the Father. He did not impose His will on the Father. He did not demand His way in the life He led before the Father. "I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38). "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work" (John 4:34). If we follow Jesus, we follow Him in the matter of submission.

In addition, the concept of submission proceeds on the idea of equality. The

three persons of the Godhead are equal in power and glory. The submission of Christ to the will of the Father in no way intimates His inferiority to the Father. The submission of an employee to an employer in no way intimates the inferiority of the employee. The submission of an enlisted man or woman to the orders of an officer in the military in no way intimates the inferiority of the enlisted person. In like manner, Paul says, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). This submission, this act of placing yourself under your husband, in no way intimates inferiority. In fact, I say again, submission presupposes equality.

Submission is required of both husband and wife. Peter says, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution" (1 Peter 2:13). These are institutions ordained by God for the benefit of humanity. They include government (1 Peter 2:13-14), the workplace (1 Peter 2:18), and marriage (1 Peter 3:1 and 7). Husbands must be submissive to the will of God in the institution of marriage as well as wives. Husbands and wives both have responsibilities before God.

At the same time, husbands and wives have different roles in marriage. "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body" (Ephesians 5:23). Husbands are therefore charged to take the lead. This means a wife normally follows her husband in his employment. Most importantly, God charges husbands to take the lead spiritually.

In addition, God gives husbands the most challenging task conceivable. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). The love of husbands for their wives must be unique and exclusive. A husband cannot love another woman like he loves his wife. This would be adultery. A husband cannot love another man the way he loves his wife. This would be the sin of homosexuality. A husband's love for his wife must be exclusive and unique just as Christ's love for the church is also exclusive and unique. God sets this challenge before every husband.

We also note Paul directs wives to be submissive to their husbands. This is *not* a word to husbands. God does not give them authority to be dictatorial. They must love their wives. This latter word is directed to husbands. It is *not* for wives seeking to be excused from their role.

Let's put some of this together. First of all, married couples reflect the image of God. Part of this image is found in the leadership-submission complex seen in the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. As already stated, young couples have the opportunity and privilege to reflect the image of God before a hurting world.

Married couples also picture Christ's love for the church, God's love for His people. Loving leadership and loving submission reflect the love of the Father for the Son. They also display the covenant love of God. When all is said and done, in Paul's discussion of marriage, he says marriage is not his highest concern. "This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32). The marriage relationship is mysterious and great. It is exciting. It reflects the love Christ has for the church, the love God has for His people. The world is desperate to see this love. I challenge young couples to take the privilege and responsibility they have quite seriously. Here they have an opportunity for profound witness before the weary watching world.

The way marriage has been undermined in our culture has hidden one of the most vital witnesses to the love of God from our culture and society. A picture is worth a thousand words. Obviously, if submission is an evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:21) and love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22), God honoring marriages witness to the power and love of the Holy Spirit. Young couples and older couples too must learn to display the love of God to the lost world *in their marriages*. This is a most profound, beautiful, and exciting challenge for young men and women.

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IN RESPONSE - THE MARRIAGE BED

by Dennis Prutow

Sexual relations are central to marriage. It is therefore important to discuss the biblical perspective regarding sexual intimacy. I direct young couples to two texts of Scripture. The first is Proverbs 5:18-19. "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be exhilarated always with her love."

Solomon is obviously talking to married people. Young engaged couples need to shun petting and fondling as do all unmarried people. Sexual gratification is for the married state. Couples need to take care and preserve their chastity prior to their wedding. If there has been any prior sexual activity, they need to seek God's forgiveness. If there has been sexual activity with other parties, they also need to seek God's forgiveness. Hebrews 13:4 says, "Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." The marriage bed is defiled by fornication (sex before marriage) and adultery (sex outside of a previously consummated marriage). Sexual relations touch the soul. There is deep-seated union that takes place that is not easily erased. Sinful sexual encounters defile the thinking. Memories intrude the marriage bed. Forgiveness from God is essential.

In addition to teaching sexual relations are reserved for marriage, Proverbs 5:19 tells us we must receive all our sexual satisfaction and gratification within marriage. "Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be exhilarated always with her love." This is a command. God's design is for complete and total sexual satisfaction within marriage with your spouse. This is something at which all married couples must work. When couples do work at it, the joy and the love of marriage grows. Satisfaction within marriage also grows and matures. The marriage inevitably gets better and better.

Because of the huge sexual temptations in the path of every young person, I place heavy emphasis on the need of prospective brides and grooms to find total satisfaction in each other. For this same reason I urge the reading of both *The Act of Marriage* and *Ideal Marriage*. Satis-

faction with a spouse in sexual relations as set forth in Proverbs 5:18-19 excludes the use of pornography. Those who use pornography seek sexual satisfaction and gratification outside of their marriage. This is sinful. It defiles the marriage bed.

Proverbs also exhorts, "Be exhilarated always with her love." Literally the text says, "Be led away by her love." Do not be led away by an adulterous woman (Proverbs 5:20). This is a command.

I like to relate this teaching to 1 Corinthians 7:2-5.

Because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Sexual relations are a duty under God for married couples. As in Proverbs, satisfaction in marriage is a protection against immorality. Paul recognizes Satan's temptations and our lack of self-control.

The accent in 1 Corinthians 7 is not *deriving* satisfaction but *providing* satisfaction. The duty of a husband or wife is to work for the satisfaction of the spouse. This is in keeping with the principle of love. Love is *others* oriented and seeks the gratification of others. Lust is the opposite of love. Lust is self-seeking and interested only in self-gratification. Love links two persons in sexual relations and draws them ever closer together. Lust *uses* a partner for gratification and has no place in marriage. Lustful sexual relations can ultimately drive a wedge between husband and wife.

It is appropriate to say a word about masturbation at this point. Like the use of pornography, masturbation involves self-gratification. It is therefore sinful. It is counter to the principle of love and is for this reason also sinful. Finally, masturba-

tion interrupts the fulfillment of the duty a husband has for his wife or a wife has for her husband in sexual relations. It therefore defiles the marriage bed.

Paul helps answer other questions related to sexual pleasure within marriage. Within certain bounds, exploration and experimentation is good as couples learn to love each other and satisfy each other. One question which often arises is the propriety of oral sex. I teach couples to balance two principles. Paul is clear, "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (1 Corinthians 7:4). This seems to permit oral sex. On the other hand, Romans 14:23 reminds us, "Whatever is not of faith is sin." That is, if one party in the marriage is not convinced of the propriety of something like oral sex, a spouse should not lustfully demand it. The principles are those of love, acting in faith, and of *providing* satisfaction.

I also urge young couples to be patient with each other, anticipate extensive growth in sexual love and the attendant satisfaction, never force each other, remember that sexual relations must be pleasurable not painful, practice gentleness, experiment with various positions, avoid expecting too much too soon in the relationship, and practice cleanliness.

At this point I also briefly discuss birth control, urge both parties to obtain a medical examination, discuss various methods of birth control with the family physician, avoid methods of birth control which are abortifacients, discuss methods together and make a joint decision.

In the final analysis the marriage bed is part of the great picture God draws within marriage to display His love. Christian marriages display God's covenant. Christian marriages exhibit God's image. Christian marriages demonstrate God's particular love. This is the challenge I place before couples preparing for marriage. Godly sexual relations enhance a couple's ability to witness to God's love, God's image, and God's covenant.

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