

# The Glory of Marriage

By Pastor Jacques Roets

Marriage is a vulnerable institution. The moment Satan suggested to Eve that God could not be trusted, the vulnerability of marriage manifested itself. Adam failed to protect his wife and soon turned against her to deflect his own guilt. Ever since that fateful day the brittleness of the marriage covenant has been evident. History reveals one perversion after another seeking to corrupt, destroy or distort God's glorious gift of marriage: polygamy, patriarchy, feminism, egalitarianism, adultery, spousal abuse, no fault divorce, gay marriage, pornography, on and on we can go.

As we face a renewed assault upon the marriage covenant it is good to remind ourselves of the glory of this precious gift God has given humanity. When we look at God's revealed reasons for giving us marriage, we begin to understand its glory and blessing, together with our privilege and duty in marriage. In what follows we will reflect on four divinely given reasons for marriage.

## 1. Companionship:

The first reason for marriage given in Scripture is companionship--walking down life's pathway together, hand in hand.

In Genesis 2, we read "Then the LORD God said: 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for (corresponding to) him'"(18). These words are shocking, after the refrain of Chapter one, "it was good...it was good .... Behold, it was very good", something in God's good creation was *not good*. It was not good that man had no partner, no friend, no companion to share life with. It was not good that Adam was alone.

Adam needed more than self. He needed other. But not just any other would do. Animal other cannot make up for the aloneness. Because even after all the animals were brought to Adam he was still alone, without a "fit" companion (cf. 19-20). So although animals can provide us with some measure of 'friendship', they cannot meet this deep need, this divinely recognized aloneness.

Neither will another male be a helper "fit for" Adam. What man needed was another that was just like him, image of God, yet sufficiently different to complement and complete him. He needed a "helper suitable" (NIV). Not only did he need a "help mate", but also a "help-meet" (KJV).

Right here we see the failure of all human attempts to circumvent God's creation order through homosexual male-male or female-female companionship. They are doomed ultimately to perpetuate and deepen this aloneness. Why? Because it seeks a solution apart from the Creator. It seeks a solution which the Divine Creator in the exercise of his wise creative powers, who alone can create the other that man needs, has clearly avoided. If man needed man, God would have given him man! Therefore homosexual companionship will take human aloneness to the deepest level of aloneness because it alienates us from our Maker and his wise and perfect design for human companionship. No amount of acceptance or legal legitimization will undo this aloneness. Only the redeeming, creation

restoring blood of the Lamb removes the alienation from our Creator and restores us to experiencing the beauty of his design for human companionship.

What is his wise, perfect design?

“And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into woman and brought her to the man” (22). Woman, she is the other, man needed. Woman is the other that was suitable for him, that was a comparable and compatible help-meet. Exactly what man needed, God provided. Therefore man responded with the first love poem: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (23). The joy of discovering the helper that completes him and meets his needs, so that he is no longer alone, is vividly expressed in this beautiful poem. The complete togetherness and transparency of their companionship is made clear in the final words of the chapter: “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (25). Here is the deep companionship of marriage expressed. No longer is the other merely woman, now she is wife. Their union is so deep and completely open towards one another that there was no shame in their nakedness. No hiding was necessary in this relationship. There was nothing that shamed them into hiding from each other. Complete openness, complete harmony, complete sharing. Total intimacy, a real in-to-me-seeing. Wow!

Now, however, we no longer live in the sin-free world of Genesis 2. Our companionship is marred by sin, that often leads us to shame and hiding even in our most intimate and open relationships. That is why this ideal companionship expressed here is often so imperfectly expressed in the best of our marriages. Some marriages never experience the reality of companionship, while others only experience it quite imperfectly.

Since marriage in this post-fall world is always the union of two sinners, it will only be a union capable of God-honoring companionship if we are bound together “in Christ”. It is through Christ’s work alone that sin, alienation, brokenness is undone. And it is only in him now that our aloneness can begin to be met through a suitable helper.

If you have a companion then you are obligated to work on cultivating that friendship. Marriage requires work. The kind of intimacy and companionship set forth in this ideal requires lots of communication and time together. You cannot cultivate the kind of loving care and concern for each other if you do not spend time alone together. Are you working towards greater openness and transparency in your relationship with your spouse? Husband, do you know your wife’s deepest fears and concerns? Do you know the deepest longing of her heart? Do you know the struggles of her soul? Wife, do you know the fears and burdens of your husband? Do you know the longings of his hearts? What are his deepest desires? Why do you need to make work of this? Because God’s gift of marriage is meant to provide us with a deep companionship that meets the deep aloneness we have as human beings.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I am aware that this raises lots of questions for “singleness”. I believe the Lord is able to meet the need of all those whom he has called to this state of “singleness” (cf. Mat. 19:10-12). He is also able to sustain those who are single and wish they weren’t. Their desire reveals the deep human need for companionship. I would encourage them to wait upon the Lord to provide and not to circumvent God’s design seeking to fill their need in an unauthorized way, whether through hooking-up, rushing into marriage with someone you don’t really know, or marrying an unbeliever. All of these attempts will only deepen the aloneness you seek to remedy.

## 2. Procreation:

Although actually mentioned first in Scripture, the next reason is historically the second. In Genesis 1:28 we read: “And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...’” This is a command given: ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill...’ God underlines its importance by stating it with three different words.

Now it is important we get this right because the wrong kind of approach to these words will only crush and dishearten already hurting and struggling couples. This command is given in the pre-fall world. Obedience to this command in the post-fall world will not only be influenced by sinfulness of those seeking to avoid this command, but it will also be influenced by sin’s curse that has affected God’s good Creation. So this command will not only be subverted by those who purposely refuse to “be fruitful and multiply”, but some will be frustrated in their desire to “be fruitful and multiply”. This frustration will result in much pain and struggle. So we must not be quick to judge and condemn those who don’t have children or as many children as we would like them to have, as though they are automatically unfaithful to God’s command. We must keep in mind that obedience to this command does not ultimately lie in “our” accomplishment of it. God is the author of life and he sovereignly opens and closes the womb (cf. 1 Sam. 1:5, 20-21; 2:21). The ultimate fulfillment of this command depends upon him.

Neither should we make the mistake to assume we know what “multiply” means for everyone. This is something that each married couple before God, in responsible obedience to him, should determine. Notice God give this command to Adam and Eve (“And God said to them” 28). He does not merely pronounce it over them as he does with the animals (22). They have a God-given responsibility wisely to fulfill this command. It would look different for each couple since circumstances differ. But again our desire and responsibility must bow before God’s sovereignty which, in the end, ultimately determines the outcome.

This command is again a powerful statement that undermines all current attempts to “normalize” homosexual partnerships. Biologically, male-male or female-female partners cannot fulfill this command! The biology does not work. The only way to fulfill this command is to introduce a third party into the relationship.

We have to reflect upon God’s wisdom that places this command within the bounds of a marriage covenant between a man and a woman who have deep love for each other and enjoy a real friendship with one another. Children come into this world in a loving and protective community. That is why the companionship between husband and wife is so important, because the stability and well-being of the children depends in great measure on the health of the marriage that brought them into this world. Children raised in this environment grow up to be, for the most part, spiritually healthy and emotionally stable. It provides the loving context where children can grow up and be nurtured.

## 3. Purity

Here we come to the only negative reason for marriage, given in the post-fall context. Paul expresses it bluntly in 1 Corinthians 7:2: “But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.” Marriage is a guard, a protection against all sexual sin. Here, in the one flesh union of a husband and a wife, we find the only pure and God-

glorifying expression of our sexual natures. In this negative reason we have the positive view of our sexuality. The sexual union of a husband and wife is not merely optional, it is not merely for procreative purposes, it is really part of our Spiritual Warfare: “Do not deprive one another...so that Satan may not tempt you” (5). The guard against Satan’s temptation is our willingness to give ourselves to each other. Notice that the only possible (limited) time for withdrawal from one another is for complete devotion “to prayer”. This does not mean there are no other times for abstinence possible in marriage but it should be the exception and for serious reasons only, because it does open the door for temptation to illicit sexual fulfillment.

Even here the gospel of Christ shapes our values. Christ’s self-giving, his complete self-surrender for our good becomes the dominant norm in our one flesh union (cf. John 10:15, Phil. 2:5-9). It is not about our need, what we want, it is really about the other person. It is not about getting but about giving. “The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband” (3). Here is nothing of the perversion that would make demands on each other, but of the Christ-like self-giving that seeks the others good above our own. And this Christ-like self-giving reaches its apex in this one flesh union in our complete self-surrender to the other person: “For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does” (4).

Does this forth-right discussion of the gospel and sexual union make you uncomfortable? It does me, but again we realize that the Scriptures are far more relevant than we often realize. In our sexually perverse culture, the true antidote is not denying or suppressing our sexual nature, but living it out through its God-intended and God-sanctioned means. In this way we have the true antidote to our culture, namely don’t deny sexual pleasure but affirm it. Because it is truly only in the committed long term covenant of marriage that sexual pleasure finds its consistent and even heightened expression <sup>2</sup>. When our children catch this they will wait for marriage to enjoy the pleasure and protection of sexual intimacy as God intended it.

#### **4. Picture of Christ’s Marriage**

The final reason for marriage is the main reason for its existence. Marriage is itself a presentation of the gospel; it is the gospel acted out. Paul puts it this way: “‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (31-32). The main biblical expression from Genesis 2 (the biblical blueprint for marriage), Paul says, refers to the mystery of Christ’s relationship with his bride. Marriage displays the intimacy and glory of Christ’s relationship with his own people. In marriage Christ’s relationship with his Church is manifested as a husband gives himself in loving leadership to his wife, and as the wife in respect submits to the leadership of her husband. This inherent structure of a husband’s loving leadership and a wife’s respectful submission become a portrayal of Christ’s self-surrender and leadership of the Church he loves and of the Church’s respect

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<sup>2</sup> See article on internet “The Revenge of the Church Ladies”.

and willing following of the Lord she loves. In this way the aroma of heaven, a foretaste of our eternal home, becomes manifested and experienced in our home, when husbands and wives live out their God assigned roles. When we balk and refuse to enter into roles, we are not merely perverting marriage but the manifestation of the gospel that should shine through our marriage.

Is it any wonder that it is exactly here that so much of sin's perversion of marriage aims to destroy this God-ordered structure? Husbands demanding respect, and so losing all Christ-likeness; wives that cannot stomach the indignity of submission, and so enter into competition with their husbands. Husbands that refuse to lead or wives that seek to usurp leadership. All of these, and many more, are in the end twisting the picture of the ultimate marriage between Christ and his Church which human marriage is meant to portray. A false gospel. And yet it is only the gospel that can help us to approximate (and that is all we can hope for in this sin-cursed world) the marriage between Christ and his bride. It is only when the saving sacrifice of Christ works its way deep into our lives that we begin to see how its effect empowers the wife to joyfully submit and the husband to truly love. The delicate balance between respectful submission and loving leadership calls for a profound commitment to Christ and his love. The wife must look to Christ and submit for his sake, and not to the husband and his worth, for if she looks at the husband she will always find reasons not to submit (23-24). The husband must love sacrificially in spite of the wife's respect and glad response, for Christ loved his unlovable wife. This love beautifies the wife (25-27). So each is responsible for their own obedience. The husband cannot demand the wife's submission, and the wife cannot demand the husband's love. But Christ can and does. So only when both husband and wife are "in Christ" can they begin in obedience to Christ to love and submit to each other. Here is another very important reason not to marry an unbeliever (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14-16).

Are you living in obedience to Christ in your marriage? Are you loving your wife as Christ loved his wife? Are you submitting to your husband as the Church is to do to Christ? Are you doing it for the Lord Jesus? Let your love for Christ drive you to love your wife or to respect you husband, or better yet, let Christ's love for you so melt your heart that you seek to love your wife or submit to your husband because of it.

### **Conclusion:**

What a glorious gift God has given us in marriage. As we reflect upon this gift, may God give you energy and confidence. Energy to continue to make the most of this gift God has given. Protect it, fight for its perseverance by treasuring the sanctity and holiness of marriage. Whether you are married or not, continue to hold a high opinion of marriage. But also have confidence that God will not let marriage disappear. Even though marriage is fragile and has been under attack over the centuries, God has always preserved it, and he will to the end. Marriage proclaims the glorious, relentless love of Christ for his bride. And until the day of his return, when marriage will find its ultimate consummation, he will preserve marriage as continual proclamation of his love for his people.