

ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Winter 2004

Vol. 38, No. 3



Marriage: what's the big deal?



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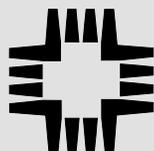
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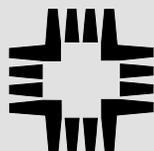
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Preserving the Definition of Marriage

MARRIAGE HAS BEEN in the news quite a bit lately. Whether it is same sex marriages, cohabitation, or the impact of divorce on children, marriage continues to remain a hotly debated topic.

During President Ronald Reagan's funeral, we were reminded of his great oratory skill. Among his many great quotations, Reagan spoke of the importance of marriage and family. He once declared:

Strong families are the foundations of society. Through them we pass on our traditions, rituals, and values. From them we receive the love, encouragement, and education needed to meet human challenges. Family life provides opportunities and time for the spiritual growth that fosters generosity of spirit and responsible citizenship. I don't believe you can have a strong healthy nation without the family unit at its very base. For as the family goes, so also will go the nation.

Other presidents, politicians, legislators, academicians, and theologians have all posited the same basic principle: Marriage is the basic building block of society and culture.

It has also been demonstrated in history that when one tampers with the definition of something, it will have a large effect on our society and how we live within it.

For example, when the definition of an unborn baby was redefined, it became much easier to sway public opinion in support of abortion. Definitions are much more than academic exercises. Definitions can shape our understandings, values, and beliefs. Many heresies within the Church, historically, have often operated with identical religious words. But the insidious nature of a heresy is that those very words were often redefined and understood differently.

What is most needed today is clarity in understanding the real meaning and significance of marriage as seen in the Scriptures and in Luther's theology.

There will continue to be discussion and heated debate over what defines marriage, what is constitutional and what is not, and issues related to sexual orientation, serial marriages, and the like.

As the old axiom goes, we don't need more heat on this issue, just more light! We certainly have the heat (political and otherwise!). But where can we find more light? For Christians, light has only one source, and it certainly can't be found in the darkness of the world. Real enlightenment on this issue comes only from

the source of true light, God Himself. And to discover what God has to say about marriage and all the other tangential issues, one only needs to open the Scriptures.

The book of Genesis clearly shows that marriage, by God's own initial design, from the very beginnings of life was this: One man and one woman in a monogamous relationship for the duration of their earthly life.

Had same sex marriages been in God's design, Genesis would have spoken of Adam and Thomas! Or Eve and Deborah! In which case, it would have been impossible for God to likewise give the command, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." In this alternate scenario, human beings would have lasted for only one generation!

Scholars, politicians, social scientists, psychologists, and societal engineers can pontificate, debate, and redefine as long as they wish. And what they ultimately define or create will be what they themselves feel is correct.

But if you want to determine what *God* has defined, what *He* has created, and what *His* divine will regarding marriage is, you don't need Capitol Hill, national think tanks, or constitutional amendments.

What you need is light on the subject! And that Light is first seen in Genesis. In just the first few pages we can find a very simple answer to what mankind has made, in human sinfulness, a very complex problem.

It isn't rocket science for a Bible-believing Lutheran Christian. But our world doesn't always desire to have its comfortable darkness dispelled by God's Light shining in. That fact hasn't changed since the beginning of time. The issues certainly have. But the basic problem of sin has always remained the same. Which is exactly why we need to be always proclaiming Jesus so urgently as we have in days gone by.

The Church needs to be a strong voice clarifying the issues and bringing wisdom and common sense to what only a few years back would have been a moot point.

A movement for strong, healthy families can only advance if marriage is honored and preserved as the union between one man and one woman. We, as the Body of Christ, are called upon to strengthen authentic marriage by helping others understand its definition, preserve its meaning, prevent its permanent alteration and ultimately grow its success.

The definition and understanding of marriage and family for a Christian, ultimately boils down to whether or not the Scriptures are, in fact, God's inerrant and infallible Word. If the Scriptures are indeed that, then they serve us well as the norm for our definitions, teaching, and beliefs.

But if we don't truly hold God's Word to be the highest court of appeals, the ultimate

norm of all other authorities, then we will be adrift in a sea of competing definitions and understandings, and ultimately marriage will be defined in the realm of spiritual darkness, being forged by the culture and the courts, rather than by the clear voice of God's Word being proclaimed strongly by His disciples in this sin-sick world of ours.

One Man. One Woman. Monogamous. For Life. It really isn't that complicated. We just need to read the first few pages of the Bible to find the correct definition. It isn't rocket science. But it is just as crucial for the well being of our nation. Marriage is, in fact, a very big deal!

The Rev. Jeffery S. Schubert

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"Until Death Parts Us"

IF IT IS BROKE YOU FIX IT; if it is not working properly you find out why. During my grandparents' 60 years of married life they owned one toaster. Grandpa would never think of throwing it away just because there was a problem with it. No, you find out what is wrong, and you fix it. You might call that commitment. Today, however, we live in a throw-away society. We throw out toasters, televisions, and computers when they become broken or outdated. There are few things that we do fix. We even say, "They can make these things so inexpensively today, that it is cheaper to buy a new one than to fix this one." Throwing items out seems to be a part of our culture. But tossing things doesn't end with appliances. Throwing things away is a practice found even in the sacred institution of marriage!

Marriage vows are frequently broken. Researchers report that between 41 and 50 percent of first marriages do not end because of "death parting" them. Rather, dissolution of the marital vows breaks the tie that binds. The death of marriage has long been common, with many marriages ending within the first five years. Today, marriages are ending even earlier. Among those who break the marriage vow there is a trend of couples getting divorced prior to having children, resulting in these marriages being called "Starter Marriages."

Starter marriages end young, with divorce papers often delivered before the 30th birthday candles are blown out. Starter marriages, like all marriages, are meant to last forever. But they don't. Instead, they fizzle out within five years, always ending before children begin.

These young people who experience marital death are a bit different than their predecessors. Rather than becoming single moms and alimony dads, they end their marital pledge before having children. Some researchers see this as an upside. Their rationale is that if people are going to divorce, better to do so after a brief marriage in which no children suffer the consequences.

What does God have to say about breaking the marriage vows? We turn to Matthew 19:4-6: "Haven't you read," [Jesus] replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

Marriages that work do so not because the couples are 100 percent compatible, but because they are 100 percent committed. St. Paul writes in Ephesians 5:25 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Instead, husbands give up their wife. Commitment is lacking. Marriage requires work and ongoing maintenance of the relationship.

Ask most people how often the oil should be changed in their vehicle, and you will hear the correct answer, "Every 3,000 miles." Ask any domesticated person how often they should change filters in the furnace, and you'll hear, "Every three to four months." Ask a man how often he says to his wife, "I love you," and he might say, "I told her that on the day we married, and if it changes I will let her know." So many machines in our lives need regular attention or maintenance, and we don't give it a second thought that there is a commitment to maintain that item. If we have so much commitment to maintaining appliances, why would we not give consideration to maintaining marriage which should be far more dear to us?

How often do we hear about the maintenance which is needed to keep marriages strong? When was the last time you took your spouse on a date? When was the last time you spent time just talking about your relationship? When was the last time you saw a professional about strengthening your marriage?

It is interesting that in our culture not one person would think it strange for you to say, "I've got to get the oil changed in the car and buy filters for the furnace." But what looks would you get if you told your friends, "My wife and I are going on a marriage retreat this weekend," or "My husband and I are seeing a marriage and family therapist"? "Something must be wrong!" are the thoughts that would run through most people's minds. In fact, their marriage might be marvelous; they just want to work at maintaining it.

We must change the stigma of marriage enrichment and marital counseling. If we are not ashamed to get our car tuned up by professionals because we don't know everything there is to know about engines, then neither should we be afraid to seek professional guidance in our marriage because we don't know everything there is to know about relationships.

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Marriage? What's the Big Deal?

WHAT IS THE FIRST thing you think of when you hear the word marriage? Some may picture a perfect couple living happily ever after. Others may shy away from any form of marital commitment. Still others may think of homosexual couples wanting the privilege of marriage. Our society is torn between the worldly view and the Godly view of this subject.

Marriage? What's the big deal? This is a loaded question. Men and women cohabitating say, "What's the big deal about marriage? We need to live together first; then we will know if we are compatible to get married." The opposite is being said by homosexual couples who are saying, "We love each other, so what is the big deal about us getting married?" One couple says, "Why should we get married?" and another couple says, "Why can't we get married?"

When God created the world, He designed it in an orderly way. God's order was for man to leave his father and mother and be united with his wife. In His wisdom, God instituted marriage between man and woman. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Again God states in Hebrews 13:4: "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." He knows what pain is caused when this order is not followed.

God also gave us the commandments as a rule and guide to live by. The Sixth Commandment states, "Thou shall not commit adultery." To do so is sin. The world tells us we need to cohabitate so we will know for sure if we should get married and be committed to each other as husband and wife. It is interesting what statistics tell us. In 1960, 439,000 couples in the United States cohabitated; in 1984, 1,988,000 cohabitated; and in 2000, 4.9 million couples cohabitated. It is estimated that

50 to 60 percent of couples today cohabitate before they marry. Statistics tell us there is a 50 percent greater chance of divorce for those who cohabitate compared to those who wait to live together until after their marriage vows. Statistics show us cohabitating isn't the answer. God knows what is best for us—that's the big deal about marriage!

God did not say in the Genesis passage, "Man, leave your father and mother to be united with a man, and then you will become one." Homosexuality is contrary to God's order of creation. God tells us in Leviticus 20:13 "If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable." The voice of the world tells us, "They should be married because they love each other. They are entitled to their partner's insurance and retirement plan. They deserve to receive the same benefits that heterosexual married couples receive." God is very clear in the Scriptures that being in a homosexual relationship is sin.

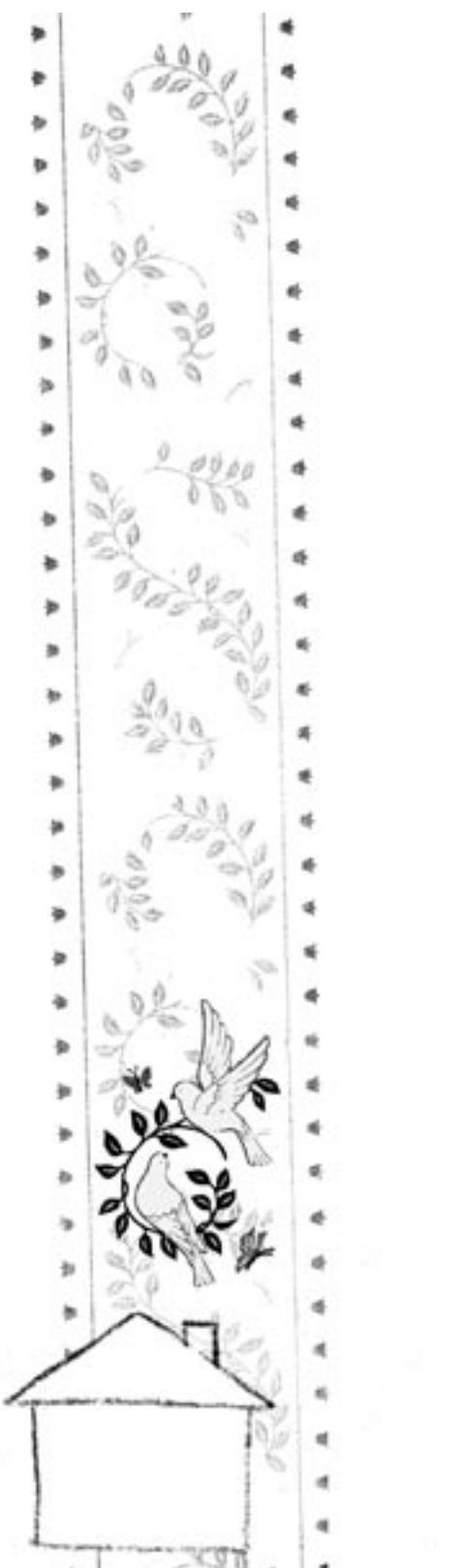
Marriage? What is the big deal? The big deal is that people are living outside of God's plan for marriage. They are building their lives around lies instead of following God's Word. That's the big deal about marriage!

As Christians, we can throw our arms up and complain that it is hopeless. We can look at this as the most terrible time to be a follower of Christ. Or we can look at it as being the greatest time to be a follower of Christ because people are searching for love and relationships. Some are finding out that finding the answer to their quest is not in cohabitating or marrying the same sex. For most of them, their lives are empty and they feel hopeless.

We, as followers of Christ, have the message of hope for those who feel hopeless. We are called to imitate Christ. We are to build relationships with people who are cohabitating or living a homosexual lifestyle. Out of love, we are to share what the big deal about marriage is all about. We are to share the truth that God instituted marriage between man and woman. We also are to share that God is the one who changes lives that are broken by sin. Christ left His perfect home in heaven to live among sinners. Christ went to the cross and gave up His life on that cross to pay the price for all sins. That includes the sin of cohabitating and living in a homosexual relationship. Marriage is a big deal in God's eyes!

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reflections

For the past fifteen years during freshmen orientation, parents of new Concordia students have been asked to stand up and greet the parents seated around them. After sitting down, the parents are asked, "Do you know what you have just done?" When no answer is forthcoming, they are told: "You've just met your son's or daughter's future in-laws."

Each year new students and their parents break away from one another at the beginning of an academic year. As the parting happens, parents leave campus with a prayer that God would keep their child safe, surround him with supportive people, and enable her to grow in mind, body, and spirit.

Each year the prayers of hundreds of parents are answered—sometimes in ways they do not specifically intend! Countless are the student couples that meet, fall in love, and marry. Some parents suggest "matchmaking" is a value-added feature of a Concordia education!

At Concordia, academic preparation occurs in the context of Christian community. Thus, learning the truth of God's plan for a man and a woman in marriage happens in the classroom, in chapel worship, in conversations with faculty members, in pre-marital counseling sessions with the chaplain, and through the daily witness of professors, staff members, and classmates.

This issue of *Issues in Christian Education* explores God's pattern for and contemporary challenges facing Christian marriage. Dr. Bryan Salminen states: "Marriage is so big, so wonderful, at times so complicated, that all the books in the world never seem to do it justice. Nevertheless, the Word of God has a firm persuasion that marriage is indeed a great gift from God." Even on a Christian campus all that students need to learn theologically and operationally about marriage (Barnes and Stanley) cannot be learned. It takes a lifetime of work and commitment to learn the richness and wonder of God's plan for His people in marriage. However, for many students, Concordia is a wonderful place to begin to learn what marriage is and how God would have people live as husband and wife. As Dr. Robert Rosin reminds us, "Christians understand that the wedded union exists because God has created it—both institution and particular marriage."

Marriage is a "big deal"! It's God's "deal" for His people. May this edition of *Issues* strengthen us in our marriage commitments and enable us to help members of our congregations and persons in our communities better live out the unions into which God has placed them in order to reflect the fullness and joy of His love for us.

Brian L. Friedrich, President



Luther on Marriage:





ROBERT L. ROSIN

Luther on Marriage: The Basic Framework

I am a peasant's son, and my great-grandfather, grandfather, and father were peasants That I earned a bachelors and masters but then took off the brown hat and gave it to others, that I became a monk, which brought me shame and greatly irked my father, that the pope and I clashed, that I married an apostate nun—who would have read this in the stars? Who would have foretold it?"¹

WHO INDEED?! Martin Luther's Table-Talk remark was meant to tweak some—Philip Melanchthon, for instance—who wondered about reading signs and portents in the heavens, as if God were trying to tell them something. Luther never put any stock in that. Stick with sure revelation (Bible) about things that matter (salvation), Luther urged, since we can do nothing about the comings and goings of daily life anyway—nothing except trust and confess that God is in control.

But notice what makes Luther's list of things beyond understanding: his marriage. This renegade monk nearly old enough to be the father of a run-away nun who became his wife were two unlikely people, hardly star-crossed lovers in Luther's book. But they were a couple matched by God in that union that mirrored huge change wrought by Luther's Reformation.²

The Reformation was a revolution. It was radical not only in matters of salvation with the faith alone by grace alone message, but the Reformation also turned fundamental elements of daily life upside down. Marriage was

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one of those elements, part of the law's second table about horizontal or human relationships God has established, starting with "honor your father and mother." In Luther's Large and Small Catechisms, the God-pleasing relationships begun in the Fourth Commandment extend to wider authority and spill into civil relationships necessary for a healthy society. The Fifth Commandment focuses on the ultimate harm to one's neighbor, and the other commandments "all teach us to guard against harming our neighbor in any way."³ Those words start Luther's Large Catechism explanation to the Sixth Commandment, zeroing in on that neighbor who is "the person nearest to [people], the most important thing to them after their own life, namely, their spouse, who is one flesh and blood with them."⁴ Fulfilling that commandment meant living not by compulsion but with a spirit God had intended in Eden. Recast by Luther, the commandment was no longer a means to saving merit, but a description of how God had intended life to be in Eden before things went so wrong. And while the old Adam, the old man (and woman) still stumble, renewal can succeed because of the great revolution brought by God in Christ Jesus. Both the Creed's Second Article and the First are cast in a new light. This new theological perspective will affect how marriage is handled in daily life both on the personal level with one's closest neighbor, the spouse, and within larger society.

Medieval Perspectives

JUST HOW DIFFERENT is Luther's approach? A blitz through some medieval ideas on marriage will offer some perspective. Medieval theologians started with the church fathers from the first centuries, though the medievals would go beyond. For their part, the early church fathers saw marriage as an institution created and ordered by God for the good of men and women. Augustine (AD 354-430) set the pattern emphasizing three benefits: procreation, the guarantee of chastity, and a forged relationship of permanent union.⁵ This permanent union was a "sacramental bond," the roots of marriage being one of seven sacraments in later Roman Catholic theology.⁶ Augustine saw the man-woman relationship as a reminder of



Christ-church, with the marriage bond as a kind of grace that called the other tie to mind, a grace Augustine called sacramental. The tie not only taught, it blessed. From that germ of an idea more would sprout and take root in the medieval thought which Luther eventually would revamp.

Pope Gregory VII (ruled 1073–85) marked the start of a 200+ year rise in papal authority as clergy increasingly deflected imperial and civil authority while the papacy became an autonomous player in legal matters.⁷ Popes such as Innocent III were literally king makers and breakers mixing in civil life and aggrandizing power in Rome. In the centuries after Gregory, universities were established where the attention scholars paid to ancient Roman law and the church fathers helped form the church's own ideas on marriage. Theologians such as Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas helped build Rome's case when it came to guiding and controlling marriage. Along with theological arguments, new canons (church decisions) were issued on marriage and many other subjects. These were collected, starting with Gratian's *Decretals* and culminating with the *Corpus iuris canonici*—the canon law.⁸ This rise in papal power, this thinking through of the church's theology, and the codifying of administrative decisions put control of marriage firmly in church hands. If anyone balked at the arguments, the idea of marriage as sacrament surely gave the church a trump card.

But within its own thinking, the church trumped marriage with another life choice. Marriage might be commanded and even permitted to avoid fornication (Augustine's second benefit), but that was only a remedy, a warding off of an evil. Celibacy, on the other hand, brought reward. How so? Theologians cited Paul's discussion in I Corinthians 7 as proof, making celibacy superior to marriage. Marriage was not bad, but celibacy was superior. Marriage might safeguard the community by limiting sins of the flesh, but celibacy would perfect the individual before God. In fact, it really took nothing special to be married other than consent to contractual relationships governed by canon and civil law—no special instruction, unlike the priesthood where study was involved. But at least in medieval thinking, marriage did give some grace; it transformed

the husband-wife relationship rather like baptism transformed character, and the sacramental aspect removed any sin from marital relationships and gave help in child-raising.

Once this channel of grace was tapped, it could not be closed—no divorce. Augustine had spoken of "sacrament," but the medievals had gone well beyond. Theologians such as Aquinas saw marriage as a pipeline, not merely an image. It funneled grace into people's lives. To make sure of the theology, canon law laid out in detail the qualifications and conditions for marriage—who could marry whom and what impediments might prevent it. With that taken care of, there then should be no reason for a proper marriage to be dissolved. So an absolute divorce (versus an annulment after discovering some condition had not been met) where a person could subsequently remarry was ruled out by church law. The sacrament could not be broken until death do them part. But the Roman church's hold on marriage would be broken by the Reformation.

Luther's Reform of Marriage

MARK TWAIN ONCE QUIPPED that "education, unlike soap and a massacre, isn't nearly as sudden, but it's far more deadly in the long run." It often takes time for a significant effect to be felt. But with Luther's reform and the subject of marriage, the effect came quickly even though there were significant lessons to be learned. Luther's own thinking changed in just a couple of years, causing a profound effect on both theology and the political dimension of marriage.

In a sermon from 1522, Luther showed how far he had come:

What we would speak most of is the fact that the estate of marriage has universally fallen into such awful disrepute. There are many pagan books which treat of nothing but the depravity of woman-kind and the unhappiness of the estate of marriage....Every day one encounters parents who forget their former misery because, like the mouse, they have not had their fill. They deter their children from marriage and entice them into priesthood and nunnery, citing the trials

and troubles of married life. Thus do they bring their own children home to the devil, as we daily observe; they provide them their own children home to the devil, as we daily observe; they provide them with ease for the body and hell for the soul. . . . [Also], the shameful confusion wrought by the accursed papal law has occasioned so much distress, and the lax authority of both the spiritual and the temporal swords has given rise to so many dreadful abuses and false situations that I would much prefer neither to look into the matter nor to hear of it. But timidity is no help in an emergency.⁹

One did not have to look far to see how low marriage had sunk. The laity could hardly show their faces, and the clergy were worse, trumpeting the virtue of celibacy, even as evidence to the contrary abounded. Concubines were no secret (though having a stable relationship with just one was somehow to be applauded), and illegitimate children were sometimes abandoned and sometimes put into church office, especially if their fathers were powerful enough. Moral and canon law were nuanced (flaunted!) with slap-on-the-wrist fines actually called the "whore tax" and "cradle tax" that only assured steady, substantial income for the bishops.

Many fussed about the situation, but Luther actually thought through a huge shift in the approach to marriage in a matter of a few years. As late as 1519 Luther still considered marriage a sacrament,¹⁰ but by 1520 in his *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther changed his approach dramatically. Marriage is not a sacrament because there is no divine promise of saving grace and no sign instituted by Christ. Luther also anticipates his 1522 treatise on marriage. For example, he brings up the maze of canon law impediments to be negotiated; he considers conditions (e.g., impotence or infertility) that might annul a marriage; and he touches on divorce, detesting it so much that he would even consider bigamy, "but whether it is allowable, I do not venture to decide."¹¹

While there were still issues to flesh out, by 1520 Luther was at least certain that compulsory celibacy was wrong and should be done away with. By 1522 his views really are set.

Keeping clergy from marrying meant no end of trouble and sin. (What would Luther say today, given scandal headlines? One hesitates to pile on with "I told you so," but Luther told them so.) In fact, marriage was superior to celibacy in Luther's view. 1 Corinthians 7 had long been the prime text for mandatory clerical celibacy. Luther concluded every individual has a gift from God. Marriage and celibacy were both gifts, with marriage to many even with chastity a rare gift for but a few.¹² Contra Rome, Luther argues marriage, not celibacy, was the most religious state of all because "nothing should be called religious except that inner life of faith in the heart where the spirit rules," and that would be marriage, since the relationship "must consist almost entirely of faith if it is to prosper."¹³

In contrast, clerics along with monks and nuns are in a secular vocation. Why secular? Because high rhetoric and all the talk of serving God aside, they primarily serve themselves, providing for a stable, if regimented, lifestyle. Luther objected to the forced celibacy of clerical life: they flee the world where God had put them, hiding behind vows and cloister walls where they shun vocations or callings God would have given them—husband, wife, father, mother, neighbor, citizen, and more. They adopt a self-prescribed calling and then have the audacity to claim saving merit for following rules they set.

In Luther's *Appeal to the Christian Nobility* (1520) he made a case for civil rulers to step in and promote reform when those first charged with oversight (bishops) failed their responsibilities. Conservative Luther leaned on hundreds of years of imperial legal argument that the emperor was a protector like King David or Solomon who were not priests yet charged to see that right teaching and worship were practiced. Rome countered that it held superior sacred vocations, so secular rulers should keep hands off. But for Luther the sacred-secular wall existed only in the minds of those defending their turf. The wall came down, and the God-pleasing nature of daily life lived by people of faith was restored. Marriage fell into that camp, an institution established by God, not for sacramental grace but to get his work done in this world through husbands and

wives, fathers, and mothers. That was a blessed calling, not begging alms or saying masses. The universal priesthood of all believers, of the baptized, put them all directly before God for Christ's sake. Don't be ashamed of marriage as a lesser calling. It wasn't!

Marriage: Three Parts

LUTHER'S 1522 TREATISE, *The Estate of Marriage*, offered the basics of a theology of marriage in lieu of the medieval sacramental approach.¹⁴ It has three parts: who can marry, who can divorce and why, and how Christians live a God-pleasing life in marriage. Roots from Genesis 1:26-28 describe Adam and Eve's creation and the charge to be fruitful and multiply, to begin the family. The burden of proof to live otherwise—Rome's celibacy—was on those who rejected marriage.

On who should marry, Luther rejects most of canon law, keeping only rules with biblical precedent—Leviticus 18, for example, with prohibitions against marrying blood relations. The rules might once have helped in the early middle ages when Christianity was still making converts among the tribes, and the rules spotlighted the Christians with the hope of impressing the unbelievers who had no such prohibitions. But by his day, Luther saw no purpose.

But what of marrying outside the faith? Luther had a remarkable response:

Know therefore that marriage is an outward, bodily thing, like any other worldly undertaking. Just as I may eat, drink, sleep, walk, ride with, buy from, speak to, and deal with a heathen, Jew, Turk, or heretic, so I may also marry and continue in wedlock with him. Pay no attention to the precepts of those fools who forbid it. You will find plenty of Christians—and indeed the greater part of them—who are worse in their secret unbelief than any Jew, heathen, Turk, or heretic. A heathen is just as much a person—God's good creation—as St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. Lucy, not to speak of slack and spurious Christians.¹⁵

Clearly, the outlook on marriage has changed. That could not happen with marriage as sacrament, but only with marriage as a matter of daily

life, of the First Article of the Creed. Luther is not urging mixed marriages, nor is he divorcing marriage from God as if the Christian religion cannot help, though marriage is not the possession of the church. Still, when husbands and wives are Christian believers, one hopes they benefit from an added dimension of love and patience to weather tough times.

Further in his treatise, Luther hesitates to support divorce. With God upholding creation through families, Luther was concerned for the foundation. He expected especially believers to go the extra mile, though he recognized that sometimes divorce happens. A perspective with a husband and wife as God's gift to each other for service rather than an avenue for selfishness and self-satisfaction goes a long way to maintaining relationships. Luther thinks of the father washing diapers not as drudgery but as an act prompted by faith, and the angels smile looking on.¹⁶ It's not the work but the Christian attitude that matters.

And that was the thrust of part three: a Christian attitude amid mundane tasks. There are no special works as monks might see them, but since all people are *larvae dei*, masks of God, as he accomplishes his tasks in preserving his creation, faithful husbands and wives being just husbands and wives are doing what God wants done. Christians understand and believe this, doing the same tasks as unbelievers, yet doing good works because faith prompts their tasks.

Three years later Luther began to practice what he preached, marrying Katherine von Bora. He learned to love her, he wrote, but from the start he realized she was his gift from God.¹⁷ They raised children, struggled with the death of two, and set aside tasks that cried for attention in order to spend time with children who needed it. Luther's marriage may have pleased his father and irritated the pope, but it was especially doing what God wanted in his order of creation.

Civil Authority: A New Role

LUTHER'S RADICAL RETHINKING prompted action pro and con. Virtually every land that embraced his reformation moved to reform marriage laws, putting the weight in civil authority.¹⁸ Pragmatically, someone had to step in when the canon law was tossed, but this was

not just stopgap. Luther supported the rightful role God would have for secular authority. Unfortunately, with that change came an avalanche of petitions for divorce. Persistent adultery was most often cited, though other problems (e.g., failure to fulfill one's full responsibilities having children) were mentioned. Luther was not willing to do this easily or quickly. Wittenberg averaged just over one divorce per year for adultery.

There is an important point to remember here: Luther's context is overwhelmingly influenced by Christianity. City fathers, who took on marriage laws along with such things as poor relief the church once did, were presumably good members of the local congregation with a Christian perspective. So while the Reformers sometimes had to scold and offer correctives, they were not forcing Wittenberg into the hands of the Turks. What would they say then? In principle, marriage is still not the possession of the church but falls into the First Article and the realm of daily life. Luther knew Christians to the east who lived under non-Christian rule. When ordered to violate what God has taught, they must resist, not by violent uprising for it was not their station in life to be the ruler, but by confessing the truth and suffering consequences that might come.

Luther did not imagine the twists and pitfalls of today. He had his own. No doubt much of what Luther advises won't resonate and might alienate today. Some think him benighted speaking of women mostly in household roles, though for his day he was remarkably progressive: elementary education also for girls, a new step; wives treated not as property but as partners as the Bible allows; and Luther honored his own wife in publicly praising her management skills in that bustling extended household and in bequeathing his estate to Katie, not to the sons, contrary to the custom of the day.

Still, Luther is worth a look. With no-fault divorce filed with do-it-yourself forms from the Internet, we can only imagine what Luther might say. Clearly the focus on what marriage is has been lost, replaced by impatient, selfish perspectives. But those wanting to crack down should remember there has never been nor will be a golden age this side of the second coming.

Same-sex unions? Wanting to be married is probably not the place Luther would tackle that, for there are far deeper problems underlying that political move. But it certainly would be resisted, though calls to make our country Christian again miss the basic point that marriage never is essentially a matter of the Second Article but of the First. Turks can rule well, too, Luther held. In fact, better a smart Turk than a dumb Christian when it comes to governing skills.

In the end, we must be careful importing 16th century Luther in particular cases today. Occasional parallels can be found, of course, but the chief contribution comes in two principles that guide our own casuistry. First, we must remember where marriage lies—a matter of civil order that we certainly want blessed by God, but no special blessing comes in marrying. Second, Christians understand the wedded union exists because God has created it—both institution and the particular marriage. While we live in cultures that would have their say, Luther's approach to marriage cuts to the point: God has established it to accomplish things in this life. If we want to know more and how, pick up the Bible and search his Word.

Notes

- 1 Martin Luther, *Werke* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883), Tischreden, vol. 5, no. 6250.
- 2 There are certainly more ideas and nuances than can be handled here. Yet there are not a large number of titles about Luther and marriage. Broadening the circle brings in more. The following offer a good start to read more. William H. Lazareth, *Luther on the Christian Home: An Application of the Social Ethics of the Reformation* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960). Scott Hendrix, "Luther on Marriage," *Lutheran Quarterly* 14 (2000): 335-350. James Arne Nestingen, "Luther on Marriage, Vocation, and the Cross," *World & World* 25/1 (Winter 1003): 31-39. Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983). John Witte, Jr., *Law and Protestantism: The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), especially "The Mother of All Earthly Laws: The Reformation of Marriage Law," pp. 199-255.

- Carter Lindberg, "The Future of a Tradition: Luther and the Family," in *All Theology is Christology: Essays in Honor of David P. Scaer*, edited by Dean O. Wenthe, et al. (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000), pp. 133-151. What eventually will be developed on the legal front out of Reformation thought is in Hartwig Dieterich, *Das protestantische Eherecht in Deutschland bis zur Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1970).
- 3 Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*, in *The Book of Concord*, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 413 (paragraph 200). Reading not only the explanation to the Sixth Commandment but to all in Luther's Large Catechism makes plain the deep vertical and horizontal relationships God intended—broken by sin yet restored in faith to be lived in the new life in Christ.
 - 4 Ibid.
 - 5 Augustine, *On Original Sin*, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 2nd series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), vol. 5, p. 251, in the Anti-Pelagian writings.
 - 6 Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, p. 261.
 - 7 Gregory and Emperor Henry IV clashed in the Investiture Controversy. Since bishops and abbots often also served as rulers over lands given to the church, they had civil responsibilities to go with their ecclesiastical duties. In an age where symbolism counted greatly in teaching who had authority, who gave the symbols of office (the bishop or abbot) mattered much. Emperor Henry understandably wanted to bestow symbols of both secular rule and church office, but Gregory objected and, to no one's surprise, could argue that imperial authority itself grew from papal roots. When Henry refused to cooperate, his lands were put under the interdict—sacraments suspended—and Henry was pressured to give in. Hearing that Gregory was on his way to release Henry's subjects from their vows of obedience, Henry appeared one morning in Canossa outside the pope's window, standing barefoot as a penitent in the snow. Gregory absolved him—and Henry promptly mixed in politics again. But the precedent was set, and the first step in a rise in papal power had been made.
 - 8 If "canon law" sounds familiar from Luther's personal story, remember Luther's students were burning copies outside Wittenberg in 1520 in the bonfire outside Elster Gate.
 - 9 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia/St. Louis: Muhlenberg and Fortress/Concordia Publishing House, 1957-), vol. 45, pp. 36-37. [Hereafter LW; so, for example, LW 45:36-37].
 - 10 *A Sermon on the Estate of Marriage*, in LW 44:10f.
 - 11 LW 36:105. Luther was thinking out loud about hypotheticals in an effort to preserve marriage—though the ideas would come home to roost with Philip of Hesse a few years later. Philip had a notorious libido rarely kept in check and a politically arranged marriage he cared little for. Finally he was moved to confess and promised to stay faithful to one mistress (!) but wanted to make this a more honorable relationship. With divorce from the first wife no option—a legitimate marriage—Luther and others counseled a second marriage but with the promise that Philip would keep this private. Old Testament patriarchs were no precedent to set a rule but an example of weakness, so Philip should keep things to himself. Instead, he spoke openly, cited the advice given, and had a grand reception for wife number two. For that both Philip and Luther in different ways faced censure under imperial law and great embarrassment. It was not a shining moment but an effort to salvage bad out of a worse situation.
 - 12 LW 28:16-17.
 - 13 LW 28:17, 19.
 - 14 LW 45:11-49.
 - 15 LW 45:25
 - 16 LW 45:40.
 - 17 LW 49:117. June 21, 1525, letter to Nicholas von Amsdorf. The root word *diligo* has the connotation of cherishing beyond or more than romantic passion. (St. Bernard wrote *De diligendo Dei*, that is, *On Desiring God*—clearly intending a deep cherishing, not passion.) Luther writes he had the first while the second came in time.
 - 18 See the chapter in Witte, *Law and Protestantism*, for examples of the fallout. Witte's excellent chapter (and book) certainly takes theology into account, but the material is especially useful for the sober look at the legal aspects of daily life that take center stage in his account.



BRYAN SALMINEN

A Firm Persuasion

Then I asked: Does a firm persuasion that a thing is so, make it so? He replied: All poets believe that it does, and in ages of imagination this firm persuasion removed mountains; but many are not capable of a firm persuasion of anything. (From William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*).

MARRIAGE IS A VERY SERIOUS MATTER in almost all respects, whether it is a young couple preparing for their wedding day, or a couple, married for 50 years, who has gone through many trials and difficulties. Through marriage, people make a difficult world habitable and create meaning in their lives. Our approach to marriage can be naïve, fatalistic, power-driven, cynical, detached, and obsessive. It can also be selflessly mature, revelatory, and life giving; mature in long-reaching effects, and life giving in the way it gives back to the spouse.

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There is no hiding from marriage. In the United States, 96 percent of all people marry “for better or for worse.”¹ These people begin their married lives with many hopes, dreams, and expectations. They plan their lives and their futures together, dreaming of what life will look like in the future. Under the great sky of their endeavors they live their married lives, growing (they hope) through its seasons toward some kind of greater perspective. Any perspective is dearly won. And the only way it is won is the result of dedication, application, an indispensable sense of humor, and above all a never-ending courageous conversation with themselves, their spouses, and most importantly their God. It is a long journey; it calls on both the ardors of youth and the perspectives of a longer view. It is achieved through life-long pilgrimage.

William Blake, that unstoppable creator, as both poet and engraver, seemed to have a direct and conversational relationship with many things, especially the well-springs of work. Blake, over a lifetime, exhibited a continual inspiration, a profound vision, and an indomitable ability, despite his poverty, to follow through with the tiniest details of his art. Blake called his sense of dedication “a firm persuasion.”

I would like to suggest, however, that having a “firm persuasion” is precisely what marriage entails. Blake’s concern for endless details and his continual inspiration need to be applied to marriage as well. To have a firm persuasion in marriage—to believe that what we do is right for ourselves and our spouses and good for the world at the same time—is one of the great triumphs of human existence. When we know what marriage is, that it is designed, designated, and described by God as something good, our lives are enriched enormously. It is then that our married lives take on a sense of cosmic significance. When we remember that marriage is not simply a human ordinance, but one created by God for the civilizing and socializing of people, we begin to understand that we are players in a cosmic drama. Of course, as men and women redeemed by Christ the crucified, our marriages take on an even greater significance. For as St. Paul says, regarding marriage, “this is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the

Church” (Ephesians 5). Paul says that marriage is a great wonder because it is a picture, a glimpse into the marvelous mystery of God’s love in Christ for the whole world. When I love my wife as Christ loved the church, and when my wife loves, honors, and respects me, we bear witness to a supernatural reality. Our marriages become living witnesses to the goodness of God who loves all people and has proven this in the sending of his Son. Every husband and wife needs a “firm persuasion” that their marriage is something beautiful from God. Every couple needs the sense of wonder and enchantment of what it means to be married to this particular spouse. Every marriage needs a sense of belonging, a conversation with something larger than themselves, a felt participation, and a touch of spiritual fulfillment and the mysterious generative nature of that fulfillment. Blake might have said they need a conversation with angels.

This article will address a number of areas where the church has taken a “firm persuasion” on marriage. I will first of all discuss the importance of the permanence of marriage. Secondly, I will attempt to explain briefly the Church’s understanding of marriage in terms of who is to be married and what this means for the homosexual debate. Thirdly, I want to address the issue of cohabitation from a biblical, pastoral perspective.

Marriage: Its Contours

THERE IS, OF COURSE, a sense in which each spouse is indeed, “an angel of God,” for the other. Each person in the marriage is a living, life-giving message and messenger to the other. In Christian marriages, we bring the message of forgiveness from Christ to our partner. When we fail our spouses, and we all do, we then turn to each other and bring the message of hope, forgiveness, and healing to our partners. Indeed, each day provides a new opportunity to see our spouses as “angels” sent from God to help us become all that God has intended. Or as Dan Allender wrote, “God’s intention is for our spouses to be our allies—intimate friends, lovers, warriors, in the spiritual war against the forces of the evil one. We are to draw strength, nourishment, and courage to fight well from that one person who most deeply supports and joins us

in the war—our soul mate for life.”² Or, better yet, as St. Paul said, “We are to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” We are called to approach marriage from God’s divine perspective and maintain the grace to have a “firm persuasion.” Marriage provides a metaphor of spiritual truth. The bond uniting husband and wife symbolizes certain aspects of the relation between God and God’s people. The Old Testament prophets found in marriage an appropriate vehicle for telling the story of Yahweh’s faithfulness in the face of Israel’s idolatry. The New Testament authors drew from this Old Testament imagery (e.g., Romans 9:25, 1 Peter 2:9-10). They spoke of marriage as a picture of the great mystery of salvation—the union of Christ and the church. Marriage illustrates Christ’s self-sacrifice for the church as well as the submission to Christ (Ephesians 5:21-33) of a people who anticipate the future coming of their Lord (Matthew 25:1-13; Revelation 19:7; 21:2, 9-10).

In this manner, marriage provides a picture of the exclusive nature of our relationship to God in Christ. Just as our marriage is to be an exclusive, inviolate, and hence holy bond, so also our relationship to God must be exclusive and holy, for as God’s covenant people we can serve no other gods but the one God. By extension, the exclusive love shared by husband and wife reflects the holiness of the divine love present within the triune God, which in turn overflows from God to creation.

To have this type of “firm persuasion” in our marriages, we need help. As the importance of marriage has declined, the number of depressed, despondent, downcast people has mushroomed. Currently, many people, instead of a “firm persuasion” have what I call a “weak persuasion” regarding marriage. Amato and Rogers reported that today’s more divorce-accepting attitudes contribute to the decline of marital satisfaction. “The belief that an unrewarding marriage should be jettisoned may lead some people to invest less time in their marriages and make fewer attempts to resolve marital disagreements.”³ Thus, “greater freedom to leave unsatisfactory marriages may ironically increase the likelihood of marriages becoming unsatisfactory. Divorce acceptance feeds marital unhappiness which feeds divorce.

The 20th century began with Nietzsche’s lament that God had died. *Time Magazine* finally got around to running the obituary in 1967. And now, sadly, many people in our culture proclaim the death of marriage. Not in the sense that marriage is not valued. It still is. But what is no longer valued is the permanence of marriage. Ages ago, it was thought that men and women who were married would stay married “‘til death do you part,” as the wedding vows say. But today, other commitments, namely the rise of the self and the therapeutic man and woman whose own personal needs are more important than the commitment and responsibility one has to the marriage and/or to children, take precedence. Indeed, there is no longer a firm persuasion. And so we desperately are in need of help and resources to change the way people view marriage and the family.

God in his Word provides these resources and the very foundation by which every couple can revel in the wonder of their marriage. God’s Word provides the very power necessary to help a couple remain faithful to their vows in spite of the difficulties in doing so. God’s Spirit, working through Word and Sacraments, is able to help couples love one another and remain faithful to their vows, not because they can do this on their own strength and power, but because God has loved them and remained faithful to them in the sending of his Son. This is not to suggest that people who base their lives on the Word of God will not have problems. Quite to the contrary. Many Christians have a variety of problems in their marriage. Stress affects all couples, and sin rears its ugly head in every marriage. For love to be sustained in marriage requires radical acts of forgiveness. Just as God repeatedly pardons our sinful waywardness, so do married partners sustain their love through repeated reconciliations. Nuptial love is such a difficult endeavor which prompted one of Luther’s jauntiest sayings: “It takes courage,” said Luther, “to enter both marriage and tournaments.” Luther was speaking not of our modern athletic engagements, of course, but of those fearful medieval jousts where knights carrying lances hurtled full tilt at each other on horseback. Such headlong conflict, Luther suggests, often characterizes marriage. “Think of all the squabbles,” Luther

joked, “that Adam and Eve must have had in the course of their 900 years. Eve would say, ‘You ate the apple,’ and Adam would retort, ‘You gave it to me.’”⁴

In order for marriage to have a “firm persuasion,” couples need to develop the habit of showing love to their spouses without regard to personal feelings. This, as we all know, is terribly difficult over the long haul, and yet this is precisely what love entails. We seek the good of our spouse, not because we are in the mood, but because it is good, right, decent, and, of course, the loving thing to do. Many modern marriages fail because people have come to regard marriage as an extended form of dating. They work only as long as the couple continues to “like” each other, have fun together, and find each other interesting and even entertaining. But a “firm persuasion” in marriage means loving one’s spouse precisely when he or she is unlikable, often even unlovable. In other words, cupid must grow up. Romance needs to ripen into mature love. Young minds and bodies harden, and the fantasies of what might be must conform to the limits of a single possible life. Love is not strawberry fields forever. We learn to wait, to work, to weave patient threads of care, to husband and till the land, to bake bread, to change diapers. As a firm persuasion takes over, romance grows into commitment, and it is often called upon to sacrifice immediate pleasures, forego spontaneous impulsive passion, and pledge fidelity from which hope blossoms. Love must finally put on work gloves and an apron.

Marriage: Who Is to Be Married?

THE CHURCH HAS ALSO HAD a “firm persuasion” that marriage is between a man and a woman. Although this may seem obvious to many, this issue has now become highly debated, particularly in academic circles. It also needs to be stated that homosexual conduct is not a major theme in the Bible. However, certain Bible passages do in fact speak to this issue. The central texts are relatively few: the story of Lot and Sodom (Genesis 19:4-11) as informed by other references to the sin of Sodom, together with the incident in Gibeah (Judges 19); the prohibitions found in the Holiness Code (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13); and Paul’s

inclusion of homosexual practices within his condemnation of gentile society (Romans 1:26-27) and in his list of moral infractions (1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:10).

However, because of the current political climate and the small but vocal homosexual movement, many people suggest that marriage is simply a man-made institution. Because it is man-made, people should be free to marry whomever they desire, even when those desires and those marriages are contrary to the Word of God. Regardless of the many issues surrounding this topic, and there are many, we need to do what Jesus himself did—go back to the original Word of God. In the Book of Genesis, we read that God created man and woman, “male and female he created them, and he named them Adam” (Genesis 5:2). Traditionally, the church has found in these texts a clear rejection of all homosexual behavior. Based on these texts the church has also said that marriage entails the coming together of male and female to form an exclusive sexual bond. The Scriptures connect this human relationship with procreation and child rearing. The second creation narrative and the stories of the Hebrew patriarchs suggest that marriage also serves as a focal point for companionship as husband and wife share intimacy and friendship.

Admittedly, there are numerous arguments against the Church’s historical position. However, if clearly examined and debated, these arguments are frivolous. It needs to be said that most people never debate what the Word of God actually says regarding this topic. Most people who remain objective, and I would add, fair-minded, who examine the Scriptures will agree that the biblical perspective states that homosexual behavior is sin and not to be condoned. Arguments made by advocates of homosexuality which undermine the relevance of Scripture or state that the Scriptures do not understand the contemporary context and situations raise issues that need to be addressed. However, the Scriptures reject homosexual behavior as a violation of the gendered existence of male and female ordained by God at creation.⁵

We also know that God acted freely in creation. He could have created a different universe than He did, but He did not. We do not

know what might have been. We have no categories for thinking about it. The only categories to us are the ones provided by the Scriptures and the nature God has made. We know that whatever God in his uncreated goodness creates is good. Marriage is indeed good, and God's design of uniting man and woman in marriage is His will.

I mention this only because it seems to be a real obstacle for many people regarding marriage and the fact that marriage is designed for a man and woman, not for a man and a man, or a woman and a woman. The problem is, of course, that many people don't want the freedom of the creature, but the freedom of the creator—not freedom to be good but freedom to determine what is good. This, of course, is nothing new, for it was the first temptation, "to be like God, knowing good and evil." G. K. Chesterton remarked, "The modern world is insane, not so much because it admits the abnormal, as because it cannot recover the normal."⁶ Although this article certainly cannot do justice to the issue of homosexuality, suffice it to say that the Word of God clearly states that marriage is designed by God for a man and a woman, for their mutual joy and their love and nurturing of children when the good Lord permits. The subject of homosexuality is enormously complex, touching on many aspects of human existence: biological, psychological, and spiritual. I recognize the debate continues regarding what issues are at stake concerning homosexual desires. Nonetheless, as Jeffrey Satinover (1996) said, "We can draw a number of conclusions regarding these arguments."⁷ I quote Dr. Satinover at length as he is considered to be one of the world's leading experts on the topic of homosexuality:

1. Homosexuality is not a true illness, though it may be thought an illness in the spiritual sense of 'soul sickness,' innate to fallen human nature. Its treatment thus opens directly into the domain of the cure of the soul.

2. Because deeply engraved behaviors are so difficult to modify, homosexuals, like all people, have two choices: to capitulate to the behavior and its consequences or to depend on others, and on God, for help.

3. A pastoral understanding of the cure of the soul, which unfolds progressively over a lifetime, is more than the alleviation of particular symptoms; it consists of growing ever more closely toward the divinely ordained configuration that God intended for us from the beginning—and which is largely unnatural, not only in the area of sexuality. This process is without question a reality; it is a reality that occurs in secular settings as well as in religious ones. It is a reality no less pertinent—and life-giving—to every person, whatever his particular brokenness, than to those struggling with homosexuality.

4. The modern change in opinion concerning homosexuality, though presented as a scientific advance, is contradicted rather than supported by science. It is a transformation in public morals consistent with widespread abandonment of the Judeo-Christian ethic upon which our civilization is based. Though hailed as progress, it is really reversion to ancient pagan practices supported by a modern restatement of Gnostic moral relativism."⁸

Again, I recognize the volatility of the issues. I know from working with many men and women in my counseling practice who have struggled with their homosexual desires how very painful and difficult their struggle is. I also realize that many homosexuals have been mistreated by many people, including Christians. Instead of finding a place of refuge, a place where they can be confronted, loved, and forgiven, homosexuals find among many Christians an absolute hatred. This ought not to be so. The Church of God must love them and minister to them. The church must struggle along with them and share their suffering. But like any other sinful behavior, homosexual behavior must be confronted with the Word of God in a spirit of love. The homosexual and lesbian are not the church's enemy but people in need of the church's help and support for restoring to wholeness their broken sexuality, through compassion, prayer, humility, and groaning together for the redemption of our bodies.

Cohabitation: A Pastoral Response

THE THIRD AREA where the church needs a “firm persuasion” is the topic of pre-marital cohabitation. This is a difficult topic because there seem to be many differing views of well-meaning people, pastors included, as to how to deal best with this problem. Two or three couples of every five coming to our churches for marriage today are already living together, in spite of our teaching and preaching to the contrary. Every new couple coming to be married seems to bring a whole new set of circumstances as to why their situation is unique, and that the church should, of course, allow them to stay in their current state. The end result: we find ourselves making yet another exception, bending the “rules” one more time to connect them to the church, believing they will grow in their commitment to Christ in the process. The fact is, however, that most new outside couples fade away from the church soon after the marriage ceremony. This leaves the clergy feeling compromised and wondering if they have helped the couple at all.

An even greater dilemma is posed for pastors when either or both of the couple’s families are active in the church. The families’ expectations are that pastoral pre-marital counseling will draw the couple further into the church rather than turning them away. In this context, our responsibility is to confront sin and to teach holy living while keeping redemptive doors open. Our first goal in pre-marital counseling is always to help people into a right relationship with God. A second goal is to help launch a couple into a lasting Christian marriage.

There are a number of ways to do this, but space does not allow addressing all of the issues. It does need to be said, however, that living together is not the same as marriage. It is not marriage. I have heard this line from well-meaning people who state that “After all, they are already living together in the eyes of God.” Not true. In John, chapter 4, Jesus says to the woman at the well, “Go call your husband.” She replies, “I have no husband.” Jesus says, “You have rightly spoken, for you have had five husbands, and the one you are now living with is not your husband.” Jesus clearly identifies “living together” as a problem, as an issue, as a sin.

The church has always understood that marriage is the public proclamation that a man and a woman are now husband and wife. When a couple lives together, they are not saying they are husband and wife. In fact, the very opposite is being said. They are not married, which is the very reason they do not have the marriage license.

I have also heard well-meaning pastors say, “Well, we have to get them out of a sinful condition.” This is true. But the real question is this: how do we get people out of a sinful condition? Confession and absolution is the only way to do so. Marriage is not a way to remove sin. Only through Christ’s forgiveness can a man and a woman be cleansed, washed clean, and then empowered to live faithfully as husband and wife.

I know that this is a difficult position to take. Many pastors have said to me that if they took a strong but loving position on this issue they would not have any couples coming to them to be married. But we need to think through statements such as this. Isn’t the real issue whether we have faith in the power of the Word of God to do its work? When we don’t believe that God will do what he says he will do, turn sinners from their sin, then we no longer confront with the full weight of God’s law. We become afraid that it won’t “work.” In other words, I circumvent the means God has given me to make changes in the lives of people on the basis of my own understanding of what might work. Of course, a related question is this: if I do not confront and deal with this sin when it is discovered, what sins will I deal with and not back down from? Do I bring people into the church, making them feel good, but never confronting them with the Law? If so, which sins will be “big enough” to deal with? As my dear colleague Dr. Norman Nagel has said, “We can only give that which has been given to us. We have been given Jesus Christ and the means of grace.” Pastors get to give everyone, including men and women who are living apart from God’s clear Word, the means whereby they can repent and receive the forgiveness of sins Christ has offered. The church not only needs a firm persuasion on this topic and many others, but we also need to realize that this is indeed what love does—tackles the difficult, sometimes pain-filled issues. However, the

church does so from the strength it has received in Jesus Christ and His Word and Sacraments.

This article does not do justice to the many issues presented. Marriage is so big, so wonderful, at times, so complicated, that all the books in the world never seem to do it justice. Nevertheless, the Word of God has a firm persuasion that marriage is indeed a great gift from God. It is a delight to both the husband and the wife when they remember the mystery, the marvel, not only of the other, but most importantly of Christ, who is to be the center of the marriage.

Let me conclude with words of the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

Marriage is more than your love for each other. It has a higher dignity and power, for it is God's holy ordinance through which he wills to perpetuate the human race 'til the end of time. In your love you see not only the heaven of your own happiness, but in marriage you are placed at a post of responsibility towards the world and mankind. Your love is your own private possession, but marriage is more than something personal—it is a status, an office. As you first gave the ring to one another and have now received it a second time from the hand of the pastor, so love comes from you, but marriage from above, from God. As high as God is above

man so high are the sanctity, the rights, and the promise of marriage above the sanctity, the rights, and the promise of love. It is not your love that sustains your marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love."⁹

Notes

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- 3 Amato, Paul, and Rogers, Stacy (1999). "Do Attitudes toward Divorce affect Marital Quality?" *Journal of Family Issues* 20 (1999), pp. 69-86.
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- 5 Gagnon, R. (2001). *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- 6 G. K. Chesterton, *Eugenics and Other Evils* (1922), Chapter 3, "The Anarchy from Above," in *Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986, Vol. 4.
- 7 Satinover, J. (1996) *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, p. 245.
- 8 Ibid, p. 246
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C. GARY BARNES
AND SCOTT M. STANLEY

A Marriage Made in Heaven: How the Significance of Marriage Can Be Taught

CAN CHURCHES TEACH the significance of marriage? Can churches teach the faithful about marriage and how to live lives of fulfillment that honor Christ in marriage? We believe the answer to this question is yes, but only if churches choose to take up this important ministry. Certainly churches have a powerful basis in the work of building marriages (Stanley, Markman, St. Peters, & Leber, 1995). First, at least in the United States, most couples seek to be married in churches. Second, the church has a formal, theologically based commitment to the institution. Third, churches have a longstanding affinity to education for the improvement of the lives of congregants both spiritually and relationally.

The ongoing connection of people with a local congregation gives churches the ability to reach people at a wide range of developmental stages for meaningful ministry around marriage. These opportunities range from teaching youth about marriage (especially counter-

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ing myths), helping couples prepare for marriage, helping couples in the transition to parenthood, and strengthening the spiritual and social lives of couples over the adult life span.

To realize its potential, a church needs a theology of marriage and an operational theology of marriage ministry. We focus on those two elements here and then provide a detailed example from our work with the curriculum of CPREP (Christian Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program).

A Theology of the Mission of the Church and Marriage

ALL MATTERS OF THE CHURCH must ultimately flow from a sound theology. This theological "grid that guides" must be integrated at several levels (Bouma-Prediger, 1990). First, since all truth is God's truth, our "grid that guides" is ideally *interdisciplinary*. In other words, while revelation is the preeminent basis for truth and the theology of marriage, the integration of such truth with social science can yield a theology that is fully Christian yet also consistent with current trends and challenges facing couples in marriage today.

The truth of Scripture teaches us that marriage is to be glorifying to God and that it is to be characterized by oneness, permanence, and openness (Genesis 2:24–25). We also see that strong marriages are the foundation for family life and the raising of Godly children (Malachi 2:15). Perhaps most importantly, Scripture teaches that there is some way in which marriage portrays the very essence of the nature of God, providing a powerful theological basis for understanding the importance of marriage in the world (Genesis 1:27).

Upon such a foundation, discovered truth from empirical research on marriages teaches us very specific truths about the obstacles that get in the way of experiencing the biblical model of marriage. Further, insights gleaned from sound science can add detail to the picture of dynamics that damage oneness and undermine respect, thereby enhancing our abilities to teach couples about signs of danger in their own relationships.

A second level of integration for the "grid that guides" is *intradisciplinary* integration, or integration *within* a discipline, for example,

within the disciplines of theology and psychology, the “practice” should be guided and driven by theory. A good theology of marriage identifies biblical purpose, principles, and process for marriage that are not naturally consistent with a “worldly” worldview of marriage. Indeed, the current dominant views of marriages as vehicles for personal fulfillment—being all about me—must be directly challenged at various levels by teaching in churches. Therefore, the practice of the church as it instructs and equips people about marriage and couples for marriage should be driven by its theological purpose of marriage, not the popular worldly purposes or practices. In contrast to the world’s model, the underlying purpose of marriage from a “heavenly” world view is that marriage is ultimately all about God and that marriage partners get to be key participants in something that is greater than themselves (Thomas, 2000).

A third level is *intradisciplinary* integration, which includes an experiential integration *within* disciplines. This praxis may be understood as reflective action that is laden with belief (Anderson, 2001). In other words, real and effective theology is that which animates the lives of believers. This experiential integration demands that the church should model living examples of marriages that are “biblical” as opposed to “worldly.” The aim of integration at this level is internal harmony between faith commitment and way of life.

Anderson reports that as he entered ministry directly out of seminary, “. . . I soon discovered that I was afflicted with PTSD—Practical Theology Deficiency Syndrome. I had a theology that could talk but that would not walk” (Anderson, 2001, p. 12). Experiential integration involves the attempt to live out one’s faith commitment as authentically as possible in everyday life. This is not “just talking the talk, but also walking the walk.” At this level of integration, the church is actually modeling marriages of oneness, permanence, and openness. Such a theology of marriage is in action by the development of ministries that bring younger congregants into regular contact with mature, Godly couples who have developed deeply meaningful and healthy marriages. More broadly, the divorce rates of authentic Christian marriages should be distinct

from divorce rates of marriages built upon the worldview that marriage is primarily about me.

The church must exercise its distinctions to accomplish its mission regarding marriages. It must speak up and boldly proclaim its distinct core beliefs regarding marriage. It must clearly explain the whole truth of God regarding marriage and instruct and equip with practices that are consistent with and driven by these core beliefs.

A good theology is a necessary but insufficient component for marriages that are distinctly Christian in practice. It is also necessary that the church function with a good “operational theology” of marriage. This goes beyond good interdisciplinary integration to the praxis or intentional action that is driven by beliefs of good theology. It is especially at this level that the church can greatly benefit from the discovered truths of empirical research on marital relationships and the nature of change. Failures in marriage within the church are more likely due to an insufficient “operational theology” rather than an inadequate theology of marriage. For many, failed marriages in the church reflect a lack of information, skills, structure, and support to facilitate a good theology to translate into a good “operational theology.”

Pathways of Operational Theology

CHURCHES ARE BLESSED with many pathways or avenues in which people can be impacted about marriage. There are many specific modalities of teaching in which congregants can be taught principles, values, and skills in accordance with the broader theology of marriage. For example, while most conjure a relatively narrow image of what marriage education is, thinking of a group of couples in a class or a workshop learning some principle, all of the following can be thought of as ways in which churches can effectively teach sound theology about marriage:

- Preaching from the pulpit that teaches the special place of marriage in God’s created order
- Practices that honor marriage such as by honoring couples on Sunday morning when a 50th anniversary is reached
- Youth classes that teach teens accurate information about common myths about marriage, such as that marriage is no different from cohabitation or that living together

prior to marriage improves their odds of marital success

- Premarital education regimens
- Mentoring programs that pair younger couples with older, imperfect, but succeeding couples
- Pastoral (or other) counseling for couples who are struggling
- Parenting classes that also honor marriage but without isolating or ostracizing single parents

There are many other examples, of course, but the key point is simply that there are manifold paths to reaching congregants with messages on various levels that lift up the institution of marriage in general and teach couples specific principles, skills, and attitudes to foster marital fulfillment and meaning. As perhaps a striking example, most churches have ongoing opportunities to affect the thinking of youth as they prepare for life. It has now become very evident that young people believe any number of things that actually undermine their likelihood of marital success in life, all overwhelmingly unsupported by social science: (1) that living together prior to marriage improves their odds; (2) that having a child out of wedlock is no particular problem or risk; (3) that you must find your perfect soul mate for marital bliss to occur; and (4) that you should be fully established financially in your career before you would wisely consider marriage (even though it is true that marrying very young, as in 22 or younger, is risky). Such beliefs increase the likelihood of young people experiencing higher risk, not lower risk marriages, and such beliefs could be directly countered by a balance of teaching that is founded on a Christian vision for marriage as well as current social science demonstrating the destructiveness of such beliefs.

Christian PREP: An Example of a Systematized Model for Teaching an “Operational Theology” of Marriage in Churches

OUR VIEW is that a very strong basis for marriage ministry in the church is to be found in the marriage of foundational Christian theology based in Scripture and best practices guided by current advances in social science—a marriage made in heaven, if you will, by the

unifying principle that all truth is from God. In the area of educational models for working with existing couples (premarital or marital), Christian PREP (CPREP: The Christian Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program) is a very strong example of this model of “operational theology.” There are undoubtedly many such manifestations, though we use this one to highlight important elements of what we consider to be best practices.

CPREP is a program reflecting a clear commitment to traditional Christianity and Christian truth, which also places a high value on experiential change for marriages to become more authentically Christian as well as more stable and satisfying (Stanley, Trathen, McCain, & Brian, 1998). CPREP is founded on a Christian model and teaching on marriage with an integration of solid research on marriage and relationships. CPREP’s integrated approach is designed to teach couples how to reduce the negatives that tear marriages down and preserve and deepen the positives that allow two to become and stay one.

Goals and Objectives of the “Operational Theology.” The goal of CPREP is to present the strongest program possible for helping couples begin, maintain, or renew a joyous Christian marriage that is characterized by the love and oneness of God. The objectives of CPREP are based in the belief that love and oneness will be cultivated or constricted according to the choices that are made in relational interactions.

The “discovered truths” from the empirical research of the CPREP program are highly compatible with Scriptural teaching in terms of choices that we make to cultivate healthy relationships. Being “right with God,” having insight, and feeling in love are all wonderful things. However, none of these things guarantees that a person knows how to handle the challenges of marriage on planet earth. Therefore, the operational theology of CPREP does not assume that getting the heart right is sufficient but only that it is necessary.

CPREP starts out by presenting the primary purpose and design of marriage as being sourced in God and not in mankind. Teaching about Adam and Eve in the Garden establishes the essential nature of the deep desire built within the human heart to be naked and

unashamed as it interacts with the dangers of sin and selfishness and the resulting fear of rejection and desire to hide or cover up. From there, CPREP teaches how both Scripture and research clearly suggest certain behaviors are destructive in relationships (e.g., many passages in Proverbs, such as Proverbs 18:13; Matthew 5, 6, and 7; most of the book of James; Galatians 5:13–15) and certain behaviors are constructive (e.g., James 1:19). Despite the vast number of Scriptures that highlight how negative ways of treating one another destroy relationships, we believe that the simple importance of such teachings is too often lost in the teaching about marriage within the church. It provides a great example of how the most important value of research lies at times not in revealing something unknown, but in drawing attention to something plainly known and clearly revealed that has received too little attention.

CPREP takes the position that it is equally valid to stress both insight and behavior. Insight is important when it leads to internal change and commitment to move a new direction (“ . . . clean the inside of the cup.” Matthew 23:26). The behavioral strategies taught in CPREP are aimed at changing thought patterns, expectations, and emotion, and are not simply about acquiring new behaviors. For example, one cannot genuinely practice listening carefully to his or her mate about something on which they disagree without some internal change having already taken place—one that will multiply further through the experience of communicating well. Structure (agreed-upon ground rules for handling conflict well, for example) guides behavior and beliefs, and change in one will positively effect change in the other.

Key Concepts and Principles of the “Operational Theology.” Safety.

Running through all of the teaching of CPREP is the foundational belief that good marriages are basically marriages that have two key types of safety (Stanley, Markman, and Whitton, 2002): (1) Safety in terms of the day-to-day connection as reflected in the way partners treat one another, such as it being safe to say what one really thinks (also including safety from personal harm); and (2) safety in terms of a fundamental sense that the marriage has

a secure basis in commitment that underlies a trust in the present and a faith in the future. We have come to believe that safety lies at the core of both a sound, Scripturally based theology of marriage and good relationships, and also that it is one of the most powerful unifying themes that can be found for organizing decades of sound marital research—reflecting the core desire to be naked and unashamed.

Scripture and research demonstrate that various kinds of negative interaction are particularly corrosive to the positive bond between partners over time. In this model, a watershed point on the path to marital failure occurs when one or both partners begin reliably to associate the presence of the other with pain and stress rather than support and safety (Stanley, Blumberg, and Markman, 1999). Hence, reducing negative interaction is not merely a goal in its own right, but most important because of the ways in which negatives can tear down the positive bond over time (see Notarius and Markman, 1993). In fact, a compelling case can be made for the idea that oneness is inherently mysterious (e.g., implied in part of the teaching of Paul in Ephesians 5:32); that it is the positive side of connection where all the interesting and creative variability lies in marriages (Stanley et al., 1998). A couple who is thriving in oneness in marriage can be entirely different from other couples who are also thriving in oneness. In contrast, couples who do not handle conflicts and differences well and with respect look much like other couples who are damaging their relationships. This demonstrates the banality of destructive negativity of the sort that Scripture and research suggest is the death knell for relationships.

Education and Practice. Healthy relationships characterized by closeness and oneness will not automatically result in the midst of our inevitable differences and conflicts. While therapy can be extremely helpful in certain situations, much of what goes wrong in loving relationships has to do with never having *learned or observed* how to think about marriage, how to evaluate and handle expectations, or how to manage conflict without damaging closeness.

Respect for Truth and Empiricism as One Window. Numerous factors have been shown to increase the risk of marital dissolution. In

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| PREDICTION AND RISK RESEARCH: FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH DIVORCE AND DISTRESS. | STATIC FACTORS: | DYNAMIC FACTORS: |
| | Some Personality Factors Parental Divorce Cohabitation History Previous Divorce Religious Dissimilarity Young Age at Marriage Economic Status | Interaction Danger Signs Communication Ability Conflict Management Some Types of Physical Aggression Unrealistic Expectations Inaccurate Beliefs Commitment and Motivation Substance Abuse |

FIG. 1

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| KEY PREVENTION THEMES OF PREP: AN EXAMPLE OF RESEARCH INFORMED PREVENTION. | LOWERING RISK | RAISING PROTECTION |
| | Interaction Danger Signs Communication Conflict Management Problem Solving Expectations Forgiveness | Commitment Friendship Fun Sensuality Spiritual and Religious Intimacy |

FIG. 2

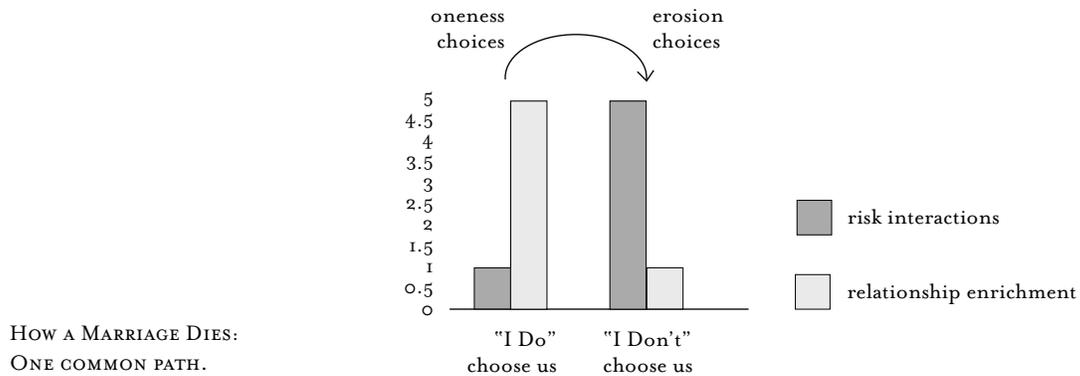


FIG. 3

training in CPREP or PREP, these risks are categorized into dynamic and static dimensions (Figure 1). The hallmarks of couples headed for trouble included negative reciprocity, poor affect management, withdrawal during problem conversations, unrealistic expectations, and diminished commitment. Static variables are also associated with marital distress and divorce, but a foundational belief of CPREP (and PREP) is that efforts should be concentrated on the dynamic dimensions because the dynamic dimensions are more plausibly changeable (Stanley, 2001; Halford et al., 2003).

Personal Responsibility. CPREP promotes the key concept and set of principles that all couples must be actively intentional and involved in creating positive impact in two different arenas simultaneously throughout the life of the relationship. If couples are not actively and intentionally counteracting destructive tendencies, they will find themselves engaging in patterns that erode their positive bond over time. Further, without

intention to do otherwise, they may allow the positive side of their bond, such as spiritual and friendship connections within the marriage, to drop by the wayside.

Building Positive Connection. Along with the use of cognitive-behavioral techniques to manage negatives better (e.g., Baucom and Epstein, 1990), CPREP is designed to teach couples how to preserve and deepen friendship, fun, spiritual connection, and sensuality (e.g., Markman, et al., 2001; Stanley, et al., 1998), consistent with the trend in the field to help couples develop the positive side of their marriages (e.g., Jacobson and Christensen, 1998). In the frame of prevention, such factors are the purely protective factors (Figure 2) designed to give couples an edge in building lasting love. CPREP promotes the concept that couples do not fall out of love the way people fall out of trees, but that they are prone over time to automatically erode it away.

Healthy couples are typically characterized by (1) low risk interactions around emerging problems and (2) high relationship enrichment (with

"I choose us" messages) when they come to the point of saying, "I do" as they consider marriage. Unhealthy couples are typically characterized by the mirror image of (1) high risk interactions around continued problems and (2) low relationship enrichment (with "I choose me" messages) when they come to the point of saying "I don't" want to continue marriage with you. Avoiding this negative combination and promoting this positive combination is the key focus of prevention in the CPREP model of intervention (Figure 3).

A Marriage Made in Heaven: Good Theology and Good "Operational Theology." CPREP is a strong, user-friendly tool for the church to better accomplish its mission of strengthening Christian marriages, and is a sound example of an "operational theology" for change that flows from the valid integration of theology and social science. Congruence of truth claims within a discipline as well as across disciplines becomes highly significant for confirmation of "true truth." The CPREP model strongly affirms that outcomes in all marriages are not so much about finding the right person as about being the right person. The apostle Paul tells husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:21 that they must ". . . submit one to another out of reverence to Christ." This is particularly demonstrated as individual choices are made about how inevitable differences are handled to achieve mutual understanding and mutually agreed upon resolutions. This cannot be accomplished with worldly power.

CPREP is one of the most powerful examples of an "operational theology" for deeper level personal and relational transformation versus superficial change. It demonstrates that simple tools and strategies can be profound in their impact when they alter the way we automatically make cognitive and behavioral choices. These upper level changes free us up from defenses to work on a different "playing field" of deeper reflections of feelings and connecting core beliefs. As we "speak the truth in love" to others and ourselves and as we disclose and receive feedback, our relationships become "relational working labs" for new levels of transformation—and transformation may have always been God's ideal for the impact of the vocation of marriage in the life of the believer.

Conclusion

THE CHURCH HAS A DISTINCT ROLE and opportunity to counter the myths of the world by bringing together good theology and good "operational theology." As this happens, it is more likely that Christian marriages will become more authentically Christian and the world will witness "out of this world marriages."

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book reviews

The Heart of Commitment.

Scott Stanley. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998.

Dr. Stanley has provided an enlightening, encouraging and empowering resource for individuals and couples who want to understand what marital commitment is about. He himself has a Christian heart, a family heart, and, as a clinical psychologist and researcher, a scholarly heart.

This book should be read by every church worker, and it should be read by every Christian who is preparing for marriage, and by those married, whether recently married or married for 40 years. We need to read and talk about books like this, especially in a culture like ours where the word "commitment" seems to be a foreign concept, and marriages are often understood as a contract ("so long as you meet my needs") rather than a sacred, enduring covenant. Dr. Stanley's research, as well as research done by other family scientists, has identified commitment as the heart of a lifelong relationship. Indeed, he teaches us what the New Testament clearly teaches, that the marital relationship of lifelong companionship is founded on total commitment. This is one of the reasons why St. Paul compared marriage to the relationship of Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:31-32). Christ has totally committed Himself to His community of disciples. That commitment by our Lord shows us the meaning of covenant love.

Dr. Stanley writes, "I want to help you go way beyond *staying together* and understand how two people can really *be together* in the full mystery of marriage" (pp. 1-2). He does this very well as he establishes a firm foundation for his goal on the basis of Scripture and research. His first chapter, "Sticking, Stuck, or Stopped?" is thought provoking. Using examples from couples' relationships, he helps us to understand how couples end up on one of three paths: those who stick; those who are mostly stuck; and those who simply stop. He discusses what God intends for marriage, and he follows that discussion with a discussion of research and theory on commitment. At the

end of the chapter he sets forth two significant questions: "First, how do you *maintain* dedication over time in marriage? What does it look like, and how do you do it? Second, how do you *regain* dedication if you have lost some or all of it?" (p. 21). Dr. Stanley clearly answers these questions in the next nine chapters of the book. He ends each chapter with a brief "Point of Application," practical questions to ponder and discuss, suggestions, and biblical references to read and meditate upon.

In Part I the author addresses the subject of choices and the path of commitment. He writes, "Commitment involves making choices, protecting choices from other options, and arriving at ongoing decisions that reflect the priorities of your commitments" (p. 23). This is a most poignant discussion. Church workers, especially today, need to give this section a careful reading, particularly because some of us are being tempted to violate or have violated the Sixth Commandment. But this is not the only concern. It also is about priorities. "Your priorities are the things that are most important to you. The way in which you make choices among competing demands is a fundamental aspect of commitment. Making the right choices in your marriage is part of sticking. Making the wrong choices is part of getting stuck" (p. 32).

Part 2 is an excellent discussion on developing and maintaining the long-term view. He compares the short-term view, the one our contemporary culture conditions us to take, with the long-term view, the one that is a fundamental aspect of commitment, the one that is Godly. With excellent and timely illustrations, Dr. Stanley helps us to understand how the short-term view ". . . kills the chances of having a good marriage" (p. 103), and how the long-term view "that comes with commitment reassures both partners of the permanence of the union" (p. 103). It is not uncommon for partners to threaten the long-term view when they are angry at each other or are focusing

on the negatives in a marriage (concentrating on what's wrong with the marriage instead of focusing on what's right with the marriage). Dr. Stanley's directive is very well taken, "*Do not threaten your future just because you are very frustrated right now. That is very destructive*" (p. 105). Therefore he helps us to understand in a practical way how to invest for the long haul, and how to develop a lasting vision for one's marriage in the light of God's intention and blessings for marriage and what has been found in research to support both the long haul and lasting vision.

The title of Part 3 says it all: "Fostering We-ness and Containing Me-ness." It's a wonderful discussion of oneness, of teamwork. In every reasonably healthy marriage there must be a reasonably healthy sense of self; in every reasonably healthy marriage there must be a reasonably healthy sense of "we." We are a team. Dr. Stanley's comments on competition, power, gender, and repentance are well worth pondering. Starting with Philippians 2:4, his exposition on sacrifice and service in marriage is one for us to review for ourselves periodically. "I think sacrifice is a crucial component of commitment in a strong and healthy marriage. This point is very clear in Scripture, and I think it is quite clear in marital research. That's what this chapter is about—the meaning and effect of sacrificial giving in marriage" (p. 183). The final chapter is on Christian love, a reflection on 1 Corinthians 13. "*What I call dedication as a form of commitment in research is what the New Testament calls agape love. . . . If you prefer, you could think of this book as a discussion of committed, agape, love*" (p. 209). And so it is: *The Heart of Commitment*.

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12 Hours to a Great Marriage.

Howard J. Markman, Scott M. Stanley, Susan L. Blumberg, Natalie H. Jenkins, Carol Whiteley.

San Francisco: Wiley/Jossey-Bass, 2004.

Twelve hours spent in study and activities to assure a great marriage. What an investment! A magic bullet for marriages! Not quite, but in the words of the authors, "If you dream of having a great marriage, this book will help you bring that dream closer."

This book is a print version of the PREP (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program) marriage improvement workshops the authors have conducted across the country. It is the most complete version of the workshop program. There are additional books for targeted audiences—Christian, Jewish, new parents, etc.

The PREP program for marriages is a marriage equivalent to the PET, TET, LET programs of some years ago (Parent, Teacher, Leader Effectiveness Training) authored by Tom Gordon that may be familiar to many readers. It is a hands-on, practical guide to developing competencies toward achieving a goal: in this case, a great, long-lasting marriage.

The program is designed for married couples and those contemplating marriage. For the latter it could be one of the most beneficial pre-marital counseling tools ever devised—a set of activities that can carry into married life and be used regularly or as needed with positive results.

We're always skeptical of books written by a committee (recall the camel as a horse put together by a committee). This book is an exception. The first four authors are with either the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver or involved in the administration or practice of the PREP workshops. Carol Whiteley, cofounder of Writing Doctor, (www.writingdoctor.com) is the writing glue that avoids the pitfalls of committee books.

The book's subtitle is "A Step-by-Step Guide for Making Love Last." The authors' operational definition of a great marriage, based on 25 years of evidence, is:

1. couples that share friendship and love in many ways;
2. couples that treat each other with kindness and respect;
3. couples where partners do their own part;
4. couples that are committed to staying together, even when it's no bed of roses.

Using a baseball analogy, these characteristics of a great marriage are achieved by couples working through 12 chapters on 12 topics—one hour per chapter—following specific ground

rules of the program. Each chapter of about 20 pages has a brief explanation of the topic at hand, such as couple scenarios explicating the topic, an explanation of how the PREP approach treats the issue with more scenarios, and a set of exercises for the couple to complete. An hour per chapter will be a minimum investment in most cases, but a good taste of the topic under scrutiny. The 12 topics are ordered under the four keys to success for healthy marriages: handling conflict, positive connections, forgiving, and making a long-term commitment.

We believe that any couple willing to practice loving kindness and invest 12 hours working through this guide will not only be rewarded in the present, but be on their way to a long-lasting, great marriage. Keeping the book for occasional revisiting and reinforcing might be a good idea also.

Gil and Bonnie Daenzer

(Celebrating 52 years of marriage)

Gil is professor *emeritus*
Concordia University, Nebraska

Happily Ever After: A real-life look at your first year of marriage.

(Formerly titled *Great Expectations*).

Toben and Joanne Heim.

NavPress, 2004.

Jason:

Almost every storybook fairy tale ends with the words "and they lived happily ever after." Toben and Joanne Heim's book titled *Happily Ever After* truly does deliver what it promises on the front cover—"A Real-Life Look at Your First Year of Marriage." While God has created us in His image and to live in relationships with other people, our sinfulness creates tension in any human relationship. Sinfulness certainly invades marriages, as well. The Heims write honestly, and they seek to unravel issues that can and do come to the surface in the first year of a couple's marriage. As Amy and I read this book together, we marveled at how true the book was for us already in the early days of our marriage. You may think it is odd that we have chosen to write our book review in this separated format. This is the exact way that the Heims wrote their book, however. Their writing style intends (and did so very successfully for us) to reach the emotions and feelings of both a husband and a wife.

Amy:

The Heims divide their book into eight main sections, each one addressing a key issue that married couples encounter. Nearly all of these

popular topics (family history, communication, conflict, finances, sex, celebrations, community, and spirituality) were issues that Jason and I had addressed in premarital counseling sessions. So, I admit that as Jason and I began reading *Happily Ever After*, I was expecting to hear the "same old" theories and words of advice. Thankfully, however, the book's simple honesty interwoven with the truth of God's Word provided a series of interesting revelations and a springboard for important discussions about our own marriage.

One revelation we had as we read pertained to the issue of family relationships. The Heims reminded us that each partner brings his/her unique family background into a marriage relationship. That one we had heard before. The rest of the chapter, however, seemed to open up an exciting new freedom for us. We started to realize that as a couple we were essentially beginning our own two-person family. Now, we could adopt the "best of the best" from each of our family histories and combine them to create unique traditions and routines of our own. Often, differing family backgrounds can be a stumbling block to newly married couples. The Heims, on the other hand, reminded us that our diverse family histories are a gift from God and can be used to His glory.

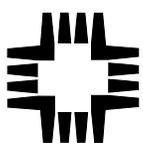
This book also provided wonderful discussion points for Jason and me. Frequently, we would laugh aloud at the stories Toben and Joanne shared in their book, simply because of our ability to relate so closely to their various marital plights. Since the Heims had entered into a heated debate about the "correct" way to fold their bathroom towels, then maybe it was okay for Jason and me to argue about how to display the wall hangings in our new apartment. The Heims' ability to share so openly their own frustrations and missed expectations about marriage encouraged Jason and me to be straightforward with each other about these sensitive issues as well.

Jason:

Happily Ever After is a book filled with the joy and truth about God-centered marriages. Because of its honest applicability and use of Scripture, we highly recommend this book to all newly married couples and to those who counsel such couples. Marriage is a joyful gift to celebrate, and we were encouraged by the Heims' celebration of God's love through their love for one another and in their practical book on marriage issues.

Jason Schleicher, Director of Christian Education, and **Amy Schleicher**, teacher (married one year)
Bethlehem Lutheran Church
Saginaw, Michigan





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