

# Marriage in a Godless Culture

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Marriage is a hot-button topic. Recent judicial decisions have altered its legal definition, so it cannot be assumed to be strictly between a male and female. Not coincidentally, marriage practices and sexual morality are in significant decline. Marriage itself is widely treated as an optional, formless, and even harmful state by many. Sins such as premarital sex, cohabitation, divorce, and homosexuality are commonplace and also more or less accepted by society. However, these surface problems and the cultural understanding of marriage do not mean that we are at a unique and pivotal point in time or that true marriage itself has changed.

The problems surrounding marriage are not new, nor is this recent legal redefinition entirely unforeseen. They have been several hundred years in the making. While there are some new twists and cultural emphases—problems the Church must tackle—the current view of marriage is not exceptional or unique. Marriage has always been despised by sinners and ridiculed by those joined by God as one flesh. What is novel is the rapid relaxing of rigid government regulation regarding all sexual behavior. However, since marriage is a divine and natural order imprinted on mankind, it cannot be undone. It will endure despite attacks from the godless and those who sin against it.

The Lutheran perspective offers a view of marriage that seems entirely secular. It actually is at odds with most of Christian history. Luther taught that it was simply a worldly estate with nothing specifically Christian about it. Almost all other traditions have sought to Christianize, or at least spiritualize, marriage. Some of those attempts have indirectly led to our current state of distress and confusion over marriage.

The biblical truth of marriage is simple and direct, but we have been culturally conditioned to not think practically about this inescapable reality. In this world marriage is a permanent fixture. Any healthy society must use it and marriage itself is in no danger of obsolescence.

Christians should be measured in their reactions to cultural shifts and not let moral zeal distort the proper understanding of this natural creation of God imprinted upon human nature.

## History: A Vantage Point

The main problem with marriage in this world, that it is unattractive and undesirable to sinful man, is nothing new. Despite the recent outward changes and government attempts to neuter marriage, “for thousands of years people have been proclaiming a crisis in marriage and pointing back to better days.”<sup>1</sup> Marriage has always been in decline and seemingly at a tipping point. Yet it is still quite prominent in popular culture, symbolizing the deepest commitment one can make. Despite serious misunderstandings of the institution itself, the visible problems we associate with the decline of marriage are not new. Causal bed-hopping, illegitimate cohabitation, children born out of wedlock, rampant divorce, a low birth rate, and the murder of children are not recent inventions. In fact, every advanced society has eventually ended up where we are, if given the chance. Deep-seated suspicion and frustration with the marital state is universal. The vitriolic attempt to get around marriage and its God-given purposes actually has much historical precedent.

Our day is actually quite similar to the early Christian period. The late Roman empire, the cradle of Christianity, dealt with the same general moral decadence as current western society. We find complaints from around the first century, when the Scriptures were written, that long marriages were rare due to unilateral, no-fault divorce available to either party. It did not even require paper work, just verbal notification. Early Christians were in basically the same counter-cultural position as modern biblical Christians, fighting against the killing of young children and the widespread use of contraception. They fought “against sexual immorality, and against extravagant weddings, easy divorces, and routine remarriages.”<sup>2</sup> The “early fathers also used the Bible to criticize prevailing roman practices of concubinage, homosexuality, infanticide, child

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<sup>1</sup>Stephenie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 1.

<sup>2</sup>John Witte Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012; 2nd ed.), 75. Elaborate, expensive weddings are a sign of the decline of marriage and family in the culture. The more that is made of the wedding day, the less is made of married life and its duties.

abuse, arranged marriages, [and] raucous weddings.”<sup>3</sup>

What is different today is the state’s reaction. While the Roman emperors’ sexual proclivities were often repulsive and their divorces and remarriages obscene even by today’s standards, it was recognized that the good of the empire demanded strong, fruitful marriages.<sup>4</sup> A low birth rate due to many childless couples caused great concern, since that is an indicator of the death of a culture.

Despite divorcing his wife just after she gave birth and remarrying someone else’s pregnant wife for political gain, Caesar Augustus “embarked upon one of the earliest promarriage campaigns in the historical record.” Efforts to increase the birthrate (to at least three children per family), criminalize adultery, and legally restrict divorce “had little impact on Roman morality and behavior.”<sup>5</sup> While the modern day legalizing of aberrant behavior is quite unusual, marital morality has always been a great concern of society.

Even if we examine marriage in the Scriptures, we find good reason to feel like we are in bad company. Jewish males could divorce their wives for no particular reason. “Pharisees came up to Jesus and tested him by asking, ‘Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?’” The response is well known: “whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” The view of marriage among God’s people was not picturesque, for even Jesus’ disciples are shocked at His intimations of permanent monogamy: “The disciples said to him, ‘If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.’” Moses, the very one to whom was handed the divine commandment “do not commit adultery,” allowed a husband “to give a certificate of divorce and to send his wife away” (Mt. 19:3-10).<sup>6</sup>

It might be expected that conditions improved after Christianity was established. Outwardly, they did in some respects, but individuals’ behavior did not reach the biblical ideal. While looking at the birth records of a manor in England, a historian found that one third of the children were born out of wedlock between 1270-1348.<sup>7</sup> Roughly two centuries later, Martin Luther complained

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<sup>3</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 54.

<sup>4</sup>The parallel is President Bill Clinton who signed the Defense of Marriage Act, but publicly disgraced the institution.

<sup>5</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 83-84.

<sup>6</sup>All passages ESV unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>7</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 112.

bitterly about the ubiquitous sexual immorality: “What we speak of most is the fact that the estate of marriage has universally fallen into such awful disrepute.”<sup>8</sup> “Finally, is it not lamentable that we Christians tolerate open and common brothels in our midst, when all of us are baptized unto chastity?” One scholar summarized Luther’s opinion: “Marriage was in a total state of decline.”<sup>9</sup> However, Christ did not come to save marriage, but sinners.<sup>10</sup>

It is well-known that the Roman church forbids clerical marriage. This is because marriage was thought to be too worldly for such a holy vocation. But denying marriage did not stop priests from knowing women and taking concubines. The Gospel does not change human nature. “The practice of medieval priests having concubines and illegitimate children was neither unusual nor a particular obstacle to clerical advancement.” Indeed, clerical concubinage was a significant source of ecclesiastical revenue in the so-called “whore tax” and an additional fee for each child born to these semi-approved relationships.<sup>11</sup> One sensitive contemporary of Luther, also a cleric from Wittenberg, said: “How can I preach about chastity and unchastity, adultery and depravity, when my whore comes openly to church and my bastards sit right in front of me? How shall I conduct mass in this state?”<sup>12</sup> Not only was the sin open and public, this illicit cohabitation was a financial boon to the Roman church.

Even America’s marital history is not pristine. Despite romantic notions to the contrary, this country was not moral or godly before the 1960’s.

Ninety-two percent of American College girls surveyed in the 1920’s reported engaging in petting—fondling body parts below the neck. Historians estimate that at least a third and probably closer to half, of women who came of age in the 1920’s had had sex before marriage, twice the rate of premarital intercourse reported by the generation immediately preceding them. By this time young middle-class men were more likely

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<sup>8</sup>Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), LW 45:36.

<sup>9</sup>“Erfurt has not been much better than a brothel and beer hall.” Johan Buitendag, “Marriage in the Theology of Martin Luther—Worldly yet Sacred: An Option between Secularism and Clericalism,” in *HTS Theological Studies* vol. 63.2 (2007), 453.

<sup>10</sup>Pastors who aim to make strong marriages do not have a Christian goal, since faith or Christ is not needed to live together with a spouse.

<sup>11</sup>“The bishopric of Constance ‘licensed’ clerical concubinage for four gulden, and assessed each child of such unions an additional fee of four gulden. Since it is estimated that about 1,500 children were born annually in this situation, it is easy to appreciate the non-doctrinal reasons for Episcopal opposition to clerical marriage.” Carter Lindberg, “Martin Luther on Marriage and the Family,” 31.

<sup>12</sup>1522, Franciscan Johann Eberlin, quoted in: William E. Phipps, *Clerical Celibacy: The Heritage* (New York: Continuum International, 2006), 152.

to lose their virginity with women of their own class than with prostitutes.<sup>13</sup>

One of the best times for marriage, at least as far as divorce rate, was the Great Depression. But it was not love that constrained couples. Divorce proved impractical and too expensive during this time of poverty.<sup>14</sup> In fact, perhaps the major correlating factor for divorce (apart from its legality) is the ability of women to assert economic independence.<sup>15</sup> Married people, in general, have never been happy to be married and will chose divorce whenever it is legal and practical. The marital bed has never been universally kept pure, nor children always welcomed. Marriage has always been despised.

Luther relates the complaint about married life that is just as relevant today as when it was written: Who wants the troubles of raising a family, the sleepless nights, the expense, the caring for a wife, the “bitterness and drudgery married life involves? What, should I make such a prisoner of myself? ...It is better to remain free and lead a peaceful, carefree life.”<sup>16</sup> A spouse today is called a “ball and chain,” only partially in jest. This thinking, though, does underscore both the historic and modern view of the institution of marriage. The actual critique and exact version of sexual immorality practiced has taken different forms, but the hatred of this uniting in wedlock is universal. Today men are demeaned as the problem in relationships, though historically, it was women who were thought to have been the problem.<sup>17</sup> But ultimately marriage itself, a work of God, was blamed for a couples’ state of misery.

What has changed today is not people, but the government’s active role in fostering the disintegration of the status of marriage. Through legal and judicial maneuvering, the state has given people what they have always wanted, rather than restraining them. For most, marriage is an accessory today, done for purely personal reasons—not economic, political, public, or practical

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<sup>13</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 200.

<sup>14</sup>The birthrate was at 2.1 children per a woman, basically the same as today. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 9, 218.

<sup>15</sup>The !Kung bushmen were reported to have a 40% divorce rate in the 1970’s, while “some !Kung women had as many as five consecutive spouses. This correlation between economic independence and divorce is seen in a host of cultures.” Due to the wealth of their women, the Yoruba of West Africa were said to have a divorce rate up to 46%. Elen Fisher, *Anatomy of Love: The Mysteries of Mating, Marriage, and Why We Stray* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992), 104-5.

<sup>16</sup>Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), LW 45:39.

<sup>17</sup>“I image that if women were to write books they would say exactly the same thing about men.” Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), LW 45:36.

considerations. The legal barriers have been so lowered as to render marriage superfluous for living a happy, fulfilling life. “People no longer needed to marry in order to construct successful lives or long-lasting sexual relationships. With that, thousands of years of tradition [restricting man] came to an end.”<sup>18</sup> No specific form of marriage is now legally supported. It has become a structureless contract, ever contingent on each individual’s will.

At a minimum, it might be instructive to recognize that family transformations on a comparable scale to those we face today have been faced before—in the fifth, twelfth, sixteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Indeed, in some respects, the Western legal tradition in the past millennium has simply come full circle. . . . Sexual pathos was prominent at the opening of this second millennium, with widespread concubinage, prostitution, voyeurism, polygamy, adultery, fornication, sodomy, wife and child abuse, teenage pregnancy, abortion, and much else. Sexual pathos has returned with equal pungency at the opening of this third millennium with the wildest frontiers of sexual prurience now only a mouse click away.<sup>19</sup>

Rather than being an entirely modern topic, the decline of marriage has always been a complaint. Marriage has been perennially thought to be the problem, not the people in it.

## What Is It?

The Christian definition of marriage is simple: “The two shall become one flesh.”<sup>20</sup> But this ever-creating divine word is in no way restricted to Christians or to anyone of a particular confession. This defining and instituting word, along with “be fruitful and multiply,” establish marriage as the foundation of human life. “The institution of the family is necessary to our very existence, basic to our culture, and critical to our happiness and well-being.”<sup>21</sup> Family is the most natural unit of humanity in this world, yet it is a work of the creative God who makes the two into one and causes them to multiply. Everyone participates in this work of God, because we must have children for the race to propagate and families in which they are raised.

God created all life, not just Christians. “After all, a man is a man and a heathen is no

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<sup>18</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 308.

<sup>19</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 326.

<sup>20</sup>Mt. 19:5; Mk. 10:8; Cf. Gen. 2:24.

<sup>21</sup>Gene Edward Veith Jr. and Mary J. Moerbe, *Family Vocation: God’s Calling in Marriage, Parenting, and Childhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 15.

different from a saint so far as bodily functions are concerned.”<sup>22</sup> He makes us into two sexes, male and female, thereby indicating that we were made for marriage. Everyone is created for this purpose, but it is not a law or rule one must obey. It is simply a fact of nature. In this natural order, “God is not so much a lawgiver as a creator and ruler.”<sup>23</sup> He also impels us with procreative desires to the married state. “In normal persons the sex urge is bound to assert itself and it is not possible to escape its insistent call.”<sup>24</sup> All people were created for this, though after the Fall not everyone must marry, though most should. “God did not create husband and wife. What he created was the sexual distinction in unity (man as male and female) which forms the larger background of marriage.”<sup>25</sup>

While people consent to this union, they do not create it—God does. It is entirely God’s creative work. He creates one out of two, and keeps them glued together as a single flesh. Although pagans can well enough see what marriage is about, they cannot see it as God’s work. Christian marriage is no different in form or essence than pagan marriage. Though, believers should see the author of marriage as God Himself, since He creates the one flesh union. Society or “mother nature” did not create it. Rather, it is the reason God created man in two different forms. This teaching of the Small Catechism is to inform the Christian view of this natural order: “God has made me and all creatures; He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my sense, and still takes care of them.” Marriage is as obvious as the body we have been given.

“Man and woman were created to become ‘one flesh,’ i.e., a unity effected by God Himself so that a permanent union would result.”<sup>26</sup> Inseparable is the marital act. Sexual intercourse is designed and intended by God Himself. Without this very specific act, no one would exist. Yet, even outside of true marriage, it is marital in character. “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members

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<sup>22</sup>Gerhard E. Lenski, *Marriage in the Lutheran Church: A Historical Investigation* (Columbus, OH: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1936), 114.

<sup>23</sup>Werner Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, trans. Carl J. Schindler (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957), 77.

<sup>24</sup>Lenski, *Marriage in the Lutheran Church*, 107.

<sup>25</sup>Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *God and Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 1.

<sup>26</sup>“Marriage,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), III:264.

of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, ‘The two will become one flesh’” (I Cor. 6:15-16). Sexual intercourse unites male and female, as in marriage, though without public recognition it is defective and illegitimate. But physically God unites in this act. The same words are used of joining with a prostitute as with a wife: “the two will become one flesh.” So apart from intentions or a public commitment, a marriage union arises out of God’s work in conjugal union.

Only male and female can unite. This is an undeniable fact of nature. It is impossible for two of the same sex to become one.<sup>27</sup> Nowhere is sexual pleasure indicated as relevant to producing this one flesh union. This is shown in the conception of new life, God’s own act, which requires neither physical pleasure, nor desire for children. God works through means, in this case the body parts that are covered in modesty. This makes accidental unions improbable.

The bodily union of male and female is the one defining act of marriage. Not as a continual activity, but in a single bodily uniting God joins two into one. “Adultery is therefore not a breach of contract, not personal harm inflicted upon the partner, not a formal violation of the law, but destruction of the divinely fashioned” one flesh reality.<sup>28</sup> Adultery is not an exception to the “no divorce rule,” but the actual rending of the one flesh into two and the physical joining to another in bodily union. Coitus is always a creative work of God, even apart from children. To create a new one flesh bond is to destroy the previous marital unity. This is true biblical divorce—the actual ripping of the one flesh into two pieces. Even a valid and legal second “marriage” can be adultery in actuality. It is truly adultery, no matter what man or state may say, if the original marriage bond is still intact.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>In electronics there are male and female cables. To make a connection opposites are required. This basic and obvious fact of nature is now obscured through an emotional way of thinking.

<sup>28</sup>Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, 90.

<sup>29</sup>The statement by Jesus about God’s uniting and adultery is not practical advice. It is the reality. One commentator misses that point: “it seems unjust to take Jesus’ teaching literalistically. Jesus declares that if a wife is wrongfully divorced by her husband, then he makes her participate in adultery. Yet she is the innocent party! What is she to do . . .” Yet Christ does not say what is allowable or permissible, he merely defines adultery—a breaking of God’s union and what is condemned by “you shall not commit adultery.” Because of the one flesh union, the “innocent” wife is made an adulterer by the action of her husband. But adultery is not the worst sin or unforgivable. Nor is it an on-going sin in a legal second marriage. The Church is not concerned with interpreting laws to justify people. It demands repentance and forgives sins, even adultery. Contrary to Jesus when he said “*everyone* who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and *whoever* marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (Mt. 5), it is claimed: “There are ways in which divorce or remarriage are *not* the same as adultery. Jesus’ teaching here does not specifically address



The unity in marriage is all God's doing and only He has the authority to break the resulting unity by death. The Greek word *κολλάω* [kollao], translated as "joined" in Mt. 19:5 and I Cor. 6:16, speaks of God's uniting action. It means to glue or cement together.<sup>30</sup> So "mutual consent of the contracting parties must ever be the vital element."<sup>31</sup> Not that consent forms or keeps the union together, but it marks public entry into this natural institution. Consent to divorce does not break this union. In fact, it lasts until God breaks it through death or man breaks it through an adulterous act. "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery" (Lk. 16:18). The joining in marriage, and also outside of it, is an act of God. He physically unites two bodies together. It is He who cements and holds together the one flesh union of all people. Man has no authority to separate this creative work of the Lord. "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mt. 19:6). Marriage is and will remain entirely the Lord's work, though He acts in such a hidden way that He does not get any credit or thanks from unbelievers.

From the Church's point of view, marriage occupies a minor place in relation to the Gospel and salvation. Although every Christian must deal with marriage directly by personally entering or avoiding matrimony, and indirectly through one's parents who had to decide the same, it is not an exclusively Christian possession. Major theological works, such as Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*, hardly mention it. That is because there is no Christian marriage or special version of it just for believers. It is an *adiaphoron*, a free or indifferent thing, in view of faith which receives the righteousness of Christ.

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every conceivable situation that would allow divorce." But according to Scripture, there is no new marriage without adultery, unless God ends the union in death. The pastoral issue is rather what can be forgiven and what cannot. This commentator's conclusion shows a failure to separate law and Gospel and to take Scripture seriously: "There is a *direct* contradiction between Jesus' teaching and Paul's, unless one is willing to admit that the Lord's teaching in Matthew 5 and 19 (and for that matter, Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians) does not offer a comprehensive treatment of every conceivable situation or case." Remarriage means a previous one flesh bond, God's own work, is broken, so it always entails adultery, no matter how unfair to man. Once a new marital bond is established in valid marriage, a new one flesh union has been established by God and should be respected. Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1-11:1*, in Concordia Commentary Series: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture (St. Louis: CPH, 2006), 295-296.

<sup>30</sup>Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), 252.

<sup>31</sup>Lenski, *Marriage in the Lutheran Church*, 236.

## Order of Creation

Marriage is of the world and man's bodily nature, not the Spirit. As such, it is not regulated by the Church, but by society. This does not conflict with God's work. He is not bound by the preached Word or by belief in it, but regulates and upholds all things. Government does not join the two into one, though legal protections hopefully uphold that divine union. The state's laws do not create the one flesh reality. They merely sanction and regulate it outwardly. Society must accept marriage as a natural given of this world. Neither can the government prevent this permanent joining, since it happens in a physical act. It does, however, have the role, as God's instrument, of governing the use of marriage.

While thoroughly divine in itself, marriage is only for this world. "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Mt. 22:30). When our bodies are glorified, the distinctive bodily characteristics are not destroyed, but the use of those bodies which relate to marriage cease.

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, and deal with a heathen, Jew, or Turk, so I may also marry and continue in wedlock with him. Pay no attention to the 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, or Turk. A heathen is just as much God's good creation.<sup>32</sup>

Marriage is only for this world, not for the world to come. It is a universal good intrinsic to creation and has nothing to do with eternal life, that is, Christianity proper.

No true marriage exists apart from God's action, but bodily actions are regulated by government. Even where laws do not prescribe it, society has customs and some means of recognizing the public character of marriage and voluntary entry into this estate. "To speak of marriage is to talk about humanity."<sup>33</sup> The command "you shall not commit adultery" does not explain or encourage marriage, it simply assumes it.<sup>34</sup> This world must have marriage to continue and

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<sup>32</sup>Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), LW 45:25.

<sup>33</sup>Wilhelm Maurer, *Historical Commentary on the Augsburg Confession*, trans. H. George Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 165.

<sup>34</sup>Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, 77.

prosper. “Marriage is the most important legal contract in every society.”<sup>35</sup> It is more than a legal matter. It is the basis for earthly life and is prior to government.

Marriage is “an independent social institution ordained by God and equal in dignity and social responsibility with the church, state and other estates of society.”<sup>36</sup> In fact, as a natural, God-given estate, marriage is older than government and has priority over it. The state simply accepts this creation of God as an undeniable institution and regulates entry into it and legal exit from it. “While marriage is a divine institution the form in which a marriage is contracted is determined by the society in which the marriage takes place; and while it is true that [consent makes matrimony], that consent must have the approval of the social organism in which it occurs before the marriage is valid.”<sup>37</sup> What most human societies and reasonable natural philosophy say of marriage is accurate: “Marriage has been described as biological act, as a legal contract, and as an economic arrangement.”<sup>38</sup> Oneness in body includes oneness in outward things. Though marriage has nothing to do with salvation, “the reformers were far removed from the thought of surrendering marriage to the profane, that is, to an order detached from God.”<sup>39</sup> Marriage relies on God’s internal, active word that forms and upholds the creation and creatures. It is not based on any mediated externals, such as the participation of ministers, the preached Gospel, or regulatory law of the state.<sup>40</sup>

Regulative activity is not creative activity. One is derived, while the other is the exact, ever-sure activity of the living God. Even though couples, ministers, and civil servants claim to

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<sup>35</sup>Bronislaw Malinowski, “Marriage,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 14th ed. (1929), quoted in: Lenski, *Marriage in the Lutheran Church*, 8.

<sup>36</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 6.

<sup>37</sup>Johann Michael Reu, *Christian Ethics* (Columbus, OH: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1935), 266-67.

<sup>38</sup>“Marriage,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 261.

<sup>39</sup>Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions 1529-1537*, trans. Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 291.

<sup>40</sup>“The blessing of the ministry is necessary for rightly entering upon marriage, not from any special divine command, nor because of the nature of marriage, as though it were not complete without the consecration of the ministry, but on account of the ecclesiastical and civil arrangement introduced with reference to the public advantage and honor. The blessing, by the ministry, is not required for the essence of the thing itself, but for a public witness of it, so it may be evident to all that the marriage is contracted lawfully and honorably. ... In the forum of conscience and before God, a marriage is true and valid which has been entered upon with the legitimate and matrimonial consent of both parties, even though the blessing of the ministry be not added.” Johann Gerhard, quoted in: Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1875; reprint, Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publishing, 1961), 621.

“marry,” God is the one who joins the two bodies into one. He does not delegate this uniting, just as sure as He made everyone male or female and does not give that choice away. The word “the two shall become one flesh” cannot fail in its aim, though people do sin and break what God has joined. It is not human acknowledgment or acceptance of this divine word that makes it efficacious. God has bound Himself through it to the end of time. We may say every marriage is a miracle, a divine working of God, because it is. God unites apart from faith, the Word of Christ, or knowledge of Him.

Even though canon law forbidding marriage was *de facto* civil law for them, Lutherans asserted that the marriage estate was independent of church and state. They argued on the basis of divine creation: “just as the nature of the earth cannot be changed by human laws, so neither can human nature be changed by vows or by human law without a special act of God.” “Since natural law is immutable, the right to contract marriages must always remain.” But nature cannot be separated from its creator and upholder: “a natural right is truly a divine right, because it is an order divinely stamped upon nature.”<sup>41</sup> Man may try to change nature (as transsexuals superficially attempt) and marriage, but both are as fixed as male and female, by God’s design and present working.

Even today, for all attempts to redefine legal matrimony, homosexual unions are not popular. This brisk sweeping away of legal precedent is really not about marriage, *per se*, but a strident pursuit of supposed equality and civil rights. Since no children are born from these fictitious “marriages,” their longevity is finite. On the contrary, no one is advocating that it is good to be alone, so it is a devilish perversion of the godly aim for which we were created. God is working in the world, pushing man and woman into His work of marriage. Marriage itself cannot be changed, though the people who enter it can have false expectations and assumptions regarding this permanent fixture of creation. Man can rebel against it, but no other solution is workable, practically, for the survival of the human race. God has not made us for any other arrangement, so marriage will endure.

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<sup>41</sup>Ap XXIII:8, 9, 12; *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 249.

## Purposes

Marriage's God-given purposes are built-in. They do not require knowledge of God or the Gospel. In fact, at times, pagan philosophers have been closer to the truth than Christian theologians about the aims of marital union. There has always been a strong spiritualizing impulse which devalues marriage by defining it by one of its purposes. But the essence of marriage, being joined as one flesh, is sure even without faith or its intended purposes being fulfilled.

“The Western tradition inherited from ancient Greece and Rome the idea that marriage is a union of a single man and single women who unite for the purposes of mutual love and friendship, and mutual procreation and nurture of children.”<sup>42</sup> The three stereotypical Lutheran purposes are: “1) the preservation of the human race, by the begetting and education of offspring 2) mutual assistance 3) a remedy against sinful desires.”<sup>43</sup> Instead of love, Christians traditionally spoke of “assistance” or “aid,” in view of Eve being Adam’s “helpmeet” (Gen. 2:28). Also, the Christian emphasis on procreation focused more on the negative goal of regulating sexual desire. Since children are God’s work, the intention to procreate is not needed. The marital act, in general, will lead to it. If the conjugal duty is fulfilled and not frustrated, God works by His creative word so we must “be fruitful and multiply.”

Marriage becomes deformed when one of the purposes dominates and replaces the essence of marital union, God’s inherent working. Children are the logical and matter-of-fact result of physical union, it appears. But this seemingly natural occurrence is actually God working through the created means of male and female. “It pleases [God] to conceal himself in marriage, in which he lets men and women think they bring forth the children into the world, ‘but it is he who does so, hidden behind these masks.’”<sup>44</sup>

Many early church fathers and especially the late Roman church, embarrassed by physical union and the sinful passion exhibited in it, elevated a purpose above the essence. They made procreation the only valid reason to be physically united with another as one flesh, as if sexual

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<sup>42</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 17.

<sup>43</sup>Johann Gerhard, quoted in: Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 621.

<sup>44</sup>Quoting Martin Luther, “Psalm 147” (1531), LW 14:114; Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Evansville, IN: Ballast Press, 1999), 138.

union was a concession for the sake of children—not a good and divinely ordained activity in itself. The Roman church’s elevation of celibacy, as well the later sacramental theology foisted upon marriage, both devalued God’s uniting in a similar way. Sexual union, the conjugal or marital duty St. Paul speaks of, is a good in itself. It confirms and renews the marital union and should not be avoided, since one’s body belongs and has been joined to the other.

During the Middle Ages, when children were considered a vital and necessary economic element of marriage, barrenness was sometimes cited as a reason to divorce a wife. The reverse is what a concubine gave: companionship and sexual satisfaction, apart from legitimate children.<sup>45</sup> That was not considered a valid marriage, though many marry today based on the assumption they will not have children. Both extremes are wrong: putting children above the union and also thinking they have no role in marriage. Children are not inherent to marriage, though to enter a marriage denying that it could lead to a family reveals a defective view.

Although children don’t make a union, marriage is the location God chooses to give them. This is where man’s natural desire leads. Lutherans, unlike Rome, do not look down on unprocreative uniting. Though sin affects everything man does, coitus is good within the marital state and is used for a divine purpose: God’s creating of life. Sexual union, a true uniting and renewing of God’s work is a good in itself, apart from intentions. This is shown from nature, but also Scripture:

But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control (I Cor. 7:2-5).

This duty within marriage is neither optional, nor an individual’s right to refuse. But the absence of this purpose, if it is not possible, does not harm the marital bond created by God.

Without marriage, man in abstract must sexually sin. No one without the divine gift of celibacy can restrain this working of God, which leads to marriage and children. Men are “too

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<sup>45</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 20.

tempted to forgo God’s remedy of marriage.”<sup>46</sup> Notice, marriage serves a negative function for the Christian. It does not grant forgiveness or holiness, but is a restraint and protection for the flesh. “Marriage restrains and controls sexuality, which has been distorted by sin, by providing structures and limits. Without marriage the sexual drive would lead to prostitution and similar unchastity, which would not merely destroy the soul but also the body, property, honor, and friendship.”<sup>47</sup> Therefore, everyone should be married who cannot easily control their sexual urges. These impulsive desires are partially sinful, no doubt, but also partially divine, a working of God which drives us to the estate of marriage and multiplication.

Due to child preventing technology, economic independence, and flexible morals, a modern “marriage” does not have to exist for any of the three purposes. While these purposes do not form or define marriage, they should be seen as part and parcel with becoming one flesh. While few in the history of the world have married solely to have children, family could not be avoided easily either. People got married for a less wholesome reason (because they do not want to burn with passion), which did not invalidate their unions. Man’s reasons or intents do not constitute the natural purposes for which marriage exists—these purposes are divinely stamped on man. This is why the Lutheran reformers’ sexual realism insisted that “one of the fundamental goods and goals of marriage was to protect from sexual sin.” After the fall, marriage is not an intrinsic good and blessing for all people. Yet, it is still unavoidable for most, even though “it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman” (I Cor. 7:1). Marriage is free to the conscience in faith, but not to the body for most. Marriage is “a basically social institution into which two persons enter, with an objective, formal character, and determined by a clear end.”<sup>48</sup> When marriage loses its public character and predefined aims, mischief results and Satan is pleased.

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<sup>46</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 6.

<sup>47</sup>Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 85.

<sup>48</sup>Paige Hochschild, “What are Children For?,” in *First Things*, (Jan. 2013), 43.

## All Conquering Love

Love is commonly defined as an emotion. Internal feeling and passions have become an authority, eroding marriage as a worldly estate. But the public institution requires only outward duties and actions, not inner passion or heart-felt romance. One book of marriage history is accurately subtitled: “How Love Conquered Marriage.”<sup>49</sup> Since the Reformation, the institution of marriage has become less institutionalized. The divine purposes, considered to be outdated, have been detached and made optional. While marriage itself, as God’s Work, has not changed, the reasons to get married and the expectations that accompany marriage have been altered by “love.”

One of the forerunners of a modern understanding of marriage is Martin Bucer (1491-1551), a contemporary of Luther. “Bucer stressed the character of marriage as a fellowship, a relationship of mutual love.”

The essence of marriage is that the parties “not only live together under the same roof but do so to each other’s advantage in love and mutual helpfulness, as each is able to do for the other.” . . . Bucer believed that if this all-important element of mutual love and service is lost, then marriage ceases to exist in essence, even though it may continue to exist formally or externally.”<sup>50</sup>

If love, that is, affection and feeling, is taken as primary and even necessary, God’s Work is denied. Legal divorce will then become more accessible, apart from the actual breaking of the marriage bond. Bucer, in his naiveté, thought marrying and staying married only for love would stabilize society. We see the end of this kind of thinking, which paints marriage as only a personal relationship, malleable by each one’s private whims. Couples routinely write their own vows, thinking they shape marriage, including its purposes and longevity.

Over the last several hundred years love as the essence of marriage became dominant and suppressed the natural purposes and public character of marriage. First, “mutual aid,” referring to outward duties and an implied mutuality, was replaced with subjective feelings of passion. “Mutual aid,” in contrast to “companionship,” refers to an ordering within marriage, since the wife is called the “helpmeet” or “helper” (Gen. 2:18). The woman was made for man and does

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<sup>49</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*.

<sup>50</sup>N. Scott Amos, “Review of H. J. Selderhuis: *Marriage and Divorce in the Thought of Marin Bucer*,” in *Westminster Theological Journal*, 62/1 (2000), 150.



not have priority: “for Adam was formed first, then Eve” (I Tim. 2:13). This implies specific roles within marriage for each gender, but this understanding has largely been lost. More recently, children have been logically separated from marriage. Few marry expecting or allowing children as the result of their conjugal duty, so that children are not seen as a divine blessing within marriage, but tools to achieve selfish gratification and fulfillment. Children are now seen as optional, if not conflicting with marriage, primarily because they denigrate the real purpose for which most get married: a perceived internal closeness and a withdrawing, selfish companionship. The result is that today marriage is not seen as an institution, but a private, formless relationship. A married individual is typically answerable to no one, not even one’s spouse or the marriage vow, but only one’s fickle heart.

“Until the late eighteenth century, most societies around the world saw marriage as far too vital an economic and political institution to be left entirely to the free choice of the two individuals involved, especially if they were going to base their decision on something as unreasoning and transitory as love.”<sup>51</sup> Marriage was not about individuals, it was about society at large and governed according to strict laws. When divorce, even in the case of adultery, became legal in England in 1658, it required “a private act of Parliament.” The result: “There was only one divorce every five or six years.”<sup>52</sup> It was not pure love that held husband and wives together, but pure compulsion.

Enlightenment writers spoke of equality, apart from the Gospel, with vigor and, a few generations later, some “called for absolute equality of husband and wife.”<sup>53</sup> The ideological structure of marriage started shifting in the 18th century, though the fruits and logical results were not visible until the last half century. Today “marriage” is essentially a meaningless word, conveying none of the traditional purposes or public elements once considered so critical. It has become a private, malleable, and tenuous contract.

This contractarian gospel for the reformation of Western marriage law was too radical

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<sup>51</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 5.

<sup>52</sup>In accord with Roman theological thinking, separation (from bed and board) was allowed for adultery and similar causes, but not remarriage, since it was legal bigamy in England. “God could even use a broken marriage to communicate his sacramental grace.” Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 256, 268.

<sup>53</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 11.

to transform much of the law of the nineteenth century, though it did induce greater protections for wives and children in their person and properties and easier suits for divorce. But this contractarian gospel anticipated much of the agenda for the transformation of marriage law in the twentieth century, particularly in America. . . . the early enlightenment call for the privatization of marriage and the family has come to greater expression in new cultural and constitutional norms and habits of privacy, equality, and sexual autonomy.<sup>54</sup>

What now seems radical and momentous about marriage has been hundreds of years in the making.

“Until the late seventeenth century the family was thought of as a miniature monarchy, with the husband king over his dependents.”<sup>55</sup> It was an absolute rule, not subject to many, if any, limitations. But as love and companionship wedged itself into the definition marriage, traditional gender roles stood in the way of societal progress. Love was more easily fostered when men and women were equals in authority, not ordered in a divine hierarchy. Subjective feelings were pitted against divinely commanded duties and functions. Divorce was rare and exceptional, even for physical abuse, since it did not serve society’s benefit. But as the interior, passionate heart of marriage came to be centralized, divorce naturally became the answer to a loveless marriage. Previously, “early death by one spouse was the most common cure for broken marriages.”<sup>56</sup> Once the private, contractual view of marriage came to prominence, there was no logical reason to stay in a less than fulfilling marriage. Neither society’s expectations nor public laws required it. So presently, couples can divorce easily and for no other reason than that emotions have tilted. This is what many married individuals have historically felt and sought, but had no recourse. The consequence is that feelings can supposedly dissolve the public institution.

The spouse ceased to be a workmate and instead became a soulmate, with no definable role.<sup>57</sup> Duties specified by God-given gender gave way to feelings which are genderless. Divinized emotions, however, are unpredictable and unstable for organizing families and society. “The husband, once the supervisor of the family labor force, came to be seen as the person who, by himself, provided for the family. The wife’s role was redefined to focus on her emotional

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<sup>54</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 11.

<sup>55</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 148.

<sup>56</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 328.

<sup>57</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 68.

and moral contributions to family life rather than her economic inputs. The husband was the family's economic motor, the wife its sentimental core."<sup>58</sup> This is the traditional 1950's "Leave it to Beaver" model of marriage, which led directly to entirely emotion-based unions.<sup>59</sup> It was a significant move away from marriage as a divine institution with defined outward roles based on gender.

Now marriage is seen "as essentially an emotional union."<sup>60</sup> "Americans marry to enhance their inner, largely secret selves."<sup>61</sup> These interior unions gave rise to "disembodied love," one not dependent on nature, anatomy, society's well-being, or specific roles.<sup>62</sup> Marriage is under the "bewitchment and tyranny of love."<sup>63</sup>

If love and equality, not roles and sexual complementarity, rule marriage, nature is not the starting point. Instead, married individuals suppose that they remain separated physically, united only by the active agreement of both wills. They only act as one when it is convenient—they do not believe they are united as one flesh. So the compassionate heart and perceived utility of each marriage determines its continuing validity. What Francis Osborne (1593–1659) proposed long ago is now the basic, cultural understanding: "marriages [should] be made annually renewable contracts, rescindable at will by either party."<sup>64</sup> Marriage, if unpleasant or hindering either individual, is an evil to be discarded. While this denies the physical union affected by God, it does allow primacy to the impossible claim that "all God's children have the right to feel good."<sup>65</sup> Structure, public and inherent functions, and even marriage itself, are seen as contradictory to the union of souls. Sex is then an expression of love that can be withheld (as punishment), not a basic duty to be rendered according to divine mandate.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 146.

<sup>59</sup>This program holds the distinction of being the first to show a toilet tank and "among the earliest programs to show a bathroom in any form." It also featured a family with only two children, still the modern ideal for many. "Potty Time," *Snopes* (<http://www.snopes.com/radiotv/tv/firsttoilet.asp>).

<sup>60</sup>Sherif Girgis and Ryan Anderson and Robert P. George, *What is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012), 7.

<sup>61</sup>Paul Bohannon, *All the Happy Families: Exploring the Varieties of Family Life*, quoted in: Fisher, *Anatomy of Love*, 111.

<sup>62</sup>"Response to Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust: A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations" (LCMS, April 2012; <http://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=1820>), 2.

<sup>63</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 147.

<sup>64</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 268.

<sup>65</sup>Joy Browne, *Dating for Dummies* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2011; 3rd. ed.), 374.

<sup>66</sup>"The modern home has been freed from the social and economic dominance of family and its economic and

Unreliable feelings have replaced structure, laws, and roles. “Westerners adore love. We symbolize it, fear it, envy it, live for it, and die for it.”<sup>67</sup> Even the idea of a fixed gender or sexual orientation is seen to hinder the god of love. But this idea of love has more in common with drugs than any public institution or outward duties. Love provides a temporary high, but also leaves one with a powerful withdrawal.<sup>68</sup> Marriage, as an outside influence and legal institution, hinders the “pure relationship” of the inner person.<sup>69</sup>

Tragically, people expect too much from marriage today, not too little. Formerly, love was not something one fell into, but tiptoed into. Obedience to father and then husband, not mutual love, was the expectation for women. Since marriage is not considered practical today, about the body, or for society’s good, it aims for the heavens. Children are sold on the romantic dream of being fulfilled and in love with a person’s soul. A single individual is sought to complete them spiritually—to be a best friend, edifying intellectual companion, and passionate lover.<sup>70</sup> For most, marriage is not about the uniting of male and female, it is actually about each individual’s heart-felt needs which remain superior to any notions of unity. Moderns essentially marry an ideal of love, not a person, and stay true to it, not the outward facade of marriage. Love has conquered marriage as a public institution. For centuries this gradual dismantling has propelled society to the “ultimate conclusion” that “people could construct meaningful lives outside of marriage and that not everything in society had to be organized through and around married couples.”<sup>71</sup>

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political authority. The household is no longer a necessary conveyance of land, wealth, and social function. It has been freed, so we moderns believe, for a reformation of love.” Matzko McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home: A Theology of the Household* (London: SCM Press, 2001; 2nd ed., 2004), 21.

<sup>67</sup>Fisher, *Anatomy of Love*, 165.

<sup>68</sup>“You’re gone and I gotta stay/ High all the time/ To keep you off my mind/ . . . Spend my days locked in a haze/ Trying to forget you babe/ I fall back down/ Gotta stay high all my life/ To forget I’m missing you.” 2014 song “Habits” by Tove Lo.

<sup>69</sup>McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home*, 209.

<sup>70</sup>No wonder people are hesitant to get married—that’s a tall order. But if God does the joining, agreement on the basics, like family, religion, sex, and money, should produce a content union.

<sup>71</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 307.

## Spiritualizing

The history of marriage is a long series of attempts to elevate the creaturely to the divine. Lutherans uniquely positioned marriage as a basic, non-religious fact of this world, while also confessing that it is a work of God. This doctrinal understanding not only runs counter to early Christian thought and medieval Roman practice, but also enthusiastic theology and modern paganism. Today, people think of marriage as a spiritual experience and love as both intoxicating and as close to the divine as one may get.<sup>72</sup>

Love in current thinking is a god, meaning one's heart and passion decide what marriage should look like. To continue in a loveless union is the grossest immorality in present thought. The "false gods" of the social institution and purposes fixed by gender are pitted against the "true god" of love within the soul.

We have this idea that love is supposed to last forever. But love isn't like that. It is a free-flowing energy that comes and goes where it pleases. Sometimes it stays for life; other times it stays for a second, a day, a month, or a year. So don't fear when it comes simply because it makes you vulnerable. But don't be surprised when it leaves, either. Just be glad you had the opportunity to experience.<sup>73</sup>

Love can override public structure, physical realities, and the public good. This is why some see marriage itself as a hostile enemy to the romantic relationship.

This is not a new phenomenon, but deep-seated romantic thinking mated with godless morality and lawless laws. The spiritualizing of love has deep roots in Christian thinking. The early church father Tertullian said: "Where there is one flesh, there is also one spirit."<sup>74</sup> There has been a tendency since the earliest days of Christianity to make marriage into a spiritual power, going beyond the words of its institution. "Adultery of the soul" was said to be the result of marrying outside the faith at the Council of Elvira (300-309).<sup>75</sup> Despite such statements, mar-

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<sup>72</sup> "Never had much faith in love or miracles / Never wanna put my heart on the line / But swimming in your water is something spiritual / I'm born again every time you spend the night / 'Cause your sex takes me to paradise . . . You bring me to my knees, you make me testify / You can make a sinner change his ways / Open up your gates 'cause I can't wait to see the light / And right there is where I wanna stay / 'Cause your sex takes me to paradise." Bruno Mars' pop song "Locked Out Of Heaven" was released in 2012.

<sup>73</sup> Neil Strauss, *The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists* (New York: ReganBooks, 2005) 193.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in: Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 64.

<sup>75</sup> Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 62.

riage was not a church matter until around 1000 A.D. It was left to local customs and not even recognized by an ecclesiastical ceremony.<sup>76</sup> The sacramentalizing of marriage began a trend of Rome asserting civil dominance through church laws governing marriage.

Rome built a sacramental theology of marriage upon Augustinian precedent and a misunderstanding of Ephesians 5. The Greek word μυστήριον (mystery) was translated in the Latin Vulgate as *sacramentum* in Eph. 5:32. Misinterpretation caused theologians to not fully grasp the mystery of the Gospel presented in that text, but it did provide a toehold for spiritualizing marriage. “Medieval Catholics would say, that a Christian marriage remains indissoluble because God’s mysterious union with his church is permanent even if its members fall into sin.”<sup>77</sup> In the words of an Orthodox theologian, echoing the same spiritualizing sentiment: “The sacrament of the Church embodies the ideal vision of Christian marriage and graces the couple with the potentialities to realize it.”<sup>78</sup> Despite marital language representing and symbolizing Christ’s love for the Church, the sacrament of marriage is essentially law, enforcing a permanency that does not exist in the case of adultery. In the sacrament “this union of husband and wife symbolized the enduring union of Christ and His Church, and conferred sanctifying grace upon the couple and their children,” making it “an indissoluble bond broken by the death of one of the parties.”<sup>79</sup> Still today, Rome holds that there are two types of marriage: civil and sacramental.

If marriage is spiritual, it is regulated by clerics, not the state. Since marriage is essentially an order of this world, it involves dealing with worldly matters. Since God does the positive work of uniting, the church magisterium becomes a law-making body in place of the government. Commanding people to be Christ-like does not enable married couples to fulfill this lofty ideal. No marriage has this kind of selfless love, since it is populated with sinners through and through.

Though it sounds like Rome elevates marriage by making it a sacrament, that is not the case. It is a lessor estate than celibacy, which the holier clergy occupy, according to their law first promulgated in 1139. While intercourse is necessary for children, it is looked down on and not

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<sup>76</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 106. Lenski, *Marriage in the Lutheran Church*, 240, 248.

<sup>77</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 71.

<sup>78</sup>Alkiviadis C. Calivas, “Marriage: The Sacrament of Love and Communion,” in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 40:3-4 (1995), 252.

<sup>79</sup>John Witte Jr., *Law and Protestantism: The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 17.

even viewed as intrinsic to marriage. Combined with speculation about the perpetual virginity of Mary, her marriage to Joseph is termed a “spiritual marriage.”<sup>80</sup> Even today, the Orthodox commend spouses living together as “brother and sister.”<sup>81</sup> These teachings are contrary to marriage and relegate a natural, divinely created, fleshly union, to secondhand status. Chemnitz cuts to the heart of the matter:

What do you suppose is the reason why papalists argue so strongly that matrimony is to be numbered among the sacraments of the new law? Are they so friendly to matrimony? Are they so greatly inclined to honor its worth? By no means! They forbid wedlock to their holy men, and that for this reason, they may be able to be pure. . . . No, they have many causes [to make it a sacrament], namely, that matrimonial matters may be subject only to ecclesiastical judges in order that they may be able to impose their prohibitions and their implementation as snares on the consciences of men; that they may sell dispensations all the more dearly; that it may not be permitted to the innocent party after a divorce again to contract marriage permitted by divine right . . . because second marriages are really a kind of fornication and prostitution.<sup>82</sup>

When marriage is said to have a spiritual character, then it must have some relation to faith. It becomes more than a one flesh union, contrary to Scripture—a limited “eternal bond” that ends with the death of one party. Canon law recognized many impediments to a sacramental marriage, including “spiritual fornication, one party’s abandonment of the faith.”<sup>83</sup> Not only that, but the definition of incest was extended to an unfathomable degree. “Spiritual incest,” having an affinity to one’s baptismal sponsor, was also legislated against. Luther’s marriage to Katie was particularly scandalous since it was “double spiritual incest,” involving a priest and a nun.<sup>84</sup> While divorce was not possible, annulments were given at a price. A marriage that has been consummated with children and grandchildren can be made null, as if they were

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<sup>80</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 93.

<sup>81</sup>“In very pious families [total abstinence] is not at all as uncommon, either today or yesterday, as one might think. It often happens that after an Orthodox husband and wife have brought a number of children into this world, they agree to abstain from one another, both for spiritual and worldly reasons, living the rest of their lives in peace and harmony as brother and sister. This has happened in the lives of saints—most notably in the life of Saint John of Kronstadt. As a Church which very much cherishes and protects monastic life, we Orthodox have no fear of celibacy, and no silly ideas about how we will not be fulfilled or happy if we cease to have sexual activity with our spouse.” Alexey Young, “The Orthodox Christian Marriage,” in *Orthodox America*, vol. 156:8 (1998; <http://www.roca.org/OA/155-156/155h.htm>).

<sup>82</sup>Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), II:729.

<sup>83</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 100.

<sup>84</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 116.

never married sacramentally, and so are free to remarry, if the church so rules. To sacramentalize natural marriage is actually to denigrate that which was originally made good by God the Father.

Lutherans had to fight this spiritualizing of marriage on two fronts. Other protestants incorporated elements of Roman thinking, while denying its sacramental character. The Formula of Concord records this “intolerable article” of the Anabaptists: “That married people may divorce for the sake of faith and abandon the other marriage partner, and then marry another who shares the same faith.”<sup>85</sup> “In this conception a true marriage is the union of believers, a fellowship so spiritual that the unifying bond may be considered to be severed when the one party or the other, by unworthy conduct or unbelief, disturbs, destroys or vitiates the spiritual harmony of the faith which is regarded as its basis.”<sup>86</sup> This view of marriage makes it man’s work to create and uphold a union, in spite of the spiritual language. If marriage depends on an individual’s beliefs, then it can never be a sure union. It must be firm and divine apart from the Gospel or else God’s work in uniting is minimized.<sup>87</sup>

Even Calvin, though not advocating divorce for spiritual reasons, added “a spiritual dimension” to marriage.<sup>88</sup> “God is the third party to every marriage, Calvin believed.”<sup>89</sup> While this could be understood correctly, the church’s role in forming a marriage implied a Christian element not present in pagan marriage. Marriage, in Calvinist thought, is a covenant, “rendering all marriages triparty agreements, with God as third-party witness, participant, and judge.”<sup>90</sup> This law-based emphasis, which de-emphasizes God’s unitive work, is an element of American thought mediated through Anglicanism.

“Luther’s application of evangelical theology to marriage and family desacramentalized marriage; desacralized the clergy and resacralized the life of the laity; opposed the maze of canonical impediments to marriage; strove to unravel the tangled skein of canon law, imperial law, and

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<sup>85</sup>Ep XII:19; Kolb/Wengert, 521.

<sup>86</sup>Lenski, *Marriage in the Lutheran Church*, 101.

<sup>87</sup>One believes alone, but in marriage the two are joined into one flesh. The one cannot believe for the other, nor does one’s unbelief affect the other. The unbelieving spouse and children are “sanctified” by the believer. Being married to a pagan or having unbelieving children do not separate from Christ or make one “unclean” before God. (I Cor. 7:14).

<sup>88</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 9.

<sup>89</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 207.

<sup>90</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 7-8.



German customs; and joyfully affirmed God's good creation, including sexual relations."<sup>91</sup> But making marriage worldly did not deny its divine origin or validity.

Luther does not contradict his description of marriage as a holy and spiritual station when he also refers to it as an outward physical, secular, or worldly station, and speaks of the marriage ceremony as a worldly affair. This means that marriage belongs to the natural order of creation and not to the order of redemption in Christ.<sup>92</sup>

God works in nature, apart from the Gospel. Faith is bound to the external Word of Christ, but Christ is not. What makes marriage holy is that God Himself forms the one flesh union. Faith in Christ sees marriage as God-pleasing and the place to honor Him. Luther makes the outward life holy, but not a means of salvation. Marriage is had by all, so by itself it does nothing to bring grace.

What man deems religious and spiritual is usually about his works and efforts. In marriage the pagan denies God's hidden, physical work. But as with daily bread, the Christian sees God working in a way that looks completely mundane. In trusting Christ as the revelation of God, everything becomes religious, though marriage itself is not changed one iota. Only Christ justifies, not the work of having a spouse. Man is a fleshly creature, therefore he cannot live in only a spiritual way as a genderless person. This is true for all, but through faith the justified man fulfills his physical role with the Spirit, in love. "Nothing should be called religious except that inner life of faith in the heart, where the Spirit rules." The pure teaching of Christ's imputed righteousness allows marriage to be an outward, yet divine work. Therefore, Luther could boast: "Matrimony is the most religious state of all."<sup>93</sup>

In Lutheran thought marriage is freed to be God's action, not man's. Using Scripture to fight this internal and inescapable word of God, which impels our nature and desires, is evil and harmful. Man is made for marriage and the body usually demands it—not the Bible. A person holy by faith in Christ's righteousness can certainly live in marriage in a God-pleasing way. Because this union is created by the same God revealed to us in Christ, marriage itself is divine. Belief in the Gospel does not change our nature or marital duties, but they are seen in

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<sup>91</sup>Lindberg, "Martin Luther on Marriage and the Family," 28.

<sup>92</sup>Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, 89.

<sup>93</sup>Luther, *Commentary on I Corinthians 7* (1523), LW 28:17.

an entirely new, divine light. Faith does not add new purposes or works, for this would be to impose law through the Gospel. Though marriage is a legal institution, it becomes free in the Gospel. If occupied it becomes the primary place for good works—the very works most despised by the world. Marital relations become a holy, loving, and neighborly work in faith. Inordinate passion is not excused, but is forgiven. God uses man and woman’s desire to bring forth children, and bearing and raising them is seen as a God-given privilege. So God is not divorced from this world, but He is allowed to be God exactly where He wills to work, through renewal of the Spirit in Baptism and in the most worldly and secular of matters—marriage.

The spiritual, who see marriage as God’s work, do not need laws to compel them to faithfulness. By removing outward marriage laws from church authority, consciences are freed. The same laws then govern all people, but do so outwardly through earthly authorities. Marriage is an entirely outward order. Faith is not needed for a divine marriage because every marriage is truly divine. Therefore, the Church is not a law-making authority to enforce what should be obvious to Christians, that sexual immorality is wrong and that adultery breaks God’s work. Christ’s Word addresses the conscience. It does not undo or destroy God’s natural works.

Lutherans actually introduced divorce. While this sounds heretical, God’s work can be put asunder, that is, broken. Adultery does break the divinely created bond of marriage. The innocent party, who is made for marriage, does not have to suffer unjustly in an unnatural state of celibacy. This “absolute divorce on proof of cause” reinstated the natural and divine right to marry.<sup>94</sup>

In many ways, marriage is presently not a secular matter, but the spiritual summit of life and the most intense personal choice. In olden days one married a suitable next door neighbor. Now a perfect and compatible soul-match is sought among millions of suitors. How many have faith that there is one correct partner to complete them and search for that one as they should salvation in Christ? Love, or *eros*, is thought to be a way to self-fulfillment and possibly a pathway to the divine. And this has caused much mischief. Eastern religious language, like “soulmate” is often used, a decidedly spiritual word. Pagan sexual enthusiasm has replaced Roman celibacy

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<sup>94</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 139.

as the dominant form of spiritualizing. Sexual gratification, not outward gender, has become the central theme of everything.<sup>95</sup> Thanks to people like Sigmund Freud, sexuality has been elevated, worshiped, and made the undercurrent of all human discourse.

If marriage is really “a wedding of two souls,” what place do the created body and natural works play?<sup>96</sup> Very little in current thought, hence the acceptance of homosexual relationships through civil marriage law. After all, “No government can tell people who to love.”<sup>97</sup> The modern “movement [is] not so much of incremental secularization as of intermittent resacralization of Western marriage . . . dependent on faith-like beliefs in liberty, equality, autonomy, and more.”<sup>98</sup> Separated from public duties, family, and societal implications, marriage serves no real purpose in the minds of most if it is not spiritually uplifting. It has ceased to become a practical way of life and necessary institution. Governments have obliged by withdrawing laws regulating physical behavior to give room to the spiritual, internal love of the soul. Marriage is too religious and spiritualized, so making it more Christian is not the answer.

## Two Kingdoms

A government cannot be Christian. It cannot believe in Christ or be cleansed from sin. But it does have divine authority to regulate the body and punish with the power of the sword. There is no contradiction between state and Church. The same God authorizes both, so marriage that is regulated by the government is not less holy. After all, laws about marriage, even lousy ones, do not disturb true marriage. Even in America, where marriage has been redefined (or undefined), God works unhindered. No true marriage is forbidden and the Christian does not take moral

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<sup>95</sup> “Among some [Hindi] *shakti* cults, the experience of transcending space and time and of releasing the identity and unity of the divine in all things is also expressed through the ritual satisfaction of lust as a means of release from the cycle of rebirth. In this context, ritual copulation becomes (for males only) a sacred rite in experiencing and participating in cosmic and divine processes. The very mystery of shakti cults (Shaktism) is the realization of the identity of God and his creative energy. Sexual relationships, therefore, help to transcend all opposites—but only among intimates, since participation in such rites is conditional on the capacity of merging one’s mind with the Supreme Being.” S. A. Nigosian, *World Faiths* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 100.

<sup>96</sup> “Intense love and desire for union are understood as arising from similar causes, whoever the partners may be.” Ruth Vanita, “‘Wedding of Two Souls:’ Same-Sex Marriage in Hindu Traditions,” in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 20:2 (Fall 2004), 24.

<sup>97</sup> Vanita, “Wedding of Two Souls,” 119.

<sup>98</sup> Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 12.

direction from government. No-fault divorce laws do not disturb the Holy Spirit, and the state does not compel unfaithfulness to one's spouse. The government works in an entirely different way and realm. There is no conflict for one with the mind of Christ.

The author of marriage speaks a comforting word, not through nature or man's works, but in Christ Jesus who died and rose. "The civil authority, no less than the ministry, is an estate appointed by God."<sup>99</sup> Government actually serves salvation, though in a negative way, by curbing sin and providing peace and order. The state acts by coercing and threatening punishment. The righteous in Christ have no need of such force, since "the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine" (I Tim. 1:9-10). "Therefore marriage is a matter of the Law and not of the Gospel. It is God's bulwark against sin, and in no way a sanctifying means of grace."<sup>100</sup>

The Church preaches repentance and forgives in the name of Christ. It does not regulate the body or demand marriage. It speaks to all people, married or not, a spiritual, justifying word. What Christ spoke about adultery is not applicable to governing the general populace, or else all would be in prison: "everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt. 5:27). Divorce is always an evil, as is lust. But the state can allow legal divorce for the unrighteous, because there are worse things.<sup>101</sup> Can a liberal divorce law prevent fidelity and Christian love within a marriage? No, the spiritual person is made so by Christ's Spirit, not by outward laws which control behavior. Christ rules so that the heart begins to love in a spiritual way, while the body continues to need discipline and mandates. The government should regulate actions, while the Church should apply the spiritual law and the forgiving promise. When each does its job, there is no overlap, because both are God's hands and do divine works.

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<sup>99</sup>Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 616.

<sup>100</sup>Buitendag, "Marriage in the Theology of Martin Luther," 452.

<sup>101</sup>40% of female murders are committed by those at one time romantically involved. Elizabeth Flock, "WHO Study: Forty Percent of Murdered Women Killed By Their Partners" (June 21, 2013), <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2013/06/21/who-study-forty-percent-of-murdered-women-killed-by-their-partners>.

Only a person can be forgiven, and everything is righteous to him who is justified. “The spiritual character of the [marital] relationship is neither established by the religious service nor disturbed by secular legislation regarding marriage.”<sup>102</sup> It is an independent estate, but when God is known as good in Christ, a unity will be seen in God’s working, both spiritual and natural. Christians are to obey Caesar as long as he does not command sin. This includes state laws regulating marriage, as long they do not forbid marriage or demand a violation of God’s Word. “Civil magistrates, directing marriage and enforcing law and order . . . are God’s agents as much as are the ordained and called ministers of the clergy who preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments.”<sup>103</sup> “The Church’s recognition of civil weddings—which perhaps lack the religious symbolism of a church ceremony—acknowledges the right of the state to regulate marriage as it does with other social institutions.”<sup>104</sup> The Church does not “Christianize” marriages, as if a different god unites outside the walls of a church building or a particular faith. On the contrary, only a person who is first spiritual can see marriage as a holy way to live. But to the unmarried, being celibate is holy and a divine calling also.

St. Paul legitimizes this approach of not making marriage a religious work in itself:

if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. . . . But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. . . . Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches (I Cor. 7:12-17).

The Gospel does not command anything concerning the outward ordinance of marriage. It is left as a free work of God in creation. But since it is God’s work, a Christian joined by Him will not break the bond He created. God says that only the “unbelieving partner separates,” indicating that a Christian ruled by the Spirit cannot do so. If a person does break an intact marriage, unbroken by adultery, he has made a public confession of his unbelief. Since the Church should not attempt to regulate unbelievers, divide assets, or decide alimony and custody of children,

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<sup>102</sup>Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, 93-94.

<sup>103</sup>Lenski, *Marriage in the Lutheran Church*, 103.

<sup>104</sup>“Marriage,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, III:262-63.

the matter is left for the state, which is better equipped to demand a just standard of behavior from the unspiritual. The Church merely demands repentance—not monetary penance.

This Christian freedom is a great solace in this current lawless time. Flimsy, secular laws, or the lack thereof, do not bother the Christian who follows God’s Word. What is allowed by the state and what is God pleasing, even if they are opposed, should not confuse the Christian taught by Christ. But where the state demands disobedience to God, they have overstepped their authority and should be disregarded, but only at that point. Also, with regard to marriage, the state only regulates. It does not create or actually physically unite citizens by its laws. Making homosexuality legal and available for protections and benefits does not disturb true marriage, nor alter God’s unitive activity. Christians are to know God has married them—He does not marry those who cannot be united physically. Civil rights conferred by men do not nullify the Word of God or change true marriage, the joining of male and female into one flesh.

This freedom allows the Church to do its job of taking away sin and the government to work for the public good. Christians are citizens of both kingdoms, since God instituted both. “The Church is not a law-making authority,” and regulating marriage is a matter of law.<sup>105</sup> So a Christian will submit to the governing authorities. A marriage license is not simply a “piece of paper.” It is the state’s authorization and God’s indirect rule over the Christian and non-Christian. It is holy, because the state acts with God’s authority to regulate entry into this holy estate.<sup>106</sup> Although a car can be driven well without a license, it is sin to do so, since it is contrary to the authority put in place by the Lord.<sup>107</sup> Civil laws do not oppose Christians who

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<sup>105</sup> John Witte Jr., *Law and Protestantism*, 8.

<sup>106</sup>This encounter illustrates the proper Christian view of the marriage license—that it represents something holy: “We went up to the wretched shanty, built of driftwood, and entered. The interior was a *mêlée* of washtubs, rickety chairs, babies, and flies. The woman of the house hung out a ragged smile upon her puckered mouth, etched at the lips with many thin lines of worry, and aped hospitality in a manner at once pathetic and ridiculous. A little girl, who looked fifty or five, according to how you observed her, dexterously dodged the drip from the cracks in the roof, as she backed away into a corner, from whence she regarded us with eyes already saddened with the ache of life. After many days and nights in the great open, fraternizing with the stars and the moon and the sun and the river, it gave me a heartache to have the old bitter human fact thrust upon me again. ‘What is there left here to live for?’ thought I. And just then I noted, hanging on the wall where the water did not drip, a neatly framed marriage certificate. This was the one attempt at decoration. It was the household’s ‘scutcheon [emblem; protective shield] of respectability. This woman, even in her degradation, true to the noblest instinct of her sex, clung to this holy record of a faded glory.” John G. Neihardt, *The River and I*, ed. Audrey Longhurst, Julia Miller (1910; <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16793/16793-h/16793-h.htm>, 2005).

<sup>107</sup>A diploma is a piece of paper also, but honored and displayed by many, since it signifies a school’s official endorsement. But consider that government is divinely instituted, unlike the most prestigious institutions of

want to obey God in marriage anymore than those who want to drive a vehicle in faith.

The fourth commandment includes government, so Christians will seek God's permission to marry from Caesar when possible to do so without sinning. "In accordance with Rom. 13, the Church expects couples who desire marriage to seek civil approval before the performance of any church ceremony."<sup>108</sup> The minister who officiates a marriage does so with the state's permission. He is acting on behalf of both the state and church, so the "function of the state and church may be combined in one act; the minister acts as a servant of the state and the church at one and the same time, and thus marriage is validated before the law and sanctified by the Word of God and prayer."<sup>109</sup> "It is wrong to assert that the state marries in a human way and the church marries in a divine way."<sup>110</sup> Marriage, in its entry and outward form, has nothing to do with the Church, yet in faith created by the Gospel, it has everything to do with Christ who created it and blesses it.

How is the Christian to react to a government encouraging the disintegration of marriage? Marriage is God's work, even when laws allow sinners to separate what God has united. The temptation for Christians is to change or turn the Church into a civil authority.<sup>111</sup> We do not need to change the institution of marriage through laws or encourage civil disobedience. "To make use of the social and corporate power of the Church as a public lever to apply to the reform of abuses, and the uplifting of social institutions, leads straight to Rome."<sup>112</sup>

Sinners have never loved marriage. Only the Gospel makes one guilt-free and renewed before the Father, so that it is possible to love God and His works, including marriage. The Christian lives internally free by faith in Christ, not by outward laws. Marriage will endure, even if many marriages do not. "In the state, because of the hard-heartedness of man, God suffers divorce to be issued even in such cases where He has not dissolved the marriage. These divorces, however,

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higher learning.

<sup>108</sup> "Marriage," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, III:262.

<sup>109</sup> Reu, *Christian Ethics*, 268.

<sup>110</sup> Lenski, *Marriage in the Lutheran Church*, 158.

<sup>111</sup> "The Catholic Church's jurisdiction over marriage was, for the Reformers, a particularly flagrant example of the Church's usurpation of the magistrate's authority." Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 113.

<sup>112</sup> Theodore Schmauk and C. Theodore Benze, *The Confessional Principle and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church as Embodying the Evangelical Confessions of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911), 926.

are null and void before the forum of the church, which is ruled not by civil law but by divine law.”<sup>113</sup>

Even if the social institution and public view of marriage crumbles, the divine institution of marriage is safe and will be upheld by God, who forgives marital trespasses until the end of the world.

When we are certain that we are justified and that God is graciously pleased with our person and our works, then every distinction between ordinary and special, profane and holy, insignificant and significant, small and great works disappears completely. . . . There are no particular holy works. Everything we do is secular. However, it all becomes holy when it is done in obedience to God’s command and in the certainty that he will be pleased, that is, when it is done in faith.<sup>114</sup>

## Ephesians 5

When marriage is taught as an inherently spiritual work pleasing to God, Eph. 5 is the text that inevitably comes up. The institution is so simple and clear, symbolism can only cloud its directness: “the two shall become one flesh.” While the other major passage, I Cor. 7, allows marriage as a concession for those burning with lust and gives practical advice to the married, it has been used to promote celibacy over marriage. But Eph. 5 hints at a greater meaning behind marriage itself, so many have intimated.

Eph. 5 does not actually say that much about marriage. After setting up Christ as the exemplar of a husband’s love, Paul uses the institution of marriage to proclaim the Gospel: “‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (v31-32). This passage says much more about the Gospel than marriage. It explains what love is, according to the Gospel. Paul goes from physical marriage to the Gospel, so that the words do not apply to earthly marriage. He is using the marital union to speak of the higher, spiritual marriage of faith: “I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” These two marriages must be kept separate. “This spiritual marriage cannot be known or grasped except

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<sup>113</sup>Theo. Laetsch, “Divorce and Malicious Desertions,” in *Concordia Theological Monthly* (Dec. 1932), quoted in Reu, *Christian Ethics*, 271.

<sup>114</sup>Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, 9-10.



by two items: The Word of God and water,” so “that Christ is one body with me and shares everything he has and can with me, as a bridegroom does with his wife.”<sup>115</sup> “This is why St. Paul gives such a glorious sermon about this spiritual marriage.”<sup>116</sup> This parable-like use of marriage should not be used to deform the institution of marriage or legalistically burden the married, but to uplift Christ.

The text does not define earthly marriage by our love or faith in Christ. Instead, the subsequent words point to the basic will of God for those married: “However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (v33). It is not implied that Christ’s sacrificial love for the Church is achievable in marriage or that human love makes it spiritual.<sup>117</sup> When this Gospel sermon is twisted, our love in marriage is made more prominent than God’s unitive work.

“There is set before us in wedlock a most beautiful image of redemption.”<sup>118</sup> It is a one-way application of marital language to an entirely different topic. It will not do to reason backwards and impute to the definition of marriage impossible burdens. This is what all spiritualizing demands: an impossible task, as if we can really be holy or Christ-like. Notably, the text does not say anything about the love or behavior of wives, because the Church is passive in relationship to Christ who justifies. However, in real marriages the wife is not called to be passive but to actively submit. One can know and believe what Eph. 5 talks of without being married. Salvation, that is, being joined to Christ’s body, is had without uniting in flesh to another person. A Christian is joined to Christ by faith, which is God’s monergistic action.

“The crowning text for medieval marriage was Ephesians 5, . . . [which] became the basis for a rich sacramental theology that rendered marriage one of the church’s canonical sacraments.”<sup>119</sup> Luther countered: “But figures or allegories are not sacraments, in the sense we use the term.”<sup>120</sup> Paul simply uses one natural work of God (marriage) to talk about another, superior work of

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<sup>115</sup>Martin Luther, *What is Marriage, Really?*, trans. Holger Sonntag, ed. Paul Strawn (Minneapolis: Lutheran Press, 2013), 70.

<sup>116</sup>Luther, *What is Marriage, Really?*, 69.

<sup>117</sup>“There [St. Paul] does not command the bride or the wife to love, but to honor her husband and to be subject to him, which evidently can be done without love.” Luther, *What is Marriage, Really?*, 82.

<sup>118</sup>Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, II:723.

<sup>119</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 80.

<sup>120</sup>*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), LW 36:92.

God (redemption). Speculative interpretation of Eph. 5 wants to elevate marriage, but in doing so, devalues the Gospel and makes it worldly. Marriage is a practical matter, one the flesh demands, but not the Spirit. “The mystery is not marriage, but Christ in relation to His bride, the Church.”<sup>121</sup> Being married neither hurts nor helps faith—it is entirely outward, like wearing clothes and eating.<sup>122</sup>

## Sexual Realism

By de-spiritualizing marriage, the body’s sexual functioning and the marital act are seen as naturally good and ordained by God. Sexuality is not something to look down on or be ashamed of. It is a “part of God’s good creation.”<sup>123</sup> We were created male and female for this purpose. There are no sexless human beings. Marriage is the place sexuality is to be physically exercised. But everything we do, married or not, is to be in accordance with the sexual distinction God gave. Our station in life determines how we are to honor God with our bodies.

The Bible does not speak of inclinations or innate attraction as the starting point for marriage, but the creation of woman out of man. “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gen. 2:18). God continues His work of creation today, even using unseemly passion and lust, to cause us to participate in the divine work of creating new life. Each person is created male or female—with a sex—for the purpose of uniting with the matching sex in marriage. Anatomy tells us our role in the world and within marriage. “Therefore, each one of us must have the kind of body God created for us. I cannot make myself a woman, nor can you make yourself a man; we do not have that power.”<sup>124</sup> We know about marriage and how it is to be organized from how we were created.

Sexual desire is one of the strongest forces in the world. It originates from God and drives

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<sup>121</sup>Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions*, 290.

<sup>122</sup>“For marriage is an outward, physical thing that neither promotes, nor hinders faith, and the one partner may well be a Christian and the other a non-Christian, just as Christian may eat with a heathen, Jew or Turk, or drink, buy from him, and have all ordinary commerce with him. In the same way one marriage partner may now be a true devout Christian and the other an evil, false Christian; still it is not necessary to dissolve the marriage because of piety or malice.” Luther, *Commentary on I Corinthians 7* (1523), LW 28:33.

<sup>123</sup>Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, 83.

<sup>124</sup>Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), LW 45:17.

to marriage, but it also has been corrupted and become unwholesome in our sinful state. But the basic good is still affirmed. God’s Word and biological anatomy inform how we are to act and use the sex function, not lust or imaginations of the heart. “Sex” is not about what we find pleasurable, but what we were created for. The body, God’s own creation, condemns homosexual acts as unnatural, even when done by heterosexuals (Rom. 1).

Marriage is a remedy and outlet for those who cannot be continent, that is, easily chaste. And most cannot, and therefore must marry, legitimately or through illicit fornication. “The family is the basic unit of our society . . . . It channels biological drives that might otherwise become socially destructive; it ensures the care and education of children in a stable environment.”<sup>125</sup> Children, the normal product of bodily union, are also part of the restraint—not of conjugal duty—but unrestrained sexual desire and selfishness. Until recently, marriage was synonymous with family, so that marriage logically meant raising children. Without this purpose, marriage is weaker. Children are tangible reasons to stay united apart from one’s spouse.

Who should marry? The body and its normal desires make this known. “But if [the unmarried] cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.” “But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband” (I Cor. 7:9, 2). Yet, sexual intercourse is not an evil to be despised. God uses it to join as one flesh and in some sense every subsequent knowing of one’s spouse is a “renewal” of that union.<sup>126</sup> It is good and expected by God Himself in marriage, hence it is termed a “duty” and “obligation.” It is a practical need and the reason most will enter marriage. God uses sinful desire to hold husband and wife together and actually unites through it.

While intercourse is a physical act, it was ordained for a greater purpose than mere pleasure. The possibility for children certainly depends on the act, but even when conception is improbable, it expresses a unity that is rooted in the one flesh union, a truly divine work. It is also an actual joining itself, since even with a stranger it makes two into one flesh (I Cor. 6:16). So even when

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<sup>125</sup>*De Burgh v. De Burgh* (1952), quoted in: Sherif Girgis and Ryan Anderson and Robert P. George, *What is Marriage?*, 116.

<sup>126</sup>Plutarch, *Erotikos*, quoted in: Sherif Girgis and Ryan Anderson and Robert P. George, *What is Marriage?*, 49.

flippantly used for selfish pleasure, the body in this specific act performs God's work, or rather God Himself works through it. There is no "safe sex." It is always a giving of the whole self, a uniting, a true knowing and revealing to another person, and an act of permanent character. God makes it always a true marital act, even when it is treated as meaningless gratification.

The first married couple did not "make love," but rather "Adam knew Eve his wife" (Gen. 4:1).<sup>127</sup> "The word [know] expresses perfectly the unity, the intimacy, and the familiarity that exists between two people in marriage."<sup>128</sup> The more that is made of the bare act and its fleeting pleasure, the less is made of the glory of God's work. The joining of bodies sexually actually unites. It causes and supports marriage—God's institution. In fact, those who do not heed the express bodily call to marriage and family life must fall into sexual immorality. "Only in marriage is sexuality not a destructive force," since apart from it man runs "counter to God's word and the nature that God has given and preserves in him."<sup>129</sup> This is not to deny that a single and celibate lifestyle is God-pleasing. But it requires a rare, direct gift of God. It cannot be self-chosen. It is revealed in the body also.<sup>130</sup>

Most youth learn of sexual acts from movies, where strangers passionately devour one another, and then cast each other aside. This has more in common with crimes of passion than true marital love or the divinely-given "knowing" in intercourse. Paul gives a word which is counter to this spectacular view of sex:

The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control (I Cor. 7:3-5).

Coitus within marriage is a duty, expectation, and concession to human weakness. It is to be

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<sup>127</sup>Contra the NIV translation: "Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain."

<sup>128</sup>Veith, *Family Vocation*, 84.

<sup>129</sup>Luther, quoted in: Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, 87.

<sup>130</sup>Those who do not struggle with lust and self-control have no need of marriage. "This thing is known in German as the 'secret disease,' but this expression would not be so common either if the ailment were truly rare. . . . Now such heat [burning with passion] is stronger in some, and weaker than others. Some among them suffer so severely that they masturbate. All these ought to be in the married estate." Luther, *Commentary on I Corinthians 7* (1523), LW 28:27-28.

routine and domesticated, a part of normal life, not a rare mountain-top experience.<sup>131</sup> The body demands it, and Luther compares it to every ordinary bodily activity, even defecation. Both are demanded by the body.

For this word which God speaks, “be fruitful and multiply,” is not a command. It is more than a command, namely, a divine ordinance [*werck*] which is not our prerogative to hinder or ignore. Rather, it is just as necessary as the fact that I am a man, and more necessary than sleeping and waking, eating and drinking, and emptying the bowels and bladder. It is a nature and disposition just as innate as the organs involved in it. Therefore, just as God does not command anyone to be a man or woman but created them the way they have to be, so he does not command them to multiply but creates them so they have to multiply. And wherever men try to resist this, it remains irresistible nonetheless and goes its way through fornication, adultery, and secret sins, for this is a matter of nature and not of choice.<sup>132</sup>

No one has spoken so positively and clearly about the body’s use in marriage since St. Paul. Marriage is a practical, worldly necessity, yet completely divine and holy. In faith Christians are free to know their own flesh and use their bodies in marriage in true spiritual freedom, as God intended.

## Societal Implications of an Impotent State

Where the emotional love rules, society will be dysfunctional. While the Church is not over the government, it can objectively say the state is not doing its job. In regards to the family, it has abdicated its role of ruling and regulating behavior. Instead, to promote an ideal of love, almost every sexual perversion and relationship is protected. But society itself is not. The individual and his right to privacy, pleasure, and love, has trumped solid, fixed laws protecting marriage and the family. But a society cannot operate on the anarchy of personal feelings.

If marriage is the “mother of all earthly laws,” our government is indicted.<sup>133</sup> Rather than redefine marriage, the state now recognizes that it means nothing intrinsically in our culture. Activist judges have encouraged this reduction of the “social weight of marriage.”<sup>134</sup> No longer

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<sup>131</sup> “Those who believe sex is earth shattering will put it outside of marriage.” McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home*, 44.

<sup>132</sup> Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), LW 45:18-19.

<sup>133</sup> Luther, quoted in: Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 134.

<sup>134</sup> Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 276.

do laws constrain man to exercise his sexuality within this estate. Sexuality has been freed, but this has not freed people from sin or harmful choices. Marriage is not the remedy for sin—Christ is—but the remedy for a lack of self-control and inordinate lust. Marriage is the only safe place for people burning with lust. As an institution, it is bigger than laws which regulate it. It provides the sort of stability and largess needed for society to prosper. A union is not ultimately about a couple, which is why government has traditionally regulated marriage and sexual behavior (even within marriage) quite closely.<sup>135</sup>

The breakdown of the nuclear family is real. Unions that are purposely childless and children without both father and mother inflict harm on the rest of the society. “Whatever destroys human marriage destroys the home, the city, and the whole human race.”<sup>136</sup> “Failed marriages burden innocent bystanders, including children and ultimately all society.”<sup>137</sup> But the solution is not to improve morality by decree, as if new laws will suddenly make people better. Marriage is ultimately God’s estate and on-going work.

While a strong government would be more pleasing, it would not help marriage. Laws “have the function to regulate and control and while they serve to prevent evil, are not correspondingly creative of the goodness upon which independent morality must rest.”<sup>138</sup> The government is presently having an identity crisis and rebellious fit against God, just like individual men and women. It does not want to rule the body and promote positive order, but rather enforce an equality by law and tax code, which cannot grant righteousness before God. Since everyone is equal and god-like in their own minds, sinners will not do what is helpful for one another without some compulsion. The government obliges citizens and thinks it is granting freedom, which is really slavery to sin. Only God’s Word can free, but this is an internal freedom, not a license to go against our very nature and bodies. “Civil servants” are basically “agents of affection,”

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<sup>135</sup> “Following Sir William Blackstone’s Commentaries on the Laws of England, the crime of sodomy has often been defined only as the ‘abominable and detestable crime against nature,’ or some variation of the phrase. This language led to widely varying rulings about what specific acts were encompassed by its prohibition.” All state laws still prohibiting oral and anal sex, including between married couples, were declared unconstitutional by *Lawrence v. Texas* in 2003. “Sodomy law,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sodomy\\_law&oldid=641836705](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sodomy_law&oldid=641836705) (accessed January 18, 2015).

<sup>136</sup> Musonius Rufus, Roman Stoic philosopher in the first century A.D., quoted in: Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 21.

<sup>137</sup> Sherif Girgis and Ryan Anderson and Robert P. George, *What is Marriage?*, 42.

<sup>138</sup> Lenski, *Marriage in the Lutheran Church*, 344.

instead of servants of the law.<sup>139</sup> Holding to heterosexual-only marriage is now a type of racism. The state grants freedom for almost any desired action, while not protecting the innocent from evildoers—its precise mandate from God.

The influence of Christianity has been great since 312, though it seems to have mostly waned.<sup>140</sup> But government and marriage are God’s creations and “these stations must remain if the world is to stand.”<sup>141</sup> Every culture dies. It often does so by rebelling against marriage and committing a slow, childless euthanasia. But the Church, God’s eternal estate, will endure. Our hope is not in laws or government action, but in Christ who empowers marriage and allows this world to be populated and continue for a short time.

## Love in Marriage

Romantic love is in contrast to the structure and definite gender ordering of marriage. But human love is a temporary infatuation, a self-centered desire to acquire for oneself. Sinners cannot love—all true love is from God, through Christ.<sup>142</sup> “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God” (I Jn. 4:7). Many speak of unconditional love, but man’s love is dependent on outward fidelity and a selfish receiving of benefits. Every love or fulfillment we trust in, apart from God, is idolatry. Those who marry for love will be disappointed, for Christ’s love is not to be sought in it. It is not possessed apart from trust in Christ’s promise.

While man thinks he marries on his own accord, the actual uniting is God’s work. The creator of marriages does not make mistakes, but people picking future spouses do. Yet, once in this estate, no matter how flawed the reasons to enter it, it is God’s domain—a divine union not to be broken. In this vein, the Scriptures speak of roles and how men and women are to relate in duties and behavior—not feelings or romantic notions.

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<sup>139</sup>McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home*, 67.

<sup>140</sup>Lenski, *Marriage in the Lutheran Church*, 44.

<sup>141</sup>Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, 37.

<sup>142</sup>“Eros retains its egocentric character, however it may be spiritualized and sublimated.” Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros: The History of the Christian Idea of Love*, in 2 vols., trans. Philip S. Watson (London: Society for the Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1939), II:497.

Marriage is a practical undertaking. It requires duties and specific roles to be fulfilled, especially if a union is blessed with children. “But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. . . . the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband” (I Cor. 7:33-34). The basic attitude of a wife of submitting to her husband is commanded by Scripture: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.” “Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands” (Eph. 5:22, 24). This is a chosen task, not a matter of the husband’s force. It is an act of sacrificial love, done out of love for Christ. “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (Col. 3:18). Nowhere does it say the husband deserves submission or that it will be rewarded or enjoyable. Rather, it is part of the basic structure of marriage.

The curse of sin affects all women: “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Gen. 3:16). But Christian submission is a sacrificial act of the will that becomes an act of obedience and love to Christ. “For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands” (I Pet. 3:5). Only a spiritual woman can do this—one under Christ’s authority. Submission becomes a loving action in Christ—a duty that is pleasing to God in faith. “This headship only makes sense for one under Christ’s authority.”<sup>143</sup> So also, men are to love their wives with the headship of Christ, as they also submit to Christ. Husbands and wives are equal in faith and justification, but sexually distinguished to be different and unequal in marriage.<sup>144</sup> In Christ, where submission is delightful, free, and a light duty, the creative order is not leveled, but seen in an entirely new light as God’s will and gift.

Oneness in flesh does not erase the sex distinction, but highlights the intrinsic unity of husband and wife. Just as the one body has members with different functions and modesty shown to them, the one flesh union participates not in a generic unity that obliterates the natural, but shows the roles male and female should play in marriage. Two identical equals cannot be one, even if homosexuals symbolize the pure, ideal relationship in modern culture. “Monogamy, with its implied headship of man over woman, is an order of creation which God established as a

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<sup>143</sup>Bromiley, *God and Marriage*, 7.

<sup>144</sup>Bromiley, *God and Marriage*, 69-70.



protective dam against the demonic power of sin.”<sup>145</sup> Every Christian submits, and in marriage, there is a divine ordering, which is followed out of respect for God’s will. “Also for women, therefore, it is neither dishonorable nor humiliating to be under obedience; on the contrary, it is in accord with the position assigned to them in creation.”<sup>146</sup> Love for the Christian is not a bodiless, passionate equality, but takes concrete form according to where we have been placed by the living God. Love is not an unattainable ideal off in the clouds. Instead, it serves and takes creaturely form. It partakes of humility just as Christ’s love compelled Him to submit to death.

A marriage of two equals is not a true unity, but a recipe for a power struggle. After 1970, “legislators across North America and Western Europe repealed all remaining ‘head and master’ laws and redefined marriage as an association of two equal individuals rather than as the union of two distinct and specialized roles.”<sup>147</sup> With pre-defined roles, marriage is an institution bigger than the people in it. It offers safety, stability and a defined place in which to personally apply oneself to the commandments. But in current thought, marriage is inherently orderless and emotional, not of this world, but a heavenly, spiritual sort of thing. But everything we do is sexual, that is, defined by our created sex and its distinctions. “The Christian woman in accordance with God’s will leaves the reins in her husbands hands, acknowledges him as her head, and is willing for the sake of love to be in subjection to him.”<sup>148</sup> This feminine love is not talk or emotional drivel, but concrete submission, animated by respect for Christ who made us and ordered marriage in a certain way.

Men are told to love their wives, but in a specific way. They are not told to try to be the head. Rather it is the husband’s actual position by divine right: “the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God” (I Cor. 11:3). Marriage has specific roles, by design, that erase all talk of equality: “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (I Pet. 3:7).

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<sup>145</sup>Fritz Zerbst, *The Office of Woman in the Church: A Study in Practical Theology*, trans. Albert G. Merckens (St. Louis: CPH, 1955), 67

<sup>146</sup>Zerbst, *The Office of Woman in the Church*, 47.

<sup>147</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 255.

<sup>148</sup>Zerbst, *The Office of Woman in the Church*, 79.

Husband and wife are united as one, but there is an ordering and differentiation within this one flesh, just as their bodies were created differently. Marriage determines how all should act, even the unmarried. Children have father and mother to honor and the single honor God with their bodies by being chaste. “Our most basic vocation or station in life is biological and the duties therein are God-given and in accord with how we were created.”<sup>149</sup>

This “duty love,” including conjugal duty, is at odds with romantic love, which depends on equality. This is why many ancient cultures thought concubines and mistresses were for love, while marriage was for children and the public good. Family life is not well suited to romance and passion, yet Americans expect it in marriage with a faith-like quality.<sup>150</sup> “Modern romantic love is animated by its conflict with the duties and obligations of the home,” and especially the gender roles God chose for us. Carried to extreme, “the logic of romantic love is adulterous, both extramarital and unfaithful to the workaday structure of the home.”<sup>151</sup> Biblically, love is shown in our gender roles and acting according to the structure of marriage, not as a fruit of companionship and inner harmony. Rather than focus on what we get in marriage, the actions of each spouse are specified and the bond God made is to be respected above personal fulfillment. It is not the inner relationship or emotional closeness that nourishes marriage, but God Himself. He who is love gave us roles to follow as a pattern. God calls us to trust His creative will and respect what He made us for. Couples in this divine, protected institution can take themselves and their puppy love less seriously, since they do not keep the marital bond energized by their own efforts or feelings.

Love, for the Christian, cannot be separated from Christ. Based on our physical bodies, God has placed us in our divine station in relation to the estate of marriage. “God Himself places us in this estate and marital role.”<sup>152</sup> True love is not found outside the limits and boundaries God sets. “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous” (Heb. 13:4). Luther preferred bigamy to

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<sup>149</sup>Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 4.

<sup>150</sup>*Sex after Kids* is a 2013 movie.

<sup>151</sup>McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home*, 17.

<sup>152</sup>Luther, “Sermon at Marriage of Sigismund von Lindenau” (1545), LW 51:360.

divorce and advocated the death penalty for adulterers.<sup>153</sup> While bigamy is not good, it is the lesser evil, if the biblical teaching is understood.<sup>154</sup> To people in a romantic age, this is quite offensive. But, then again, so is permanent marriage and being what God made us.

Human infatuation is not a solid basis for an enduring union. Rather, God's love shown to man in Christ is the source of true love. In response, the married bear the troubles found in this institution by not running away from the God who united them. "Since marriage has the foundation and consolation, that it is instituted by God and that God loves it, and that Christ himself so honors and comforts it, everybody ought to prize and esteem it, and the heart ought to be glad, that it is surely the state God loves and cheerfully endure every burden in it, even though the burdens be ten times heavier than they are."<sup>155</sup> Married Christians know where God wants them to bear their cross—it is not far away. This institution is not a matter of internal nourishment, but an outward duty that God places upon man. "Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him" (I Cor. 7:17). When marriage is seen as God's work, it will also be seen as a God-pleasing way to live, quite apart from any supposed personal benefits. What is law, legal constraint, and a prison to the world, becomes a calling, a holy vocation to the Christian. Since God wills, a wife becomes the most lovely possession on earth, "one that God has given me and has adorned with his word beyond others, even though she may not have a beautiful body or may have other failings. Though I look over all the women in the world, I cannot find any about whom I can boast with a joyful conscience as I can about mine: 'This is the one whom God has granted to me and put into my arms.'"<sup>156</sup> Our spouse, out of love for God's will, becomes the only one we desire and our closest

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<sup>153</sup>"I so greatly detest divorce that I should prefer bigamy to it." *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), LW 36:105. "Where the government is negligent and lax, however, and fails to inflict the death penalty, the adulterer may betake himself to a far away country and there remarry if he is unable to remain continent. But it would be better for him to be put to death, lest a bad example be set." Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), LW 45:32.

<sup>154</sup>God hates divorce, but tolerated bigamy as a weakness of the patriarchs. It is imperfect, but does not destroy God's work the same way divorce does. Practically, no bigamists fared well with their multiple wives in Scripture. Ministers are held to a higher standard: "Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife" (I Tim. 3:2).

<sup>155</sup>Martin Luther, *Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, 7 vol., eds. John Nicholas Lenker and Eugene F. A. Klug (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000; vol. 1-4 published as *Sermons of Martin Luther: The Church Postils*, 8 vol. in 4 vol., 1995; vol. 5-7 published as *Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils*, 3 vol. 1996), 1.2:56.

<sup>156</sup>Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount* (1530), LW 21:87.

neighbor whom we actively will to love. The sixth commandment is fulfilled by being content with one's spouse, or content without a spouse if unmarried.<sup>157</sup>

## Not So Modern Problems

“There is no society in the world where people have stayed married without enormous community pressure to do so.”<sup>158</sup> Today though, there is little pressure to even enter the estate of marriage. But the problems in our culture are not new, even if they are more pandemic. The Church must condemn sexual sins and the sin against God in breaking marriage, but leave the estate free. And as is already the case, these fornications and immoralities will leak into congregations of Christians, as the culture becomes more pagan.

There is enormous social pressure on the young to have sex, besides the normal desire that accompanies youth. It is implied they are not fully human or mature until the sexual barrier is transcended. Virginity is not holy, but is advertised as something to be “lost” as soon as possible. But this cultural doctrine devalues the unitive nature of intercourse and characterizes God's gift of sexuality as meaningless. It is a sin against one's own body, the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6). But outside of natural coitus, homosexual sex acts are often seen by the young as loopholes of Christian morality. Imitating homosexuals and misusing the body created by God is a shameful perversion. Even though mainstream movies and heterosexual pornography have fully accepted oral and anal sex acts, they are despicable, sodomitic sins. Formerly, even governments called them “crimes against nature.” They are condemned even between the married, let alone the unmarried.

One dating book recommends waiting for sexual activity until at least 3-4 dates have passed and you know your partner's middle name.<sup>159</sup> But when sex is seen as illicit marriage itself, it is foolish and destructive to unite with someone without a lifelong commitment. Sex is a bodily promise, a giving and revealing of the whole self that cannot be taken back. Pre-marital sex

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<sup>157</sup> “By this commandment, God commands you to stand by your spouse and to be content with him or her. If you do that, God promises that marriage will not be called sin but a blessed institution that well pleases him.” Luther, *What is Marriage, Really?*, 54.

<sup>158</sup> Margaret Mead, quoted in: Fisher, *Anatomy of Love*, 109.

<sup>159</sup> Browne, *Dating for Dummies*, 282.

has always been prevalent, but formerly a child conceived out of wedlock was proof of marital consummation and therefore a weighty reason to publicly recognize that the couple was already united.<sup>160</sup> There is little social pressure to do so now.

Even “pre-marital sex” is a misnomer—there is only marital sex, through which God always works, regardless of man’s intentions. Even pagans realize that sex should be something special, that it changes a relationship forever. 93% of respondents to one survey wished they had waited longer to consummate a non-marital relationship.<sup>161</sup> Only those waiting until validly married will have no regret, because it is God’s will for coitus to be marital and unitive.

Cohabitation is now seen as an analogous arrangement to marriage. “Living together—that is, cohabitation apart from the given structure of marriage—is now standard practice in the Western world.”<sup>162</sup> However, it is a sin before God. But unlike premarital sex, it is a public, on-going sin that demands public repentance and spiritual discipline. It treats as temporary what is permanently done by God Himself. “Those who live together without being married, in fornication, consider marriage to be nothing . . . as if it were something that occurs by happenstance”—not God’s Word and action.<sup>163</sup> They dishonor the estate God made, and therefore God Himself. Cohabitation is a public, ongoing sin against the holy institution of marriage. Those living together in sin must be called to repentance, because there is no such thing as a private marriage. Living together without civil approval, the only form of public commitment recognized today, is a play marriage, a mockery of the holy estate. Marriage can never be temporary and it does not depend on the future will of either partner. “The two shall become one flesh.” God “does not approve of dissolute licentiousness and promiscuous cohabitation, He wants each one to live content with his own wife.”<sup>164</sup>

The problem with condemning cohabitation is that marriage itself is not seen as a permanent commitment. It is viewed at best as an intermediate or long-term commitment by society. The sixth commandment “condemns all cohabitation outside of legitimate marriage and sets forth

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<sup>160</sup>In American parlance a “shotgun wedding” restored honor to the mother and child. Only a public commitment is added. The physical commitment (the actual uniting) was already evident in the resulting child.

<sup>161</sup>Browne, *Dating for Dummies*, 282.

<sup>162</sup>McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home*, 209.

<sup>163</sup>Luther, *What is Marriage, Really?*, 41.

<sup>164</sup>Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535), LW 1:240.

penalties in this life and eternal torments after this life.”<sup>165</sup> Even those divorcing without cause and remarrying are usually not aware of what they are doing. They see being single and physically away from their spouse as the answer to misery. But physical freedom is not freedom from the law of marriage—the divine marriage bond is broken only by adultery. “A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord” (I Cor. 7:39). Christians will seek to honor God’s authority given to the government by seeking civil approval.

Homosexuality is now defined as natural—a neutral, internal proclivity or inclination. This shift away from categorizing the actual physical activities carried out has led to much confusion. Lust for the same sex, like lust for the opposite sex, is sin, but it does not necessarily contradict faith in Christ. “Our yearnings, especially those bound up with our sexuality, are hardly ever fully satisfied by the biblical model of one man and one woman yoked together for life. Every one of us is a member of the coalition of human beings who feel out of place in our bodies east of Eden. And every one of us has fallen far short of honoring God and other human beings with our bodies.”<sup>166</sup> Christians love those who deny their created body through homosexual acts by calling them to repentance, not approving of their condemnation.

Scripture is clear, that those who *practice* homosexuality are not saved and must stop the sinful behavior.<sup>167</sup> The desire and inclination may not stop, because the sinner remains a sinner under grace. But avoiding the outward action is part of repentance under the Spirit’s guidance.

If practicing sexuality and the use of one’s body are private decisions, judged only by unknown passions, immorality will reign. Not only that, the character of marriage becomes private and without constraints, instead of public and answerable to society and the Church. Early Lutherans wanted parental consent to be the normal path to matrimony. Not because marriage itself demands it, but because of the fourth commandment and the seriousness of the marital union.

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<sup>165</sup>Melanchthon, *Loci*, quoted in Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, 2 vols., trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 411.

<sup>166</sup>Andy Crouch, “Sex Without Bodies: The Church’s Response to the LGBT Movement Must be that Marriage Matters,” *Christianity Today* (June 26, 2013; <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/july-august/sex-without-bodies.html>).

<sup>167</sup>“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” (I Cor. 6:9-10).

One's vocation as a child precedes leaving one's father and mother to create a new family in marriage. Parents are not love struck, but see marriage as practical. Something so far-reaching should be the most businesslike and pragmatic decision on earth. Parental consent and opinion should be desirable and sought before deciding to marry. Marriage is a public institution and God gives parents, who are the most basic God-given authorities for all humanity. Forming a family is a worldly and practical undertaking, one which the Church and parents can demystify and despiritualize. Marriage does not require "intense feeling," but it does entail certain bodily actions and some worldly troubles.<sup>168</sup>

## Conclusion

Believers are not called to change marriage, defend it, or establish a Christian version of it. The Church simply preaches God's Word about this divine estate, while leaving it optional. It must condemn fornication, homosexual acts, cohabitation, and anything that looks like marriage without being public, natural, and authorized by the state, since these are a denigration and defiance of true marriage and its creator—God Himself. There can be no forgiveness without repentance. The Church is to preach the divine law, not human laws.

The American government is not forcing Christians to sin currently, even if it does not prevent sin very well. The answer is not to turn the Gospel into a new secular law. "The gospel [does not] introduce new laws for the civil realm. Instead [God's Word] commands us to obey the present laws, whether they have been formulated by pagans or others, and urges us to practice love through this obedience."<sup>169</sup> The right use of divine authority is to be respected. "The same triune God who acts through civil government also acts through the church's ministry."<sup>170</sup> But each has their own task: one of the outward law, the other of the spiritual application of the law in order to forgive by the Gospel.

Christian faith does not change marriage's nature or duties, any more than believing the

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<sup>168</sup>Sherif Girgis and Ryan Anderson and Robert P. George, *What is Marriage?*, 48.

<sup>169</sup>Ap XVI:3; Kolb/Wengert, 231.

<sup>170</sup>Edmund Schlink, *The Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 233.

Gospel changes the body or makes one a better athlete. However, Christians are to use this social, public, and natural estate in a special Christian way. The proclaimed Word of God, which renews individuals and makes them spiritual, causes marriage to be seen in an entirely different light. It becomes holy to the righteous and one's legal spouse becomes divinely-given above every other person in the world. In addition, all the associated troubles become holy crosses, borne in trust that God gives them. "No one can have real happiness in marriage who does not recognize in firm faith that this estate together with all its works, however insignificant, is pleasing to God and precious in his sight."<sup>171</sup> Only the Gospel of Christ can cause one to love God and all His works—especially the natural work of marriage.

The Church must do a better job of teaching God's works. Marriage as a social institution and norm of sexual behavior carries little weight. "The catechesis provided by culture in this matter is pervasive and influential."<sup>172</sup> It is no longer possible to assume that the young will seek marriage and avoid immorality because of societal pressure. Quite the contrary, the young are taught the physical side of sex and the basic human rights of sexual pleasure and heart-felt happiness. But "facts of nature do not take the place of clear moral principles."<sup>173</sup> The lawless, evolutionary view of man sees him as an animal, with no real reason to exercise self-restraint. But marriage and the body are from God. In Christ everything we do according to God's command is spiritual in faith.<sup>174</sup>

The temptation to turn the precious Gospel into a law-making authority is ever-present. "The Church, instead of establishing the Home in the power of its own strength and life with the daily presence of the Word of God, . . . cries out to the State to save the institution of Matrimony and the Home by the passage of more stringent laws of divorce!"<sup>175</sup> But the Gospel does not impose itself on the institution of marriage. Rather, it makes the people in it spiritual and new in Christ.

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<sup>171</sup>Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), LW 45:42.

<sup>172</sup>"Response to Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust," 23.

<sup>173</sup>"That Marriage is not Outdated," in *Marquart's Works* (New Haven, Mo: Christian News, 2014), I:15.

<sup>174</sup>The married "should not be afraid of the sudden and infallible Day of the Lord; even if the Day of the Lord were to come in the hour when man and wife were having martial intercourse, they should not be afraid of it. Why is this so? Because even if the Lord comes in that hour he will find them in the ordinance and station in which they have been placed and installed by God." Luther, "Sermon at Marriage of Sigismund von Lindenau" (1545), LW 51:362.

<sup>175</sup>Schmauk, *The Confessional Principle*, 931.



“Thus Paul (I Cor. 7) when he has been consulted about matrimonial matters, does not throw the whole business to the civil magistrate but instructs consciences from the Word of God.”<sup>176</sup> Our bodies demand it, and the Lord is pleased with marriage. Yet, we do not sugar coat it, pretend it will fulfill people, or turn it into a glorious earthly gospel. “For this is the reason there is so much care and unpleasantness in marriage to the outward man, because everything that is God’s Word and work, if it is to be blessed at all, must be distasteful, bitter, and burdensome to the outward man.”<sup>177</sup> Sinful man will continue to despise marriage, as he must all good works of God.

In prior days marriage was seen like high school is viewed today. Both are necessary and integral parts of this world, but are not about a “deeply fulfilling experience.”<sup>178</sup> It behooves Christians to teach children and those seeking to be married that marriage is a practical, down-to-earth undertaking. Those who marry for love, or rather puppy love, will divorce for love or be forced to find another footing for their marriage. Luther says that pastors should instruct couples in biblical gender roles and that they should “hear also the cross that God has placed on this estate.”<sup>179</sup> But the temporal suffering of marriage can most helpfully cause one to seek eternal blessings in Christ.

It is always a duty of the Church to preach the Gospel and bless marriages when permitted.<sup>180</sup> Broken marriage bonds abound and living with a sinful spouse can be hellish. That is because Satan hates marriage:

If you are not married, you think that once you are, there will always be laughter and good times. You cannot imagine ever saying a word that might hurt your spouse. You are confident that you will avoid any pitfalls. At the same time, you think marriage is something that just happens. Or that marriage is something you have invented yourself. This is wrong. Marriage is God’s institution and order. So this is why marriage must be assaulted by the devil. If you enter into this institution, you enter into a real monastery that is full of temptation.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>176</sup>Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, II:759.

<sup>177</sup>*Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, 1.2:56

<sup>178</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 276.

<sup>179</sup>“A Marriage Booklet for Simple Pastors,” Kolb/Wengert, 370.

<sup>180</sup>“But when we are requested to bless them before the church or in the church, to pray over them, or also to marry them, we are in duty bound to do this.” Luther, “The Order of Marriage for Common Pastors” (1529), LW 53:112.

<sup>181</sup>Luther, *What is Marriage, Really?*, 30-31.

The divorced are often crushed by a false earthly gospel of “happily ever after.” The hurt need forgiveness and comfort—to be shown real, heavenly love. The Church is to offer eternal consolation and Christ’s forgiving, fulfilling, and enlightening love. It does not preach marriage, but the way to God who makes all marriages holy.

The problem with marriage has always been man’s problem with God and what He wills. Marriage is not a promise of anything from God, but the breaking of God’s unitive work has significant, irreparable earthly consequences. In actual divorce, the single flesh of two united people is divided. Only Christ’s love can provide true, unconditional comfort. This love was shown in bearing the world’s sins and idolatry to the cross of death.

Everyone who lives in this world does so within the tapestry of this estate of marriage. As much as people breathe oxygen, so marriage is part of our being, bodies, and life. Marriage does not need to be saved. It is for this world only.<sup>182</sup> True love is not found in marrying, but Christians will honor Christ who is the source of all true love. He joins the two into one flesh. If any marriage is to continue and bless the world in some fashion, God will do the work and deserve the credit.

O God, who hast created man and woman and hast ordained them for the married estate, hast blessed them also with the fruits of the womb, and hast typified therein the sacramental union of thy dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the church, his bride: We beseech thy groundless goodness and mercy that thou wouldst not permit this thy creation, ordinance, and blessing to be disturbed or destroyed, but graciously preserve the same; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> “The marriage estate is God’s ordinance and we shall stick to this no matter whether they hate or persecute us and will neither regard nor listen to us; this bother us not at all. We have God, he regards us, along with all the angels and heavenly hosts, he also defends us against all the darts of the devil and our adversaries.” Luther, “Sermon at Marriage of Sigismund von Lindenau” (1545), LW 51:363.

<sup>183</sup> Luther, “The Order of Marriage for Common Pastors” (1529), LW 53:115.