

# Marriage in a Godless Culture

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At this summer's Cuming County Fair the main music entertainment was a young lady named Jana Kramer. This former TV actress, turned country music singer, will help us see where marriage is at today. Here are some of the words to her song "love:"

LOVE I don't know where you ran off to!!  
But love love love  
I still believe in you!

I still believe in miracles  
I still believe in wedding rings and bibles  
I still believe the best walk you'll ever take is  
Walking down the aisle

This illustrates the main problem with marriage today. It might not seem like it, but Jana's personal history explains a lot. "Her first husband was Michael Gambino in 2004, but they got a divorce within few months." At 20 years old, she married but did not stay married long, about 5 months. Then love found her again, when she was 27 years old. She got engaged to a fellow actor [Jonathan Schaech]. She told the media, "It was the happiest moment of my life." "They also got married but their marriage only lasted a month." That happiest moment was just a moment. Love seemed to have left her and they divorced.

But she really does believe in love, weddings, and bibles, remember. She met another country artist, Brantley Gilbert, last year. "Twenty nine-year-old Kramer and 28-year-old Gilbert confirmed they were dating last September. They were engaged in January, the same month that Kramer confirmed they were living together." So they had a play marriage and starting planning her third marriage.

Listen to the words again. What is she really saying?

LOVE I don't know where you ran off to!!  
But love love love  
I still believe in you.

Marriage as an institution is thought very little of in this song. But love is worshipped—it is more than an emotion. It is a sort of divine energy. She believes *in* love, the same way we are called to believe *in* Jesus Christ.

I do not say this to make fun of Jana. We know of people in our community, church, and family who have behaved in a similar fashion. People divorce for trivial reasons and live together without a commitment. People marry and divorce for an idea of love.

The acceptance of homosexuality today is a problem. But the view of marriage itself is the bigger problem. A homosexual union is a contradiction, because two of the same sex cannot unite physically. But most heterosexual unions are seen just like the homosexual union—an association of two individuals, held together only by their emotion and love. In other words, God has nothing to do with marriage, even for many Christians. We think of marriage as a human work.

And if marriage is determined by the people in it, not society, civil laws, or God Himself, then a loveless marriage is immoral. You have heard this or thought this: people who are miserable in a marriage have a “bad marriage.” Then divorce is the answer, because the marriage is the problem. But marriage is God’s work. The definition in Genesis was repeated by Jesus: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).

God joins in marriage—He unites the two. What else did Jesus say? “So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mt. 19:6). To break a marriage is to break God’s own work. Only the Lord has the authority to break marriage—in death. When man breaks it, it is a sin against God. Even though we think we choose our future spouse, marriage is entirely God’s work. We agree to enter the estate of matrimony. But once in it, it is bigger than us or how we feel.

Marriage is an institution of God, not a private matter. But since the government doesn’t really regulate marriage, it is up to the two individuals. Society and sometimes even the Church has no say in marriage or divorce. People find it offensive to speak against sexual sins of this nature. These are huge problems: living together, divorce, practicing homosexuality, pre-marital

sex, and pornography. In our world, these are considered private affairs—nobody else’s business. Americans believe in love and the right of sexual pleasure and that no one should have to stay a loveless marriage.

## **Fake and True Love**

The truth is, if you have fallen for someone and want to fall out of love, there is one quick solution: marry them. Passion alone cannot last under the weight of a lifetime commitment and practical concerns. Marriage is very down-to-earth. It involves sharing a bed with someone who snores and gets sick. Unlike when dating, a spouse doesn’t wake up with nice hair and sweet breath. Marriage is about living by the sweat of your brow to eat in a sinful world. It is about bills and children, food and a home, sharing and compromising. It is about not getting what you want. It does not lead to romance or a permanent emotional high. Instead, it is a school for life that demands a lot, but forces you to be a more mature, less selfish person.

Marriage is hard. Think of when a married couple has a big anniversary, such as 50 years. Do we ask if each day was full of love and happiness? No, the miracle is that two sinners haven’t killed each other. We celebrate that they continue to *try* to love each other, even when the emotion of puppy love left decades ago. Love, as an action, is hard. But in the wedding vows, we promise “to love,” not to be “in love.” The difference is night and day.

You may think I’m joking about killing each other, but I’m not. 40% of female murders are by a romantic partner.<sup>1</sup> The same intense emotion of love that causes people to get married, causes them to commit adultery, divorce, and murder.

One fascinating book is called “Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage.” That is exactly what happened. The idea of marriage as God’s work and a public institution that served the society started going downhill about 300 years ago. Consider this: if love is the driving engine of a relationship, then they must be equals. Love between a superior and subordinate is not pleasant or fair. Duties or fixed roles conflict with free and equal romance. And children do

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<sup>1</sup>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>.

not help marriage, is the common advice. They supposedly kill romance and the intense feeling of love—despite the fact that children and marriage go together. The ideal marriage is between two equals who do not have distinct gender roles. But the Bible speaks of the wife submitting as the weaker partner and the man leading as the head.

Who is the ideal soulmate? Notice that this term “soulmate” does not refer to the body, anatomy, or gender. In homosexual “marriage,” two of the same sex are equal, children are impossible to conceive, and there are no roles to play. They get to be two separated, equal individuals—connected only by feelings.

LOVE I don't know where you ran off to!!  
But love love love  
I still believe in you!

Love has conquered marriage in our minds.

But human love is an illusion. We are selfish from the moment of birth. In fact, there is no true love without God and knowledge of Jesus. In I John 4 we read:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

True love is sacrificial. It is giving of yourself and your life, even to death. Having children teaches us a bit of what love is—it is not about how we feel. We do not always have an emotional high from being around our children. True love requires suffering and pain. Only Jesus has loved us like this—no sinner can possibly put up with constant rebellion and unfaithfulness. Marriage is not the way to get this love. Only in the Gospel, which we hear and believe, do we get God's love. We are freed from sins, even the sexual misconduct of our youth. Christ nailed our sins to the cross and put them to death. Turn from them and they are forgiven. Now you are in God

the Father's good graces, with no guilt or punishment on you. You have God's love shown in Jesus who was your sin offering.

## Why Marry

If you don't marry for love, why do it? Because you have to. Marriage is an unavoidable fact of this world. Americans actually think too much of marriage, not too little. It is a practical fact of life, unavoidable for most. It is like breathing oxygen. You may not like the idea and can try to resist it, but God pushes us to it. He works in a hidden way to cause us to desire it.

Marriage is about the body, not the soul. We were created with an attraction to the opposite sex. It can be ignored or denied, but lust is very powerful. Our bodies demand to be with another and share a life together. This is actually God's work. Not to save us, but it is His natural working in creation.

God said to Adam and Eve, and again to Noah, "Be fruitful and multiply." This is not a command, married couples don't have to think about children to have them. No, God the Father implanted this desire and necessity of having children. This (plus our sin) is why the young lust and cannot control their desire. Hear Martin Luther speak about it:

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. For the Word of God which created you and said, "Be fruitful and multiply," abides and rules within you; you can by no means ignore it, or you will be bound to commit heinous sins without end.<sup>2</sup>

Luther speaks utterly realistically. We are not all royal couples. We are not all supermodels with perfect bodies and massive sex appeal. But almost all have the divine impulse to know

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<sup>2</sup>*The Estate of Marriage* (1522), LW 45:18-19.

someone else—to join as one flesh.

St. Paul in I Cor. 7 speaks of marriage in the most practical way possible—just like Luther did later. “Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: ‘It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.’ But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.” Marriage is a concession, not a source of fulfillment for the Christian. Sinful men and women are weak and almost all will fall into sexual immorality. Doesn’t it seem like single women today have more children than the married ones? Isn’t living together practically just like marriage (though without the public commitment)? Marriage, and its most basic sexual act, are unavoidable. We cannot overcome our nature.

So what else does Paul tell us in I Cor. 7?

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.

The Bible commands that the marital bed be well-used. In marriage, your body belongs to your spouse, since you are one. But it will not be like the movies. Hollywood depicts complete strangers consuming one another in sexual passion and then discarding each other. It is a mountain-top experience—but between strangers usually. No one wants to see middle-aged married couples with sagging bodies, trying not to wake kids. Teenagers get uncomfortable with thought of how God conceived them through their parents—because that makes sex part of normal, everyday life, not a ideal fantasy.

Luther and St. Paul say marital sex has more in common with eating and drinking, and emptying the bowels. We can abstain for a while, and should certainly exercise self-control in these bodily matters. But it is impractical to never do them—the temptation is too great. So within marriage intercourse is a duty and right. St. Paul speaks of sex as a debt, something owed to the other, even when you don’t feel passionate or romantic. That doesn’t sound very

sexy, does it? It is not the stuff of movies or songs, because the world despises God's work of marriage.

But in the one flesh union, God joins two bodies together into one. Even the husband does not have authority over his own body and neither does the wife. In marriage one's body belongs to the other—by divine right. We are not to deprive our spouse of what is theirs. This lack self-control is why people get married or fall into a poor imitation.

“The logic of romantic love is adulterous, both extramarital and unfaithful to the workaday structure of the home.”<sup>3</sup> Changing poopy diapers, waking up to feed the baby, carrying out the trash and working jobs to buy food is not romantic. Marriage is a practical, bodily undertaking. There is nothing spiritual about it. It is easier to like someone we do not have to live with. We get see to our spouse's faults over and over again. Marriage and raising children teach much about sin, sacrifice, and the need for Christ's forgiveness. But marriage is not about personal fulfillment or an in-the-clouds romantic love. Yet, marriage is the place to be what we were made to be—male and female. Only here is sex and our lustful desires not deadly to soul and body. In the words of our Supreme Court in 1952: “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>4</sup>

Anyone without the direct, divine gift of celibacy must be married or sin. This estate, with its troubles and practical concerns, controls the sinful sexual impulses within us. It will not satisfy you, but it is the only way not to sin for most. Intercourse within marriage is a duty, expectation, and concession to human weakness. It is to be routine and domesticated, a part of normal, everyday life, not a rare mountain-top experience. “Those who believe sex is earth shattering will put it outside of marriage.”<sup>5</sup>

When I hear of compatibility within marriage, I laugh to myself. Sinners are not compatible, which is why marriage is so much work. Love in marriage is back-breaking work and sacrifice, even after 50 years together. The world says that couples should find out if they are sexually

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<sup>3</sup>McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home*, 17.

<sup>4</sup>*De Burgh v. De Burgh* (1952), quoted in: Sherif Girgis and Ryan Anderson and Robert P. George, *What is Marriage?*, 116.

<sup>5</sup>McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home*, 44.

compatible before marriage. But God made it obvious—male and female have compatible bodies.

Luther speaks in plain words:

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>6</sup>

Marriage is not a spiritual matter—but a physical one. If you have a body, you were made for marriage. Unless you are not bothered by lust, marriage is a given.

## A Definition of Marriage

The Christian definition of marriage is simple: “The two shall become one flesh” [Mt. 19:5; Mk. 10:8], but it is in no way restricted to Christians. “Be fruitful and multiply” establishes 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>7</sup> Family (as father, mother, and children) is the most natural unit of humanity in this world—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. Governments can’t raise children, so families are needed.

God creates all life, not just Christians. He makes us into two sexes, male and female, thereby indicating 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>8</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>9</sup> After the fall into sin, not everyone must marry, though most should. “God

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<sup>6</sup>*The Estate of Marriage* (1522), LW 45:25.

<sup>7</sup>Gene Edward Veith Jr. and Mary J. Moerbe, *Family Vocation: God’s Calling in Marriage, Parenting, and Childhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 15.

<sup>8</sup>Werner Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, trans. Carl J. Schindler (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957), 77.

<sup>9</sup>Lenski, *Marriage in the Lutheran Church*, 107.



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>10</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 (since it is completely natural), they cannot see it as God’s work. Christian marriage is no different from pagan, civil marriage. There is only one marriage, not two like for the Roman Church. Though, believers in Christ are to see the Author of marriage as God Himself. Society or “mother nature” did not create it, it is the reason God created man in two different forms. The 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 senses, and still takes care of them.” Marriage is as obvious as the body we have been given. We were made differently to operate as one, to have children, and to know one another in a life-long union.

“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>11</sup> Inseparable, but not identical, is the marital act. Sexual intercourse is intended by God Himself. There is nothing shameful about it or our bodies—we were designed by God for it. Without it there would be no babies, and God would have made a mistake with our bodies. But only in marriage is sexual desire used rightly. The young need to hear a positive view of God’s creation. Don’t be ashamed of what God made you for. Even inappropriate lust serves a purpose, because it leads to family.

None of us would be here without the specific marital act. Yet, even outside of marriage, it is marital in character. I Cor. 6:15-16 reads: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members 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.’” Sexual intercourse unites male and female and is a type of marriage, though without public recognition it is defective and illegitimate.

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<sup>10</sup>Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *God and Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 1.

<sup>11</sup>*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), III:264.

“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.<sup>12</sup> They dishonor the estate God made, and therefore God Himself. Those living together in sin must be called to repentance, because there is no such thing as a private marriage. But physically God unites in this act between male and female. There is no “safe sex”—it is always unitive, it joins and unites. It is God’s own work to make two into one—for life.

The world thinks of “safe sex” in terms of preventing children and sexually transmitting diseases, but it is always marital—it unites two into one flesh. 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. There is no “safe sex,” it is always a giving of the whole self, a uniting, a true knowing and revealing to another person. It is always a permanent decision. God makes it always a true marital act, even when it is treated as meaningless gratification. Our young people must know that this is serious business.

Even “pre-marital sex” is a misnomer—there is only marital sex that God always works through, whether intended by man or not. Even pagans realize sex should be something special and that it changes a relationship forever. 93% of respondents to one survey wished they had waited longer to consummate a non-marital relationship.<sup>13</sup> Only those waiting until validly married will have no regret, because it is God’s will for bodily union to be marital, part of his public estate. Those who do not will suffer and open themselves up to union with someone with no commitment. It harms the body and soul. Even a tawdry, one-night stand, then, entails a divorce physically—it breaks asunder what God has joined. In the words of a song on the radio, which describes a fling with a girl who cheats on him: “And I wasn’t looking for a promise or commitment/ But it was never just fun and I thought you were different.”<sup>14</sup> Sex is bigger than us, which is why sexually “cheating” is still viewed as destructive today. It is actually adultery, People just don’t know they have joined themselves previously. “You shall not commit adultery”

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<sup>12</sup>Martin Luther, *What is Marriage, Really?*, trans. Holger Sonntag, ed. Paul Strawn (Minneapolis: Lutheran Press, 2013), 41.

<sup>13</sup>Browne, *Dating for Dummies*, 282.

<sup>14</sup>Ed Sheeran, “Don’t.”

applies to the unmarried too.

Only male and female can unite. This is a fact of nature. It is impossible for two of the same sex to become one. In electronics there are male and female cable ends. To make a connection opposites are required. This basic and obvious fact of nature is now obscured through an impractical way of thinking. Why? Because love is not about the body or how God made us.

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 great pleasure, nor desire for children. God works through means, in this case the body parts we cover in modesty. This makes accidental unions (and children) improbable. Sexual union is a sharing of our whole person. It is misused outside of marriage.

The bodily union of male and female is the one defining act of marriage. Not just as a continual activity, but in a single bodily union 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>15</sup> Adultery is not an exception to the "no divorce rule," but the actual tearing of the one flesh into two and the physical joining to another in bodily union. To create a new one flesh bond, is to destroy the previous marital unity. Outside of adultery, the one flesh union is not broken—even if intercourse becomes impossible. Adultery, the joining of one's body with another, destroys what God has created. Even a 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. 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 for join [kollao] speaks of God's uniting action. It means to glue or cement together.<sup>16</sup> So, "mutual consent of the contracting parties must be the vital element."<sup>17</sup> Not that consent forms or keeps the union together, but it marks public entry into this institution. Consent to divorce does not break this union, in fact, it lasts until in death God breaks it or in the adulterous act man does. Jesus spoke of this reality: "Everyone who divorces his wife

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<sup>15</sup>Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, 90.

<sup>16</sup>Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), 252.

<sup>17</sup>Lenski, *Marriage in the Lutheran Church*, 236.

and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery” (Lk. 16:18). Marriage is an act of God, since He physically unites two bodies together. It is He who cements and holds together the one flesh unions of all people. Man is not given the authority to separate this 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 does it in such a hidden way that He does not get any credit from unbelievers. We are called to honor and uphold marriage as a holy way of life, even if we are single, and not accept cheap, degrading, dishonorable substitutes.

## Order of Creation

Marriage is of the world and man’s bodily nature, not the Holy 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, like we are, but He regulates and upholds all things. Government does not actually join the two into one, though legal protections uphold that divine union. Society must take it as a natural given of this world. Neither can the government prevent this permanent joining, since it happens also in a physical act. It does, however, have the role of governing the use of it. Marriage in itself is a worldly matter for the state to deal with, not the Church.

While thoroughly divine in itself, marriage is for this world only: “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 in marriage will stop. There is no “Christian” marriage, there is only worldly, bodily marriage.

Even where laws do not prescribe it, society has customs and some means of recognizing the public character of marriage and the voluntary entry into this estate. “To speak of marriage is to talk about humanity.”<sup>18</sup> Even the 6th commandment “you shall not commit adultery” does not explain or encourage marriage, it simply assumes it.<sup>19</sup> This world must have marriage to

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<sup>18</sup>Wilhelm Maurer, *Historical Commentary on the Augsburg Confession*, trans. H. George Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 165.

<sup>19</sup>Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, 77.

continue and prosper. “Marriage is the most important legal contract in every society.”<sup>20</sup> It is more than a legal matter, it is the basis for this life.

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>21</sup> In fact, it is older than the State or the Church. “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>22</sup> “Marriage has been described as biological act, as a legal contract, and as an economic arrangement.”<sup>23</sup> Oneness in body includes oneness in these outward things. Though marriage has nothing to do with salvation, the first Lutherans “were far removed from the thought of surrendering marriage to the profane, that is, to an order detached from God.”<sup>24</sup> Marriage is completely worldly, yet still holy and divine.

Who marries? Even though couples, ministers, and civil servants claim to “marry,” God is the one who joins two bodies into one. He does not delegate this uniting, just as sure as He made everyone male or female. We do not get to choose what sex we want to be—God does not give that choice away. The word “the two shall become one flesh” cannot fail in its aim, though people do fail and break what God has joined. It is not human acknowledgment or acceptance of this divine word that makes it effective. We may say every marriage is a miracle, a divine working of God, because it is. God unites apart from faith or knowledge of Him.

Our Lutherans confessions say: “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>25</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.

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<sup>20</sup>Bronislaw Malinowski, “marriage,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 14th ed. (1929), quoted in: Lenski, *Marriage in the Lutheran Church*, 8.

<sup>21</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 6.

<sup>22</sup>Johann Michael Reu, *Christian Ethics* (Columbus, OH: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1935), 266-67.

<sup>23</sup>*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 261.

<sup>24</sup>Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions 1529-1537*, trans. Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 291.

<sup>25</sup>Ap 23:8, 9, 12; Kolb/Wengert, 249.

Even today for all attempts to redefine a legal union, homosexual unions are not that popular. This legal change is really not about marriage, but a pursuit of equality and civil rights. But true marriage cannot be changed. People entering 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. But the Church must take it seriously, even if society doesn't. God declares: "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).

## Part Two

The influence of Christianity has been great since it was legalized in 312 A.D., though it seems to have mostly dissipated.<sup>26</sup> But government and marriage are God’s creations and “these stations must remain if the world is to stand.”<sup>27</sup> Every successful culture must die, and we are witnessing our nation’s decay. We have more in common with the early Christians, when New Testament was written, than any other time. Early Christians were in basically the same counter-cultural position as modern biblical Christians, fighting against the killing of young children, the widespread use of contraception, “against sexual immorality, and against extravagant weddings, easy divorces, and routine remarriages.”<sup>28</sup> The “early fathers also used the Bible to criticize prevailing roman practices of concubinage, homosexuality, infanticide, child abuse, arranged marriages, [and] raucous weddings.”<sup>29</sup> (Notice that big, expensive weddings are 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.)

In no way do we have a Christian society. A loss of morals and the breakdown of the family will eventually ruin our country. There will not be enough people to support the welfare spending of the state. To get people we must have children, but that goes against love and happiness today. It has also changed marriage from an institution for society into a private contract—it is only about the two. Yet our hope is not in laws or government action, but in Christ who empowers it and allows this world to be populated and continue for a short time. It is passing away, but those in Christ live forever.

While a strong government would be more pleasing to us, it would not help marriage. Laws don’t make people better—they are for the evil-doers, to retrain them. 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” (I

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<sup>26</sup>Lenski, *Marriage in the Lutheran Church*, 44.

<sup>27</sup>Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, 37.

<sup>28</sup>John Witte Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012; 2nd ed.), 75.

<sup>29</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 54.

Tim. 1:9-10).

The government is presently having an identity crisis. It is rebelling against what God gave it to do, just like men and women don't want to be what they are. The state does not want to rule the body and promote positive order, but enforce an outward equality by law and tax code. But laws cannot grant status before God or erase our biology. The government obliges citizens and thinks it is granting freedom and equality by allowing divorce and homosexuality. This 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" have really become "agents of affection," instead of servants of the law.<sup>30</sup> Heterosexual-only marriage is now described as a type of racism. The government no longer protects the innocent: children and mothers (because women wanted to be treated like men). The government does not want to govern, in other words.

How is the Christian to react to the state not doing its job by promoting family and society? Marriage as God's work cannot be undone, even when laws allow sinners to separate what God has united. But we do not need to change the institution of marriage through laws, or encourage civil disobedience (by avoiding public marriage). Sinners have never loved marriage. Only the Gospel makes us guilt-free and renewed before the Father, so that it is possible to love God, including His work of marriage. 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, are null and void before the forum of the church, which is ruled not by civil law but by divine law."<sup>31</sup>

We live in two kingdoms, one earthly ruled by the government, and one heavenly ruled by Christ through His Word. The Church is not about changing public laws, but instructing consciences. We do not force people to marry, but speak the Word of God. That means spiritual discipline also. Most public sins pastors deal with are related to the 6th commandment. But if we accept sin, we cannot forgive it. We were not baptized into sin, but to live a new life. Christ died in the body, so it matters what we do with our body. They are temples of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>30</sup>McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home*, 67.

<sup>31</sup>Theo. Laetsch, "Divorce and Malicious Desertions," in *Concordia Theological Monthly* (Dec. 1932), quoted in Reu, *Christian Ethics*, 271.



Sexual sin is sin against the body and drives out the Spirit. And without the Spirit there is no faith, therefore no forgiveness.

The Christian sees marriage as God's Work. Human infatuation (or believing in love) is not a solid basis for an enduring union. Rather, God's true love is shown in Jesus' suffering and death. In response, the married Christian bears his marriage troubles willingly. We are not to run away from God who unites in marriage. He made it and we trust He will bless us in it.

Married Christians know where God wants them to bear their cross. An opportunity for good works is never far away. This institution is not a matter of internal nourishment (that benefits us), 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). It is said also "But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace"(I Cor. 7:15). Notice it says only the "unbelieving partner" breaks a marriage. A Christian ruled by the Spirit simply cannot do it. Whoever does we should not recognize as a Christian—until they repent. Christ calls us to be faithful, not because our spouse deserves it, but out of duty to the living God.

When marriage is seen as God's work, it will also be seen as a God-pleasing way to live, apart from any personal benefits. What is law, legal constraint, and a prison to the world (a spouse is called a "ball and chain"), becomes a divine calling, a holy vocation to the Christian. Since God wills it, 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>32</sup> This is not a spiritualizing of marriage, but we see that the God who saves us is also active in marriage. And He only wants the best for us in Christ.

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<sup>32</sup>Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, 95.

## All Conquering Love

Since the Reformation, the institution of marriage has become less institutional and formal. The three purposes of children, mutual aid, and protection against sexual immorality have been detached and made optional, if not outdated. While marriage itself, as God's work has not changed, the reasons to get married and expectations for it have been altered by "love."

If love, that is, mutual affection and feeling is taken as the essence of a union, God's work is denied. Legal divorce will then be more accessible, apart from the actual breaking of the marriage bond. The world thinks marrying and staying married only for love is good. We see the end of this kind of thinking today, which makes marriage a private relationship, with no definable purpose or objectives. It is up to whatever the two partners want to make it. But it de-stabilizes society. Children are without two parents, mothers are raising children on their own, fathers are not allowed to be fathers, and in-laws are divided. Love should not hurt so many innocent bystanders. Couples routinely write their own wedding vows, thinking they shape marriage, including its purposes and longevity.

In the last several hundred years, the idea of love has overrun the natural purposes and public character of marriage. First "mutual aid," referring to outward duties, was replaced with subjective feelings of passion. "Mutual aid" 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 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. Then, more recently, children have been logically separated from marriage. Few marry expecting or allowing children as the result of their conjugal duty. Children are now seen as optional, if not conflicting with marriage, primarily because they do not align with the real purpose for which most get married: a perceived internal closeness and a withdrawing, selfish, loving companionship. Actually, children are a good reason to stay together outside ourselves. The more children a couple has, the less likely they are to divorce—personal happiness becomes less of a concern.

Today marriage is not seen as an institution, but a private, formless relationship answerable to no one else. "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>33</sup> Marriage was not about individuals, it was about society at large and governed accordingly to strict laws. When divorce, even for the case of adultery, became legal in England in 1658, it required “a private act of Parliament [equivalent to our U.S. Congress].” The result: “There was only one divorce every five or six years.”<sup>34</sup> It was not pure love that held husband and wives together, but pure compulsion and force. People stayed married, because they was no alternative.

Enlightenment writers around the year 1700 starting speaking of equality, apart from the Gospel, with vigor, and a few generations later some “called for absolute equality of husband and wife.”<sup>35</sup> The structure of marriage changed, though its fruits were not so visible until the last few decades. 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 contract that can be re-written or torn up at any time.

This contractarian gospel [that marriage is a human contract] for the reformation of Western marriage law was too radical 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>36</sup>

What 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>37</sup> It was an absolute rule, not subject to many, if any, limitations. But as love and companionship grew to dominate the purpose for marriage, traditional gender roles stood in the way. Love was more easily fostered when men and women

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<sup>33</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 5.

<sup>34</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 256, 268.

<sup>35</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 11.

<sup>36</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 11.

<sup>37</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 148.

were equals in authority, not in an divinely ordered hierarchy—one above the other. Feelings did not dissolve the public institution, but they could an emotional connection.

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>38</sup> Now, in this contractual view of marriage, there is no reason to stay in a less than fulfilling marriage. Neither society's expectations, nor public laws require it. So now couples can divorce easily—since no-fault divorce laws were enacted in the 1970's. Now one party can leave the marriage against the other's will, without any good reason—just to be happy. Previously, it required at least the consent of both and some proof that the marriage was broken. This is what many couples have historically wanted, but it was not practical, nor legal.

The spouse ceased to be a workmate and instead became a soulmate, with no definable role.<sup>39</sup> Now marriage is seen "as essentially an emotional union."<sup>40</sup> It is not about duties and physical obligations. "Americans marry to enhance their inner, largely secret selves."<sup>41</sup> These interior unions gave rise to "disembodied love," one not dependent on nature, anatomy, society's well-being, or specific roles.<sup>42</sup> Marriage, in the modern view, is under the "bewitchment and tyranny of love."<sup>43</sup> Hence the one month marriage of Jana Kramer, but the eagerness to try it again and again. Remember the song: "love, where did you go?"

If love and equality, not the male/female roles, make marriage, nature is not the starting point. Instead, the individuals remain separated, united only by their agreement. What someone said in the 1600's is now the basic, cultural understanding: "that marriages be made annually renewable contracts, rescindable at will by either party."<sup>44</sup> So it's like registering vehicle—if you

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<sup>38</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 328.

<sup>39</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 68.

<sup>40</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>41</sup>Paul Bohannon, *All the Happy Families: Exploring the Varieties of Family Life*, quoted in: Fisher, *Anatomy of Love*, 111.

<sup>42</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>43</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 147.

<sup>44</sup>Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 268.

don't actively choose to continue the marriage—it is effectively over. If marriage is unpleasant or hindering either individual, is an evil to be discarded for the world. This thinking is based on the idea that “all God’s children have the right to feel good.”<sup>45</sup> But God does not promise this—faithfulness to Him will require suffering. Children, distinct roles, a life-long promise, and even marriage itself, are seen as contradictory to the union of souls. Soul-talk is from Hinduism and Eastern religion, not Christianity. This is another example that marriage is thought of as other-worldly and spiritual, not the way people should practically live.

Unreliable feelings have replace structure, laws, and roles. “Westerners adore love. We symbolize it, fear it, envy it, live for it, and die for it.”<sup>46</sup> Or in the words of our singer: “But love love love I still believe in you.” Even the idea of a fixed gender or sexual orientation is seen to hinder the god of love. So sexual orientation refers to how one feels, not how God made them. This idea of love has more in common with drugs, than any public institution or outward duties. Love provides a temporary high, but also creates a powerful withdrawal. In words of a song popular now on the radio: “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.”<sup>47</sup> Marriage, as an outside influence, hinders the “pure relationship” of the inner person.<sup>48</sup> It has been divorced from the practical needs of the body and this world. It has been made spiritual, a type of religious experience.

One shut-in I enjoyed visiting in Bancroft was Elaine Beckmann, who is now in heaven. She once told me: “When I was young you just married your next door neighbor.” She couldn’t understand why people traveled hundreds of miles and spent so much effort to find a soulmate.

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 husband, not mutual love was the expectation. Since marriage is not considered practical, 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—and living happily ever after. A single individual is sought to

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<sup>45</sup>Joy Browne, *Dating for Dummies* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2011; 3rd. ed.), 374.

<sup>46</sup>Fisher, *Anatomy of Love*, 165.

<sup>47</sup>2014 song “Habits” by Tove Lo.

<sup>48</sup>McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home*, 209.

complete them spiritually—to be a best friend, edifying companion, and passionate lover. No wonder people are hesitant to get married—that’s an impossible task. But if God joins, agreeing on family, religion, sex, and money should produce a content union. That will give true love a place to develop over decades—sharing joys and sorrows. A bad marriage is better than an amicable divorce—for everyone. Cutting ourselves in half is never the answer.

Most essentially marry an ideal of love today, not a person, and must stay true to it, not the marriage union. Love has conquered marriage as a basic, public institution. “For 150 years, [several] things kept people from pushing the new values about love and self-fulfillment to their ultimate conclusion: that people could construct meaningful lives outside of marriage and that everything in society had to be organized through and around married couples.”<sup>49</sup> And here we are—marriage is an extra, a bonus, a spiritual experience—not a fact of life we were made for.

## Love in Marriage

Romantic love is in contrast to the the structure and definite sex, or gender, ordering of marriage. But human love is a temporary infatuation, a self-centered desiring and projection of oneself. It is about getting for yourself, not the giving of yourself. Young people love another, like they love chocolate or the high of drugs. Sinners cannot truly love—all real love is from God, through Christ.<sup>50</sup> Many speak of unconditional love, but man’s love is dependent on outward fidelity and a selfish receiving of benefits. If your spouse cheats on you, will you forgive easily and frequently? I hope so, but I doubt I would. Every love or fulfillment apart from God is idolatry. Those who marry for love will be disappointed, for Christ’s love—true love—is not found in another person.

We think we marry on our own accord. But 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 reasoning was, 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

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<sup>49</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 307.

<sup>50</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.

behavior. Marriage does not demand that a married couple spontaneously and joyfully love each other in the most friendly and helpful way.

Marriage is a practical undertaking. It requires specific duties and 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 the 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 outward force. It is an act of sacrificial love, 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, 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). We were not made to be equals in this world in all we do, though in Christ, forgiveness and eternal life is the same. The Gospel does not undo nature—we were made different for a reason.

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 becomes pleasing to God in faith. “This headship only makes sense for one under Christ’s authority.”<sup>51</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 marriage.<sup>52</sup> In Christ, submission is a free and light duty. The creative order is not leveled, but seen in an entirely new light as God’s will and gift. This is how Christians view marriage—in an entirely different way.

The oneness in flesh does not erase sex distinction, but highlights how male and female fit

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<sup>51</sup>Bromiley, *God and Marriage*, 7.

<sup>52</sup>Bromiley, *God and Marriage*, 69-70.

together. We were made different specifically for marriage. The one body has members with different functions and modesty shown to them. The one flesh union is not a generic unity of two of the same. This oneness shows the roles male and female should play in marriage. Two identical equals cannot be one. In our culture, homosexuals symbolize the pure, ideal relationship. That is because men and women themselves are rebelling against what God made them to be.

“Monogamy, with its implied headship of man over woman, is an order of creation which God established as a protective dam against the demonic power of sin.”<sup>53</sup> This quote says that without ordering and difference unity is not possible. Every Christian submits (to Christ), 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>54</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. These roles tell us how to love, as an action. Rather than an idea or feeling, love serves and takes creaturely form. This Christian love partakes of humility just as Christ’s love compelled Him to submit to death. But it is holy when we submit in faith, according to our place.

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>55</sup> So, today a wife can prevent or kill a baby without her husband’s knowledge, just as a teenager can do the same without her parents’ consent.

But with clearly defined roles in marriage, it is an institution bigger than the people in it. We do not get to choose how marriage should function, neither does government control it. 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 the sex God made us. “The Christian woman in accordance with God’s will leaves the reins in her husbands

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<sup>53</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>54</sup>Zerbst, *The Office of Woman in the Church*, 47.

<sup>55</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 255.



hands, acknowledges him as her head, and is willing for the sake of love to be in subjection to him.”<sup>56</sup> This feminine love is not talk of sweet-nothings, but concrete submission, animated by respect for Christ who made us and ordered marriage a certain way. Only Christians can do this willingly. We do not need government laws, we have God’s own Word.

Men are told to love their wives, but in a specific way. They are not told to try and be the head, rather it is where God has placed husbands: “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). “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). Husband and wife are united as one, but there is an ordering and differentiation within this one flesh, even as their bodies are created different. Marriage determines what we are and what we should do, even for the unmarried. Children have a father and mother to honor, and the single honor God with their bodies by being chaste. Men should lead and take the hold of responsibility given to them—to love as Christ loved the Church—that is willingly. “Our most basic vocation or station in life is biological and the duties [in it] are God-given and in accord with how we were created.”<sup>57</sup> “God ‘preaches’ to women what their roles are to be by their biology.”<sup>58</sup>

This “duty love,” including conjugal duty, is at odds with romantic love, which depends on equality. Which is probably why many ancient cultures thought concubines and mistresses were for love and 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>59</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.

Biblically, love is shown in our gender roles and acting as the structure of marriage indicates, not as a fruit of companionship and inner harmony. Love is a duty, something we do outwardly—

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<sup>56</sup>Zerbst, *The Office of Woman in the Church*, 79.

<sup>57</sup>Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 4.

<sup>58</sup>Paul Harris, *Why is Feminism so Hard to Resist?* (Bynum, TX: Repristination Press, 1997; 2nd ed., 2011), 134.

<sup>59</sup>*Sex after Kids* is a 2013 Hollywood movie.

especially when we do not feel like it. Rather than focus on what we get in marriage, the actions of each are specified and the bond God made is to be respected above our own fulfillment. What is necessary for marriage is actually pretty basic: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality” (I Thess. 4:3). It is not the “inner relationship” that nourishes marriage, but God Himself. He who loves us gave us roles to follow as a pattern. God calls us to trust His creative will, and respect what He has made. Couples in the divine, protected institution can take themselves and their emotions less seriously, since they do not keep the marital bond energized by their own efforts or feelings. There is a freedom when marriage is bigger than us.

## Conclusion

Believers are not called to change marriage or establish a Christian version of it. The American government is not forcing Christians to sin currently, even if it does not prevent sin very well. But the answer is not to turn the Gospel into a new secular law. According to our Confessions: “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>60</sup> The state’s use of divine authority is to be respected, if it can be obeyed without sinning. “The same triune God who acts through civil government also acts through the church’s ministry.”<sup>61</sup> But each has their own task: one of the outward law to restrain evil-doers, the other of the spiritual application of the law into order to forgive by the Gospel. We live in both of these kingdoms and God works in both.

Christian faith does not change marriage’s nature or duties, any more than believing the Gospel changes our bodies. However, Christians are to use this natural institution in a special Christian way. The proclaimed Word of God which renews individuals and makes them spiritual causes marriage to be seen 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

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<sup>60</sup>Ap XVI:3; Kolb/Wengert, 231.

<sup>61</sup>Edmund Schlink, *The Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961) , 233.

troubles of a family become holy crosses, borne in trust that God gives them and is pleased with them. Luther wrote: “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>62</sup> Only the Gospel of Christ can cause one to love God and all His works—even the natural work of marriage. Only when God is love to us, can we see our marriage as a holy thing and God-pleasing. “You shall not commit adultery” really means for the married to be content with our spouse, despite the work and conflict in marriage.<sup>63</sup>

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>64</sup> It is no longer possible to assume that the young will seek marriage and avoid immorality by societal pressure. Quite the contrary, they are taught very young the physical side of sex, and the basic human right of sexual pleasure and heart-felt happiness. Public schools teach sex education, but not what it means and how serious uniting the body with someone else is. “Facts of nature do not take the place of clear moral principles.”<sup>65</sup>

One thing that has led to homosexuality is the acceptance of oral and anal homosexual acts. Even within marriage, these used to be called “crimes against nature.” But now they are accepted as “safe,” because no children can result. Pornography and mainstream movies glorify them. But they are a perversion of what God made us to be. Romans 1 speaks of homosexuality as a punishment for the loss of the knowledge of God: “For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.”

“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

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<sup>62</sup> *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), LW 45:42.

<sup>63</sup> Luther, *What is Marriage*, 54-55.

<sup>64</sup> “Response to Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,” 23.

<sup>65</sup> “That Marriage is not Outdated,” in *Marquart’s Works* (New Haven, Mo: Christian News, 2014), I:15.

Matrimony and the Home by the passage of more stringent laws of divorce!”<sup>66</sup> But the Gospel does not change the institution of marriage, it makes the people in it spiritual. Pastors are to give comfort and instruct consciences. A Christian does not need to marry, but must one be faithful in marriage. It is God’s will who will judge all people.

Our bodies demand marriage and the Lord is pleased with it. Yet, we do not sugar coat it, pretending it will fulfill people. Luther again writes: “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>67</sup> Sinful man will continue to despise marriage, as they must all good works of God. But Christians honor marriage as one of the best things in this world—God makes each individual union.

Marriage in prior days was seen like high school is today. Both marriage and high school are necessary and an integral part of this world, but are not about a “deeply fulfilling experience.”<sup>68</sup> It behooves Christians to teach children and those seeking to be married, that it 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 pastors should instruct in biblical gender roles and that then couples should “hear also the cross that God has placed on this estate.”<sup>69</sup> If you marry you will suffer, but take heart Christ has overcome the world and its sin, along with death itself. The suffering of marriage can cause one to seek eternal blessings in Christ.

It is always a duty of the Church to preach the Gospel. Broken marriage bonds abound, and not always by mutual choice. The divorced are often crushed by a false earthly gospel of “happily ever after.” The hurt need forgiveness and comfort—to be shown what real, heavenly love is.

The problem with marriage is always man’s problem with God and what He wills. Marriage is not a promise of anything from God, but the breaking of God’s one flesh union has significant,

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<sup>66</sup>Schmauk, *The Confessional Principle*, 931.

<sup>67</sup>*Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, 1.2:56

<sup>68</sup>Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 276.

<sup>69</sup>“A Marriage Booklet for Simple Pastors,” Kolb/Wengert, 370.

irreparable earthly consequences. In actual divorce the flesh (of two united people) is ripped apart. Even those united outside of public matrimony have been divided by knowing multiple people. Some have divorced dozens of times without knowing why they are so broken.

Only Christ's love can provide true, unconditional comfort. Even when we cheat on Him and follow false gods—He still loves and forgives us. This love was shown in bearing the world's sins and idolatry to the cross of death. We cheat on our God every day by sinning, yet He still loves. This love you will not find in a marriage.

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 be saved, it is for this world only. True love is not found in marrying, but Christians will honor God who is the source of all true love. He joins the two as one flesh. If any marriage is to continue and bless the world in some fashion, God will do the work and deserve the credit. In the words of a prayer of Martin Luther:

Lord God, who have created man and woman and have ordained them for the married estate, have blessed them also with the fruit of the womb, and have [in it] signified the [mystery] of your dear Son Jesus Christ and the church, his bride: We beseech your never-ending goodness that you would not permit this your creation, ordinance, and blessing to be removed or destroyed, but graciously preserve it among us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>“Marriage Booklet,” Kolb/Wengert, 371.