

Newsletter February 2014

In this newsletter we shall briefly discuss Christian Marriage utilizing edited excerpts taken from *Comprehensively Reformed Christianity* Book II, Chapter 16.1. Marriage is the oldest institution known to man having its origin in creation itself (cf. Ge.2:22). It constitutes the deepest human relationship known to mankind, and it is fundamental to the maintenance of any successful human society. Inasmuch as marriage predates Christianity, it is an institution that is universal to all of mankind and not just a privilege granted specifically to Christians. However, Christianity sheds great light upon it, and it greatly restores the blessings for mankind that God originally intended for marriage before the fall of Adam and Eve.

When God created Adam to have dominion over the earth, He saw that it was not good that man should live alone (cf. Ge.2:18). Although God had populated the earth with various animals, not one of them was found to be suitable to meet Adam's need for true physical companionship (cf. Ge.2:19,20). God daily conversed with Adam in the garden, providing him intellectual fellowship on a spiritual plane, but Adam also needed a being with whom he could confide intimately on a human level and with whom he could fully share the joy and benefits of human life. This special being must of necessity be a physical being very much like Adam himself, but also different in a way such that his physical companion would complement rather than conflict with his own thoughts and abilities.

God caused a great sleep to come over Adam during which time He formed a human consort or spouse from one side of Adam's own body (cf. Ge.2:21,22). Therefore, Eve was not an entirely new creation, but was instead formed out of and thus a part of the first creation. "And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Ge.2:23). Through that means, God had made the physical relationship between Adam and his spouse the most intimate human relationship possible: two independent living beings constituting one physical creation. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Ge.1:27). God considered the man and his wife one flesh, which they had previously shared within Adam's body, and both were therefore created in God's own spiritual image as salient autonomous beings – having the ability of independent thought and action. Adam joyfully received his helpmate to be at his side throughout life, and in that close relationship, man first experienced human love on a similar order to that which only the three persons within the Godhead had previously enjoyed. We see that this original joining of Adam with Eve actually constituted the first marriage between a man and a woman, and that it was not only approved and ordained by God, but that the relationship was created and fully defined by Him.

When God joins a man and woman in marriage, the union takes place on three levels: spiritual, mental and physical. Since the fall of man however, the spiritual component has greatly dissipated inasmuch as God cannot abide with sin. Therefore, in today's so-called civil marriages where God is deliberately excluded, the relationship can take root only within the mental and physical planes. Absence of the spiritual presence of God in a marriage greatly weakens it inasmuch as it becomes solely dependent upon the established laws of unrighteous man to bind it together. Christian marriage vows, in complete contrast, are commonly presided over by clergy and made in the presence of many god-fearing witnesses before the face of God Himself – seeking his witness of their vows as well as his approval, ordination, and continual blessing through divine maintenance of that union throughout the lifetimes of both spouses.

The intimate spiritual fellowship with God, which was lost in the fall of mankind, is restored in the fellowship a Christian enjoys with his Son, Jesus Christ by means of a spiritual rebirth (cf. Newsletter November 2012). Therefore, when a man and a woman that share that common bond in Christ enter into marriage, their combined faith becomes an integral part of it. The Christian looks upon marriage as a sacred spiritual bond that far exceeds that of a mere mental and physical relationship to cohabit legally as husband and wife. A marriage that has been effected by God is seen by the believer as being far more important to maintain and protect than fulfilling the personal desires of either the man or his wife separately. In response to that commitment, God welds the marriage together with the divine love that He endowed for it in the beginning. So much so that the husband would be willing to die to protect the life of his wife, even as Christ loved and died for the saving of his Church (cf. Ep. 5:25), and his wife will in turn respond to her husband's

love by unreservedly honoring him with her love, dedication, assistance, and respectful obedience, even as the Church should properly respond to her Lord and Savior (cf. Ep.5:22).

For that reason, Paul wrote that a Christian believer must not seek to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (cf. 2Co. 6:14). Certainly in Christian marriage, the two that become joined together as one must be equally established in a common spiritual faith in Christ. Otherwise, the two so joined would always pull in different directions, and the yoke of marriage would wear sorely on the necks of them both. Therefore, a Christian should never knowingly seek to marry an unbeliever lest his or her own faith be severely tested and the marriage becomes destined to failure. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul addressed the difficulty that arose when long after the wedding between two unbelievers has taken place one or the other of the spouses became a believer and the other remains an unbeliever. When they found themselves uncommonly yoked, the question arose whether or not the marriage should be terminated for that cause. Paul answered this with "... If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy" (1Co.7:12–14).

Therefore, we find that a Christian believer has no cause to annul a marriage or to divorce an unbeliever under those circumstances as long as the unbeliever chooses to peacefully remain with them in the marriage; although the unbeliever cannot join spiritually with the believer, he or she is not openly antagonistic toward the believing spouse's faith. In that event, the marriage remains spiritually valid based upon the vows taken by the believer alone thus sanctifying also the vows of the unbeliever in order that their children will not be brought up as descendents of a heathen relationship having no knowledge of God through the example of their parents. "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife" (1Co.7:15, 16). The believer consecrates the marriage through his or her own example of godly living as a continual witness to their unbelieving spouse, should he or she peacefully remain, in hopes of their eventual conversion to the faith.

Numerous passages of Scripture beginning in Genesis also make it very clear that marriage is a holy estate that can exist only between one man and one woman. In his epistle to the Romans, Paul states that all men know instinctively that God truly subsists as the supreme creator, ruler, and judge of all that transpires upon the earth, but that they suppress that knowledge so that they may continue to commit wicked acts with imagined impunity. Men have no excuse for that suppression inasmuch as God's presence and power is obvious merely by observing his divine works of nature all about us (cf. Ro.1:19–22). Because of their rejection of Him, they also defy his divine laws, and since they do so, God has given men over to a reprobate mind to engage in sexual impurity and the degrading of their bodies one with the other (cf. Ro.1:24,26–28). Homosexuality therefore is not a chance trait of birth, but a consequence of the sin of unbelief resulting in the defiance of God and his natural laws. The first marriage that God created in Genesis consisted of one man, Adam, and one woman, Eve, and it fully defined marriage for all time. Any attempt by mankind to fabricate a union between more than two persons (polygamy) or between persons of the same sex is an abomination that God cannot bless since it is destructive to his own purpose in creating marriage from the beginning. God sanctioned marriage not only for intimate companionship but also for the begetting of children in order to perpetuate the human race (cf. Ge. 1:28). Those who engage in homosexual unions ultimately condemn themselves to death inasmuch as they cannot procreate. They defy their human nature and purpose as well as that of their Creator. Any attempt to evade generational death through adoption of children only magnifies their sin by involving innocent children in their folly as they strive to perpetuate their own sin through them. God's definition of marriage remains firm regardless of man's attempts at circumvention. Such "civil unions," between those of the same sex have absolutely no standing before God and are not, therefore, marriage at all. They are but a legal contrivance by the ungodly who attempt to justify the sin of homosexuality, perpetuate it by example, and gain the approval of degenerate mankind in order to achieve various social and economic benefits that were intended to encourage legitimate godly marriages.

Marriage is a sacred institution that has been ordained by God, whereas divorce is an abomination contrived by sinful man. "The Pharisees also came unto [Jesus], tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mt.19:3–6). The word "asunder" means to "separate," but a secular divorce only grants permission for the husband and wife to live apart from each other by dissolving any legal bonds established by man; it cannot be a termination of a sacred marriage in which God declared them to be one flesh. "They say unto [Jesus], Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so" (Mt.19:7,8). Jesus said that it was only because of the hardness of the hearts of men that Moses allowed a letter of divorcement that the woman could be "put away" (cf. Mk.10:4,5). "But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh" (Mk.10:6–8). We must ask ourselves, since a man and a woman are made one flesh by an act of God in true marriage, how their one flesh can subsequently be divided again into two by the acts of men. Obviously, they can not.

Because Christians continue to live in an age where most of mankind's hearts are still hardened against God and likewise toward their spouse, circumstances arise where it may become necessary to legally terminate a marriage relationship to maintain peace. Actions committed by either or both spouses against the other are grounded in egregious sin, are often impossible to reconcile with ideal marriage at any level, and thus form biblical grounds for legal divorce. That action is never to be undertaken lightly realizing that divorce is always offensive to God regardless of the circumstances. Nevertheless, three conditions constitute such a travesty of marriage as a creation of God that it totally fails to live up to the lofty goals that God intended for it and so wrecks it from within. It is effectively nullified in practice making any semblance of its continuance as a genuine marriage hypocritical mockery. Simply stated, the three grounds for biblical divorce are adultery (cf. Book II, page 484), abandonment (cf. Book II, page 485), and spousal abuse (cf. Book II, page 486). While it is beyond the scope of this newsletter to discuss this subject in any detail here, we do address biblical divorce in some detail along with equally important questions concerning re-marriage after divorce in Book II, page 487-488. As we have discussed marriage and divorce thus far, we have concentrated on the relationship as if it affected only the man and the woman thus joined. However, the consequence of that relationship most often brings forth offspring that cements the marriage relationship into a greater family unit (cf. Book II, page 490) consisting of a father, a mother, and any number of children. Thus, any abuse of the divine law of marriage seriously affects not only the two principals directly involved in the relationship, but also their immediate offspring and even future generations to come. For that reason, reconciliation is always highly desirable over seeking divorce if that be at all possible. Even when initial reconciliation (cf. Book II, page 490) is effected between spouses, past sins can remain like a lead weight to drag a marriage down again before a state of mutual trust can be fully restored through honest testing over time.

For every sin that a man or woman can commit, God has provided a remedy that was purchased at great price through the death of his Son. Sins that violate his law of marriage are no exception to that remedy, totally apart from the unique stigma and necessary penalties often attached to such sins by secular and religious societies. Therefore, it is not only essential that a person who commits such unfaithful acts be reconciled to his or her spouse through true repentance (cf. Book II, page 488) and genuine forgiveness (cf. Book II, page 489), he or she must first and foremost be reconciled to God whose divine law he or she has broken. Only God can forgive sin through the grace acquired for us through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. It is to Him that we should and must turn to receive a healing balm for our sins and to fully repair any breach existing in a marriage relationship. God is willing and He is able to do so if we will but turn to Him by exposing the broken and contrite heart of a truly repentant sinner in need of his grace (Ps. 34:18; 51:17).