

Recovering Adam's Wonder and Initiative

INTRO:

- “Compared with marriage, being born is a mere episode of our career and dying a trivial incident” (Dorothy Dix¹).
- Marriage “brings [couples] into such intimate relations that they must either sweeten or embitter each other’s existence” (A. W. Pink [1886-1952], “The Excellence of Marriage,” Sermon on Hebrews 13:4).
- “Sad beyond words is it to see that professing Christians are themselves largely responsible for the lowering of marital standards, the general disregard of domestic relations, and the rapid disappearance of family discipline” (A.W. Pink).

I. **Marriage is Honorable (Hebrews 13:4)**

Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled.

- Not specified as Christian marriage, but if all marriage is honorable, then Christian marriage should be even more highly honored, because of . . .
 - A. . . . Who instituted it – none other than God Himself. No angel or emissary was entrusted with this task.
 - B. . . . when it was done – in the foundational week of creation, on the very day Adam was created and God made Eve, before sin had ever entered the world.
 - C. . . . how it was done – by the unusual process recounted in Genesis 2:18-24, and God’s taking great care to draw out the process to show that it was not initially complete
 - D. . . . where it was done – in the garden of God
 - E. . . . who is involved – man and woman, the only creatures in God’s image, destined to be heirs together of the grace of life
 - F. . . . what was in the mind of God as He formed Adam and Eve – to be a picture of Christ and the church, His body and bride
 - G. . . . why it was instituted – Scripture’s purposes are not all immediately presented, but we come to learn multiple reasons that range from man fulfilling God’s purposes for him to reign and multiply a godly seed of God-worshippers in the earth who would ultimately worship God in eternity to God’s supplying of man’s and woman’s needs for companionship and help.

¹ Pen name for a popular newspaper columnist in the early to mid-20th century.

- H. . . . how Adam responded (with delight, comprehension, gratitude, commitment, and initiative)

The creation of the woman did not obscure the responsibility God had already placed on the man; her presence increased his privilege, but also increased his responsibility. Now Adam would be responsible to see that they both listened to God, knew His voice, and carried out His wishes He had given to them to them as a blessing – to rule on earth under God’s authority, and to fill the earth. God would hold the man primarily responsible.

- I. . . . how God responded to Adam’s response (cf. Genesis 1:31, *God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good*)

II. Who is to Honor Marriage? (Ephesians 5:33)

Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself (Ephesians 5:33a).

Each individual – “no matter how good you are or how bad your spouse” (Richard Steele [1629-1692], “What are Duties of Husbands and Wives,” Sermon on Ephesians 5:33).

III. How Do Christian Men Honor Marriage?

- A. By Delighting² in Marriage as an Institution Created by God (Genesis 2:18-24)
- B. By Delighting in God’s Role as the One Who Puts Marriages Together (Genesis 2:23; Matthew 19:5-6, *what therefore God has joined together*)
- C. By Valuing God’s Standard of Permanency in Marriage (Matthew 19:6). It is a covenant that should never be broken in life. Permanency is a motivation for growth in our marriages.
- D. By Delighting in God’s Designed Purposes for Marriage

If He created us, and He designed the institution of marriage, and if He brought the first couple together, knowing and delighting in His design and intentions for marriage should be our first priority.

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² By delight, I mean to convey more than recognition, but satisfaction and persuasion.

1. Oneness

“The narrative . . . takes this unique correspondence between woman and man, originating in the unity of their bone and flesh, as the reason why, in marriage, the man leaves his family, ‘clings’ to his wife, and they ‘become one flesh.’ The organic unity of woman and man, ensured by the way in which God created the woman, corresponds to the physical unity of woman and man in marriage” (Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, Ephesians 5:31, 827).

- a. In Purpose – Fruitfulness and ruling together a godly seed under the authority of God
- b. In Companionship

“Without a Christian friend, walking the narrow road to heaven is a very difficult path. Even Solomon says, ‘Woe to the one who is alone. When he falls there is no one to help him up again’ [Ecclesiastes 4:9-10]. Hardly a day passes when a Christian does not need either comfort, or admonition, or warning, or encouragement, or instruction, and the like. So it is a great benefit to have a faithful fellow-traveler on the path to the heavenly goal!” (Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, “Wedding Address on Genesis 2:18,” *Occasional Sermons and Addresses*).³

- c. Physically (1 Corinthians 7:1-4)

“Marital sex is designed to remedy impure affections, not excite them. You cannot follow every sexual folly you can imagine with your spouse, just because you are married” (Steele).

God “instituted, heterosexual, monogamous marriage as the most intimate of personal relationships and as the only relationship in which sexual union was appropriate” (Beale and Carson, Matthew 19:5, 59).

2. Portrayal of the Mystery of Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:25-33)

“As God willed for Christ and the church to become one body (Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 12:13), so He willed for marriage to reflect this pattern—that the husband and wife become one flesh (Genesis 2:24). It is no accident that human marriage provides language to explain Christ’s relation to the church (2 Corinthians 11:2). For human marriage is the copy, not the original. Geoffrey Bromiley is right when he says,

³ Walther (1811-1887) served as the first President of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. He became president of Concordia Seminary.

‘As God made man in His own image, so He made earthly marriage in the image of His own eternal marriage with His people’ (*God and Marriage*, p. 43).⁴

E. By Taking Initiative in A Husband’s Role in Bringing God’s Purposes to Fruition

“There is no perfection upon earth. Lovers, it is true, often fancy they have found it; but the more sober judgment of husbands and wives generally corrects the mistake We should all enter the married state, remembering that we are about to be united to a fallen creature” (John Angell James [1785-1859], “Mutual Duties of Husbands and Wives,” Sermon from 1 Peter 1:22).

“A good husband will either make a good wife, or [more] easily and profitably endure a bad one” (Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, “The Special Duties of Husbands to Their Wives”).

“He must labor to be fit and able for that government which he undertaketh” (Baxter).

Which New Testament passages help us recover what God aims for in husbands created in His image, particularly for those who are being renewed into the image of Him who created them?

- Ephesians 5:25-33 – taking care of body and bride
- 1 Peter 3:7
- Colossians 3:19

Paul and Peter help men recover the glory and responsibility of our role as husbands – to see its centrality to His divine plan; to see the preeminence given to the home; to learn a right way to rule themselves in their relationships with each other.

Each of these passages not only fills out with greater specificity what the work of God in the life of a married man looks like; what spiritual fruit looks like on a “husband tree;” but each provides a window into the means by which that fruit comes.

- Giving the word of Christ a hospitable dwelling in all of our hearts, giving it room to run even inside the very corners of our marriage (Colossians 3:16, 19)
- By following in the footsteps of Jesus (1 Peter 3:7; cf., 2:21)
- Being filled with God’s Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) that enables the imitation of loving like Christ (5:25)

⁴ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/a-metaphor-of-christ-and-the-church>

1. Initiative to Imitate Christ to Lead in Love (particular emphasis of Ephesians 5:25-33)

- *Loved the church (5:25) . . . just as Christ does the church (5:29)*
- *Love your wives (5:25) . . . love their own wives as their own bodies . . . (5:28) . . . is to love his own wife even as himself (5:33)*

“This is not the only duty, but it includes all others” (Steele).⁵ Some suggest that it is highlighted for several reasons: 1) it includes all other “duties,” summarizing all that is in Christ’s example; 2) it is because this is an area where men most frequently fail; 3) and it is what wives need most to encourage their growth in their own roles.

There can be no happiness “for the party that does not love: For how dreadful the idea of being chained for life to an individual for whom we have no affection, to be almost ever in the company of a person from whom we are driven back by revulsion, yet driven back upon a bond that prevents all separation and escape” (James).

“There are many relationships that end in marriage that seem founded on love but really aren’t. There is a *love drought* that is causing marriages to dry up all around us. This love drought makes it impossible to have a marriage that is a lifelong relationship of unity and understanding. When it comes to love, we have two problems. First, there are many things we call love that simply do not rise to the level of what love is. And we lack a clear definition of what love is and what love does” (Paul Tripp, *What Did You Expect?*, 168, original emphasis).

- Commanded to do so uniquely, because of our inseparable relation (one; my own body)
- Commanded to do so surpassingly, because our unparalleled connection (leave father and mother for her)
- Commanded to do so enduringly (present tense), because of our continuing example in Christ
- Commanded to do so sacrificially, because of our need to exercise self-denial
- Commanded to do so voluntarily, because love is more than a duty (gave Himself)
- Commanded to do so sanctifyingly, because love has a spiritual purpose (that He might sanctify and cleanse)

⁵ Love is not the unique responsibility of the husband (cf. Titus 2:4).

“Marriage requires a radical commitment to love our spouses as they are, while longing for them to become what they are not yet. Every marriage moves either toward enhancing one another’s glory or toward degrading each other” (Dan Allender and Tremper Longman III).

- Commanded to do so pro-actively, because love displays initiative (nourish and cherish).

- a. Sacrificial Nourishing (*ektrepho*, /ek-tref'-o/ – to rear up to maturity; cf. Ephesians 6:4, “bring them up”; only other NT reference)

“Spouses must be friends to each other through thick and thin. . . . The highest end of marriage is to promote each other’s eternal happiness” (Steele).

“Whatever knowledge we may obtain of each other’s tastes and habits before marriage, it is neither so accurate, so comprehensive, nor so impressive as that which we acquire by living together. And it is of prodigious consequence, that when little defects are first noticed and trivial faults and oppositions first occur, they should not be allowed to produce an unfavorable impression upon the mind. If they would preserve love, let them be sure to study most accurately each other’s tastes and distastes, and most anxiously abstain from whatever, even in the minutest things, they know to be contrary” (James).

- b. Sacrificial Cherishing (*thalpo*, /thal'-po/ – to brood, to foster; cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:7, “tenderly cares”; only other NT reference)

“My dear wife, Muriel, has been in failing mental health for about eight years. So far I have been able to carry both her ever-growing needs and my leadership responsibilities at CBC. But recently it has become apparent that Muriel is contented most of the time she is with me and almost none of the time I am away from her. It is not just ‘discontent.’ She is filled with fear – even terror – that she has lost me and always goes in search of me when I leave home. Then she may be full of anger when she cannot get to me. So it is clear to me that she needs me now, full-time.

Perhaps it would help you to understand if I shared with you what I shared at the time of the announcement of my resignation in chapel. The decision was made, in a way, 42 years ago when I promised to care for Muriel ‘in sickness and in health. . . till death do us part.’ So, as I told the students and faculty, as a man of my word, integrity has something to do with it. But so does fairness. She has cared for me fully and sacrificially all these years; if I cared for her for the next 40 years I would not be out of debt. Duty, however, can

be grim and stoic. But there is more; I love Muriel. She is a delight to me—her childlike dependence and confidence in me, her warm love, occasional flashes of that wit I used to relish so, her happy spirit and tough resilience in the face of her continual distressing frustration. I do not *have* to care for her, I *get* to! It is a high honor to care for so wonderful a person”
(R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, 33-34, original emphasis).

- Creativity in expressing appreciation (Adam’s poem) – heaven and earth came together in that moment

“True conjugal love to a wife reaches her soul, so as to see an amiableness in her mind and disposition, so as to study how to polish her soul more and more with wisdom and piety, and to endeavor that her soul may prosper as her body prospers” (Steele).

2. Initiative to Lovingly Lead and Learn (particular emphasis of 1 Peter 3:7)

“The husband must so unite authority and love, that neither of them may be omitted or concealed, but both be exercised and maintained. Love must not be exercised imprudently as to destroy the exercise of authority; and authority must not be exercised over a wife so magisterially and imperiously, as to destroy the exercise of love. As your love must be a governing love, so your commands must all be loving commands” (Baxter).

- a. Dwell With Our Wives (lit. “the feminine one” – *gunaikeios*; /goo-nahee-ki'-os/; 1x in NT)

“Peter says, ‘*husbands, live with your wives.*’ Most men respond, ‘All right, I can check that one off. We live in the same house!’ But, of course, that’s not Peter’s point. Rather, you are to live with your wife. The word for ‘live with’ is the Greek word that means ‘commune’ and gives us the noun community. Peter is saying that husbands are to live with their wives in a single shared life.

Husbands are to take an interest in the things the wife is interested in (the wife is to do likewise). The couple is to spend time together and to live in one rhythm. With this in mind, I find it important that as much as possible a husband and wife go to bed together and rise together. It is extremely valuable for a couple to talk and pray in the evening before falling to sleep, and to start the day with encouragement and prayer. Peter is clearly suggesting that a husband who lives in communion with his wife will be better able to minister to her” (Richard Phillips, *The Masculine Mandate*, 84).

“That due familiarity be maintained, and that he keep not at a distance and strangeness from his wife” (Baxter).⁶

Implies living in harmony, that we are reconciled or seeking it (Ephesians 4:26-27), and that we have a heart submitted to God’s plan that we each cleave to our wife.

- b. According to Knowledge
 - 1) Of God
 - 2) Of who I am as a believer
 - 3) Of who my wife is as a believer
 - 4) Of my wife’s particular needs
- c. Giving Honor (showing respect)

“Moral esteem is one of the firmest supports and strongest guards of love, and a high degree of excellence cannot fail to produce such esteem. We are more accurately known to each other . . . than to the world or even to our own [households] . . . we are better known to each other than we are to ourselves. If therefore we would be respected, we should be respectable. Charity covers a multitude of faults, it is true. But we must not presume too far upon the credulity and blindness of affection: there is a point beyond which even love cannot be blind to the crimson color of a guilty action. Every piece of real sinful conduct, the impropriety of which cannot be mistaken, tends to sink us in each other’s esteem and thus to remove the safeguards of affection” (James). [goes on to urge “mutual respect even in little things”]

- Unto the weaker vessel (cf. Romans 5:6; without strength, KJV), in recognition that we are different, that in some ways my wife is weaker.

“It’s easy to scorn women, and most men do. We see women as physically weak, easy to intimidate, bound to the menial tasks of motherhood, emotional, illogical, and often petty. Or we see them as temptresses; in desire we idolize them and parade them across the pages of magazines, yet we scorn and hate them for their commanding sexual power over us. Male scorn for women affects every aspect of our lives: our relations with our mothers, our girlfriends, [our female coworkers], our wives, our children, the church, and even God himself.”

⁶ “I am sorry to say that there are some husbands who seem fonder of any society than the company of their wives. It appears in the disposal of their leisure hours. How few of these are appropriated to the wife! The evenings are the most domestic period of the day. To these the wife is peculiarly entitled . . . It is a sad reflection upon a man when he is fond of spending his evenings abroad. It implies something bad, and it predicts something” (James, quoting William Jay).

“I do not speak here merely of *your* scorn of women; I speak of *mine* as well. . . . I swaggered through marriage for many years, ruling my wife Susan and my seven children with an iron hand while citing Scripture as justification for my privileges and authority. After all, Scripture explicitly commands wives to obey their husbands. . . . And, frankly, once I started listening to Susan—once I began really hearing her and drawing her out—I was startled at how many and how deep were her wounds and her sorrows. . . . Most were not sorrows unique to women. There were the sorrows that all feel: sorrows that arise from the particular physiology of women and from their vocation as mothers, which gives them heavy duties and responsibilities while leaving them almost totally dependent on men for their material well-being and their spiritual support; sorrows that arise from loving their husbands and children intensely, but not being able to keep harm from those they love; sorrows that arise from the fact that in our society even the most chaste of women are regularly threatened by the lustful stares, remarks, and advances of men; and sorrows that arise because our society in general still considers women stupid, flighty, and superficial, and still places very little value on women and shows very little respect for them. . . . Women. . . suffer these wounds far more often and with a greater intensity than most of us men ever realize. And unless we ask them, women generally do not speak to us of these sorrows – perhaps because we men so often dismiss their troubles as insignificant or write off women themselves as simply weak and whiny. . . . Can men . . . withdraw the sword of sorrow that pierces every woman’s heart? I don’t think so. Their problems are generally not the kind that have a solution, but rather form the very fabric of their daily existence. . . .” (John Barger, quoted in Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, “Learning to Love,” 45, 47, original emphasis).⁷

d. As Heirs Together of the Grace of Life

- 1) What each spouse is – an heir
- 2) What you will be – recipients
- 3) What you can do to live in light of this future together now

3. Initiative to Lovingly Counter Our Typical Sinful Tendencies (Colossians 3:19)

⁷ More of the testimony of Dr. John Barger follows in this chapter. It is a compelling read of one man’s journey to discover how to love his wife and ultimately how to love God.

IV. Before Whom Do Husbands Honor Marriage?

- A. Before God
- B. Before Our Wives
- C. Before Our Children
- D. Before Our Brothers and Sisters in the Lord
- E. Before a World that Needs a Vivid Illustration of the Gospel

Conclusion: The means by which we are to recover Adam's wonder and delight is through the Second Adam and in imitation of Him.

"Sometimes that means being willing to serve when it's the last thing we want to do. Sometimes it means being willing to listen when our instinct is to argue. Sometimes it means being willing to love, even in those moments when the other doesn't seem deserving. Sometimes it means humbly asking for forgiveness when we are tempted to argue that we are right. Sometimes it means being willing to go through a moment of tension so that truth can get on the table. Sometimes it means being willing to overlook a minor offense. But there is one thing that we know for sure: as we rest in God's grace, we are called to give grace to one another. And as we celebrate God's wisdom, we must be willing to let that wisdom be our moment-by-moment guide as we relate and respond to each other" (Tripp, 12).