

## The Christian Home (4): The Purposes of Marriage (part 1)

Our Confession provides three primary purposes for marriage: "Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and for preventing of uncleanness."<sup>1</sup> These three, companionship, procreation, and sanctification are repeated with some variation in the best works on marriage.

Henry Bullinger (1504-1575), described "wedlock" as "an alliance or holy joining together of man and woman, coupled and brought into one by mutual consent of them both." He then reduced the "causes" of matrimony into three: first, for man's commodity (good), that thereby the life of man might be the pleasanter and more commodious; second, for the begetting of children for the preservation of mankind by increase, and the bringing of them up in the fear of the Lord; third, for the avoidance of uncleanness, as expressed in the words of the Apostle Paul: "To avoid whoredom, let every man have his own wife, and every woman her own husband."<sup>2</sup>

William Perkins (1558-1602), often referred to as the "father of puritanism" said "the ends of marriage is fourfold:" first, the procreation of children for the propagation and continuance of the seed and posterity of man upon the earth; second, the procreation of a holy seed whereby the church of God may be kept holy and chaste; third, after the fall of mankind, it's a means to avoid fornication, and consequently to subdue and quench the burning lusts of the flesh; fourth, to help the married parties perform the duties of their callings in a better and more comfortable manner.<sup>3</sup>

William Gouge (1575-1653), said "the ends for which marriage was ordained add much to the honor of it. They are especially three:" first, that the world might be increased, and not simply increased, but with a legitimate brood, and distinct families, which are the seminaries of cities and nations, also that the church might be preserved and propagated in the world by a holy seed; second, that men might avoid fornication and possess their vessels in holiness and honor; third, that husband and wife might be a mutual help to one another.<sup>4</sup>

George Swinnock (1627-1673), described three ends of marriage: first, the procreation of children; second, the benefit of a good companion; third, and since the fall, the avoiding of fornication. He then said, "some add a fourth, that it might be a resemblance of the mystical union between Christ and His church."<sup>5</sup>

### I. The Purposes of Marriage

1. *The need for companionship.* Scripture explicitly connects companionship with the covenant of marriage. The "immoral woman" forsakes "the companion of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her God" (Prov.2:17), and God rebuked Israel for dealing treacherously with their "companion and wife by covenant" (Mal.2:14). This means, companionship is a necessary purpose and privilege of marriage. "And the LORD God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him'" (Gen.2:18). Man needed a helper not only to procreate, but to be his companion in life. "God was first of all concerned for man's mutual help, society, and comfort" (Beeke).<sup>6</sup> Thus, while it's true man needed a helper to procreate prior to the fall, and he needs a helper after the fall for sanctification, man's first and foremost need was for companionship. "If it was 'not good' in

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<sup>1</sup> 2LBC, 25:2

<sup>2</sup> Henry Bullinger, *Decades*, 1:397-402

<sup>3</sup> William Perkins, *Works*, 10:124-125

<sup>4</sup> William Gouge, *Works*, 2:29-30

<sup>5</sup> George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:464

<sup>6</sup> Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 26

paradise, much less is it in a wilderness world" (Bridges).<sup>7</sup> "The first cause of the woman's creation was that man was alone among all the creatures God had made. Marriage was therefore ordained in response to a natural necessity" (Beeke).<sup>8</sup>

God's initial concern was that man was alone and that was not good for him, so the Lord created Eve as a helper for Adam. Therefore the benefit of companionship takes priority over the procreation of children as a purpose for marriage. Hence, as the teaching on marriage developed among the Puritans, it is not surprising that the benefit of a good companion became the first reason offered for the institution of marriage.<sup>9</sup>

The priority of companionship within marriage, can be illustrated by the change the Puritans made from the Book of Common Prayer. This was written by Thomas Cranmer in 1549 and revised in 1552. The Puritans originally planned to revise it again in 1646 but then opted to write their own Confession (WCF). The Book of Common Prayer listed the purposes of marriage as follows: "(1) the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord and praise of God, (2) a remedy against sin and to avoid fornication, and (3) for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other."<sup>10</sup> The WCF reversed this order: "Marriage was ordained for (1) the mutual help of husband and wife, (2) the increase of mankind with legitimate issue, and (3) for preventing of uncleanness."<sup>11</sup>

The notion of companionship is imbedded in the creational distinctives of the woman. "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him" (Gen.2:18). The Hebrew word rendered "comparable to him" or "suitable for him" literally means "opposite to." Adam needed a helper that was opposite him. A helper that would complement him. Only a woman is a suitable helper or companion for a man. "For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man" (1Cor.11:8-9). "As a result of the creation order, men and women are oriented to one another *differently*. The man needs *the* help; the woman needs *to* help" (Wilson).<sup>12</sup> The need for companionship, both for the man and woman, is met in each other in the covenant of marriage. "Man can have no such help from any other creature as from a wife, or a woman as from a husband" (Gouge).<sup>13</sup>

Adam, surrounded by all the glories of Paradise, found himself alone and needing companionship. Without it his life was but a solitude, Eden itself a desert. Endowed with a nature too communicative to be satisfied from himself alone, he sighed for society, for support, for some complement to his existence, and only half-lived so long as he lived alone. Formed to think, to speak, to love, his thoughts yearned for other thoughts with which to compare and exercise his soaring aspirations. His entire being longed, in short, for another self, but that other self, did not exist; there was no help meet for him. The visible creatures which surrounded him were too much beneath him, and the invisible Being who gave him life was too much above him, to unite their condition with his own. Whereupon God made woman, and the great problem was immediately solved.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Bridges, *Ecclesiastes*, 90

<sup>8</sup> Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 27

<sup>9</sup> Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 26

<sup>10</sup> The Book of Common Prayer, *Article viii, Of Matrimony*

<sup>11</sup> WCF, 24:2

<sup>12</sup> Doug Wilson, *Reforming Marriage*, 17

<sup>13</sup> William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:30

<sup>14</sup> John Angell James, *Female Piety*, 52-53

To be more specific, man's need for companionship is fivefold: (1) to assist. In marriage, two people join together to fulfill God's mandate to man. "Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth'" (Gen.1:28). "Marriage was ordained that husband and wife might be a mutual help to one another, a help as for bringing forth, so for bringing up children, and as for starting, so for well governing their family" (Gouge).<sup>15</sup> While the mandate of dominion includes childrearing, it exceeds it. Adam was given Eve as a helper in this mandate. They were to rule and govern together. "God placed Adam in the garden and gave him a task to perform. But the man was incapable of accomplishing that task alone. Adam needed help, and the woman was created to meet his need" (Wilson).<sup>16</sup>

The woman is not only a companion for man's alone-ness, she is a helper for man's service. They are partners in the task God has given humanity. The task of filling the earth through having children clearly requires male and female, and marriage is the God-given content for conceiving and raising children. But the task of humanity is more than procreation. The task is to reflect God's glory by ruling in His world as His image. With the story of sin and redemption the task takes a new turn. We proclaim the good news of a crucified and risen King.<sup>17</sup>

(2) To correct. Husbands must correct their wives lovingly and wives must correct their husbands respectively. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Prov.27:6). No one is better qualified to point out our faults than those who know us best, and no one knows us better than our spouses. With regards to this friendly correction Richard Baxter warned, "Be not either blindly indulgent to each other's faults, nor yet too critical of each other's state, lest Satan thereby get advantage to alienate your affections from one another."<sup>18</sup>

(3) To sanctify. "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Prov.27:17). We all need friends to sharpen or sanctify us, and a man has no closer friend than his wife. "God did not institute marriage to be a hindrance, but to be a help to religion. Good company should make us walk the more cheerfully in the way of God's commandments" (Swinnock).<sup>19</sup> "It is the greatest good that one can possibly do for another, to be a means of helping the advance of his salvation. And there is nothing that can more soundly and firmly knit the heart of one to another, than to be a means of it" (Gouge).<sup>20</sup>

(4) To encourage. "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up" (Ecc.4:9). "Couples are to help one another to bear their burdens. In poverty, crosses, sickness, dangers, to comfort and support each other. And to be delightful companions in holy love, and heavenly hopes and duties, when all other outward comforts fail" (Baxter).<sup>21</sup> "Like a turtle which has lost his mate, like one leg when the other is cut off, like one wing when the other is clipped, so had man been if woman had not been given to him" (Pink).<sup>22</sup>

A married man has a companion who enters his heart, partakes of all that happens to him, is touched by all his disasters, and does everything in her power to sweeten his

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<sup>15</sup> William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:30

<sup>16</sup> Doug Wilson, *Reforming Marriage*, 16

<sup>17</sup> Tim Chester, *Gospel-Centered Marriage*, 20

<sup>18</sup> Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 436

<sup>19</sup> George Swinlock, *Works*, 1:465

<sup>20</sup> William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:65-66

<sup>21</sup> Richard Baxter, *Works*, 4:234

<sup>22</sup> A.W. Pink, *Hebrews*, 1128

condition, ease his mind, cheer his heart, and share his troubles. Husbands and wives can help one another in keeping troubles at bay; and when that proves impossible, they can help by bearing one another's burdens, supplying each other's needs, and being helpers to each other's joy.<sup>23</sup>

(5) To accompany. Marriage provides us our best and closest friend. "A friend loves at all times, and a brother (wife or husband) is born for adversity" (Prov.17:17). Marriage is covenant of friendship. "His mouth is most sweet, yes, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend" (Song 5:16). Both parties promise to accompany the other through the ups and downs of life. "For mutual society and comfort God united man and woman that the cares and fears of this life might be eased by the cheer and help of each other" (Pink).<sup>24</sup> "It was the characteristic of unfallen man to need someone to sympathize with him in his joys, as it is of fallen man to need someone to sympathize with him in his sorrows" (James).<sup>25</sup> "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Prov.17:17). "Of all friends, none ought to be more careful, none more faithful to one another than husband and wife" (Gouge).<sup>26</sup>

2. *The promotion of companionship.* (1) Remember your covenant vows. As mentioned before, marriage is a "covenant of companionship" (Prov.2:17; Mal.2:14). Within marriage a man and woman promise (covenant) to live as companions. "Marriage promises must be performed" (Swinnock).<sup>27</sup> Thus, poor companions are failing to uphold their covenant promise. They are neglecting a primary purpose of marriage. They question or ignore God's assessment of man, "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen.2:18). (2) Spend quality time with your spouse. Husbands and wives must prioritize their relationship above that of parents. They are a married couple first and parents second. Thus, by quality time I mean, time alone where you can enjoy each other's company and do things alone as a couple. (3) Share yourself with your spouse. "One definition of marriage that I really like is: Marriage is a total commitment and a total sharing of the total person and another person until death" (Mack).<sup>28</sup> We must share our hearts with each other. Self-revelation and disclosure are the only effective ways of growing closer. "O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely" (Son 2:14). These are the words of the Groom, and thus, ultimately of Christ Himself. Because He loves His bride, He delights in hearing her voice.

It is a mercy to have a faithful friend, that loves you entirely, and is as true to you as yourself, to whom you may open your mind and communicate your affairs, and who would be ready to strengthen you, and divide the cares of your affairs and family with you, and help you to bear your burdens, and comfort you in your sorrows, and be the daily companion of your lives, and partaker of your joys and sorrows. And it is a mercy to have so near a friend to be helper to your soul; to join with you in prayer and other holy exercises; to watch over you and tell you of your sins and dangers, and to stir up in you the grace of God, and remember to you of the life to come, and cheerfully accompany you in the way of holiness.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 30

<sup>24</sup> A.W. Pink, *Hebrews*, 1128

<sup>25</sup> John Angell James, *Female Piety*, 53

<sup>26</sup> William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:74

<sup>27</sup> George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:469

<sup>28</sup> Wayne Mack, *Strengthening your Marriage*, 6

<sup>29</sup> Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 404