

The Christian Home (5): The Purposes of Marriage (part 2)

Having considered the first of three purposes of marriage last week (companionship), we now come to the final two (procreation and sanctification).

I. The Purposes of Marriage

1. *Procreation*. "Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it' (Gen.1:28). This was God's original mandate to Adam and Eve prior to the fall, and it's repeated to Noah and his family after the fall. "And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth and multiply in it" (Gen.9:7). "For this cause marriage is called *matri-mony*, which signifies *motherage*, because it makes mothers of those who were virgins before" (Smith).¹ This doesn't mean that every marriage will result in children, but it does mean marriage is the only lawful context for procreation. "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb.13:4). "Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward" (Ps.127:3).

But marriage isn't only "for the propagation and continuance of the seed and posterity of man upon the earth," but "the procreation of a holy seed whereby the church of God may be kept holy and chaste" (Perkins).² This is the primary purpose of procreation: to raise children in the fear and admonition of the Lord (Eph.6:4). This takes a father and mother within the covenant of marriage. "But did He not make them one (man and woman), having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring" (Mal.2:15). "It is no small mercy to be the parents of a godly seed; and this is the purpose of the institution of marriage" (Baxter).³

Thus our children are God's children, whom He has entrusted to us to raise for Him. He has a special claim on them as the One who blessed and opened the womb (Ruth 4:13; 1Sam.1:19-20). He holds us accountable to teach our children about Him, direct them to Him, urge them to believe in Him, and take Him as their own God. God holds us parents accountable to encourage them to consent to the marriage between Christ and their souls.⁴

2. *Sanctification*. Both the Old and New Testaments testify that marriage is not only given for procreation but sanctification. "It is good for them (unmarried) if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1Cor.7:8-9). "Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1Cor.7:5). "Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well. For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, and be embraced in the arms of a seductress" (Prov.5:15, 20)? "Marriage is as an haven to such as are in jeopardy of their salvation through the gusts of temptations to lust" (Gouge).⁵ "In Paradise woman would have been a help for a duty only. But now she is also, and for the greater part at that, an antidote and a medicine. In this respect Paul says: 'Because of fornication let each one have his own wife' (1Cor.7:2)" (Luther).⁶

¹ Henry Smith, as quoted by Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 32

² William Perkins, *Works*, 10:124-125

³ Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 429

⁴ Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 34

⁵ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Family*, 2:44

⁶ Martin Luther, *Works*, 1:118

One of the best remedies (against uncleanness) that can be prescribed to married persons is that husband and wife mutually delight in each other, and maintain a pure and fervent love between themselves, yielding that due benevolence to one another which is authorized and sanctified by God's Word, and ordained of God for this particular purpose. This 'due benevolence' (as the apostle calls it in 1Cor.7:3) is one of the most proper and essential acts of marriage. It is necessary for the main and principal ends of it: as for preservation of chastity in those who have not the gift of sexual self-control for celibacy, for increasing the world with legitimate offspring, and for linking the affections of the married couple more firmly together.⁷

In relation to these two purposes of marriage (procreation and sanctification), I want to address two historical errors: the priority of celibacy (monastic chastity) and marriage as a sacrament. Both of these arose out of the church fathers but had their formulation in the medieval ages (and the formal origin of the RCC). (1) Celibacy (monastic chastity). Most church fathers placed great stress on Paul's words in 1Cor.7:8, "I say to the unmarried and to the widows: it is good for them if they remain even as I am." This led to the tendency to elevate celibacy over marriage. For example, Tertullian said, "Nor do we prescribe sanctity as the rule, but only recommend it, observing it as a good, yea, even the better state, if each man uses it carefully according to his ability."⁸

Jovinian (340-405), a Roman monk, sought to vindicate the honor of marriage and physical intimacy within it. Men such as Jerome (342-420) and Ambrose (340-397) wrote against him at times devaluing marriage. "Their diatribes against Jovinian sometimes treated marriage and marital sex as inferior and irrational, if not outright sinful and scandalous for pious Christians" (Witte).⁹ While little is known about Jovinian, from Jerome's response, *Against Jovinianus* (393), we know he believed "that a virgin is no better as such than a wife in the sight of God."¹⁰ To this Jerome presented three levels of chastity: "The virtue of chastity is threefold: one kind that of married life, a second that of widowhood, and a third that of virginity."¹¹

Augustine (354-430) wrote several treatises on marriage that were overall more balanced: *On the Good of Marriage* (401), *On Holy Virginity* (401), *On Marriage and Concupiscence* (419), *On Adulterous Marriage* (419). "Augustine sought to define a middle way between the robustly pro-marital teachings of Jovinian and the stridently antimarital teachings of his many opponents." (Witte).¹² Thus, while Augustine was overall favorable toward marriage, he still gave the preference to celibacy and singleness. "If we compare the things themselves, we may no way doubt that the chastity of continence (self-control) is better than marriage chastity, whilst yet both are good: but when we compare the persons, he is better, who has a greater good than another" (Augustine).¹³ Thus, while celibacy and marriage were both good, the former was a "greater good" than the latter.

Jerome in his treatise *Against Jovinianus*, based his views of celibacy on three basic arguments: first, Jesus' statement that there would be no marriage in the kingdom of heaven (Lk.20:34-36). If heaven is a happier state than earth and there's no marriage in heaven, then to remain single on earth is a happier state than marriage. Those in heaven "are equal to the angels" (v36). "It is this angelic purity

⁷ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Family*, 2:44

⁸ Tertullian, *ANF*, 3:294

⁹ John Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 66

¹⁰ Jerome, *NPNF*, 6:346

¹¹ Jerome, *NPNF*, 6:346-386

¹² John Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 65-66

¹³ Augustine, *NPNF*, 3:411

which secures to virginity its highest reward" (Jerome).¹⁴ "Celibacy is an imitation of the angels. So, virginity is as much more honorable than marriage as the angel is superior to man" (John of Damascus, 675-749).¹⁵ Second, Paul's statement that he wished the unmarried would remain as he was (1Cor.7:8). "Happy is the man who is like Paul! Fortunate is he who attends to the Apostle's command (remain unmarried), not to his concession (marry if you must). This I desire, says he, that ye be imitators of me, as I also am of Christ, who as a Virgin born of a Virgin, uncorrupt of her who was uncorrupt" (Jerome).¹⁶ Third, the perpetual virginity of Mary. If Mary, the mother of our Lord remained a virgin, then surely this shows that virginity is to be preferred over marriage. "Mary continued a virgin, and Joseph himself, on account of Mary was a virgin, so that from a virgin wedlock a virgin son was born" (Jerome).¹⁷

This gave rise to monasteries for men and women. Those within monasteries vowed a life of celibacy and poverty. By the medieval ages, celibacy and monastic chastity was for the truly chaste, whereas marriage was for those who lacked self-control. Thus, The First Lateran Council of 1122 forbid priests to marry or have any close interaction with women. "We absolutely forbid priests, deacons, and subdeacons to associate with concubines and women, or to live with women other than a mother, sister, or aunt, or any such person concerning whom no suspicion could arise."¹⁸ "These early patristic ideals of celibacy and chastity found their strongest expression in the development of monasteries and occasional practices of hermitage as well as in the growing demand for clerical celibacy" (Witte).¹⁹

(2) Marriage as a sacrament. The word "sacrament" comes from the Latin word *sacramentum* meaning "something sacred or used for sacred purposes." The Protestant Church recognizes two sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper), whereas Rome recognizes seven sacraments (baptism, eucharist, confirmation, penance, anointing the sick, holy orders, and marriage). According to Richard Muller, three things are necessary for something to be a sacrament: first, it must be commanded by God; second, it must have visible or sensible elements prescribed by God; third, it must apply and seal by grace the promise of the gospel.²⁰ It's for this reason, in the strict sense, only baptism and the Lord's Supper are sacraments.

In his treatise *On the Good of Marriage*, Augustine gave three reasons for marriage: faithfulness, offspring, and the Sacrament. "For faithfulness, it is observed, that there be no lying with other men or women, out of the bond of wedlock: for the offspring, that it be lovingly welcomed, kindly nourished, religiously brought up; for the Sacrament, that marriage be not severed."²¹ Augustine found justification for calling marriage a sacrament from Jerome's Latin translation of Ephesians 5:32, "This is a great sacrament (*sacramentum*); but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." But by sacrament, he merely meant "a sign that pertained to holy things." For Augustine, marriage was a sacrament in that it symbolized the unbreakable bond between Christ and the church. And so, as marriage pointed to the union between Christ and the church, it brought grace to the married couple. "It was said in Paradise before sin: 'A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and they will be two in one flesh,' which the Apostle says is a 'great sacrament in Christ and in the Church.' Therefore

¹⁴ Jerome, *NPNF*, 6:345

¹⁵ Writings of Saint John of Damascus, 396

¹⁶ Jerome, *NPNF*, 6:352

¹⁷ Jerome, *NPNF*, 6:344

¹⁸ The First Lateran Council of 1122, Canon 3

¹⁹ John Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 54-55

²⁰ Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 267-268

²¹ Augustine, *NPNF*, 3:397

what is great in Christ and in the Church is very small in individual husbands and wives, but is nevertheless a sacrament of an inseparable union" (Augustine).²²

Augustin portrayed marriage as offering three main goods: the procreation of children, the preservation of faith, and the permanence of a sacrament. Children, faith, and sacrament were what made marriage good, and they were the goods that marriage offered to its members and to the communities they occupied. All three of these goods of marriage, Augustine believed, were designed to complement and complete the others. What ultimately made any marriage a Christian marriage, however, was the good of the sacrament. And this good could be sufficient to preserve a Christian marriage, even if the other two goods were lacking.²³

The Roman Catholic Church formally recognized marriage as a sacrament at the Council of Trent in 1563. "If anyone says, that matrimony is not truly and properly one of the seven sacraments of the evangelic law, a sacrament instituted by Christ the Lord; but that it has been invented by men in the Church; and that it does not confer grace; let him be anathema."²⁴ The preference of celibacy over marriage was also affirmed at the same Council. "If anyone says, that the marriage state is to be placed above the state of virginity, or of celibacy, and that it is not better and more blessed to remain in virginity, or in celibacy, than to be united in matrimony; let him be anathema."²⁵ Thus, the RCC maintains both, that celibacy is to be preferred over marriage, and that marriage is a sacrament of the church. "This covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament."²⁶

But what do they understand by sacrament? Simply put, they believe that all seven sacraments automatically communicate grace (with or without faith). "Christian marriage is an efficacious sign, the sacrament of the covenant of Christ and the Church. Since it signifies and communicates grace, marriage between baptized persons is a true sacrament of the New Covenant."²⁷ Rome believes that grace is given in the wedding ceremony to the married couple through the prayers and blessings of the priest. "In the invocations of this sacrament the spouses receive the Holy Spirit as the communion of love of Christ and the Church."²⁸

Thus, while Scripture acknowledges the gift of singleness (1Cor.7:8-9, 28-34), it portrays marriage as the general norm for mankind (Gen.2:18; Ps.127:3-5; 128: 1-6), and physical intimacy within marriage as the means of procreation (Gen.1:26-28; 9:7), sanctification (1Cor.7:4-9), and the promotion of marital closeness (Prov.5:15-20). Furthermore, Scripture warns about those who slight or forbid marriage. "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having heir own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from food which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" (1Tim.4:1-3). "What lies behind forbidding meat and marriage is the Gnostic idea that there is something sinful about the body. According to this line of thinking, souls are all that matter, and physical appetites only lead to sin" (Ryken).²⁹

²² Augustine, *NPNF*, 3:397

²³ John Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 75-76

²⁴ The Council of Trent, Session 24, Canon 1

²⁵ The Council of Trent, Session 24, Canon 10

²⁶ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1601

²⁷ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1617

²⁸ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1624

²⁹ Philip Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 161