

## **Luther on Marriage**

John Stewart

HALF A MILLENNIUM ago, Martin Luther was born into a world dominated by religious and political leaders steeped in antagonism toward the teaching of sound scriptural truths. It is not surprising, therefore, that marriage-an estate basic to human existence-was likewise a topic of extensive focus, discussion, and clarification in the life and times of Luther. Not only had medieval Roman Catholic teaching regarding holy matrimony deviated significantly from the Bible (celibacy of priests, etc.), but marriage had become widely mis- understood within the overall fabric of medieval society. Even though the Middle Age culture of Luther generally maintained a religious core, misunderstandings concerning marriage were widespread. For example, misunderstandings stretched to the point that many people failed to recognize procreation as a key purpose in God's establishment of marriage, and sought methods to avoid acceptance of children, as had been the case in ancient Rome some 1500 years earlier. As Luther characterized the society of his time: "Today you find many people who do not want to have children," and described that understanding as "callousness" and an "inhumane attitude, which is worse than barbarous."

Although 500 years of global change has passed since the Reformation, key doctrinal issues of God's kingdom remain unchanged. The concept of marriage-its sanctity, purpose, and nobility exemplifies as clearly as any aspect of human life, the unchanging nature in the Christian concept of key home and family values.

### **Begin with a Prayer**

Luther lovingly instructed that marriage should begin with a prayer. "Dear God, add Thy blessing." He also emphasized the importance of understanding, openness, and discussion between believing parents and their children who intend to marry. Tied closely to a couple's hope of establishing a marriage Luther said that the basic Christian concept of marriage "Must be seen in the light of God's Holy Word" in order that it be correctly understood. In reminding engaged couples to remember that "marriage should be brought about in such a way that we have God present," he also reassured the pair to take heart that God helps in godly marriage." [God] established marriage for countless good purposes, and He himself joins the spouses. Nor does He only join them; He also blesses them."

### **Godly Marriage**

Luther defined the estate of Christian marriage as "the divinely instituted and lawful union of a man and a woman in the hope of offspring, or at least for the sake of avoiding fornication and sin, to the glory of God. Its ultimate purpose is to obey God and to be a remedy for sin; to call upon God; to desire, love, and bring up children to the glory of God; to live with one's wife in the fear of the Lord; and to bear one's cross." Luther further explained how God had blessed Adam with a spouse, Eve, in accord with His command that they bring forth children (Gen. 1:28). Luther added, "But if no children result, you should nevertheless live content with your wife." In addition, Luther described how God also provided a spouse as a helper and companion in this life based on the Creator's words: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." (Gen. 2:18)

In recognizing that challenges can sometimes occur in marriage (because of our own sinfulness,) Luther wrote: "In the household, quarrels and disputes arise between husband and wife" and noted that

peace in the marriage can be disturbed in various ways.”

Luther reminded married couples to recall Apostle Peter's exhortation that spouses "love each other and to treat each other with respect and not as people are now in the habit of doing" (see 1 Pet. 3:1-7). Luther provided a beautiful example of a fine marriage from the Old Testament noting how Abraham spoke most respectfully to his wife Sarah, even in difficult moments they had faced in life. (Gen. 20:11-13)

### **Marriage—a Place of Honor**

Marriage and the home, as Luther described, is a place where married couples (and their children if God has so granted) can "spend their time and dwell with joy," touching on wedlock's lifelong commitment that Christ described, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." (Matt. 19:6) Luther further wrote: "For the lawful joining of a man and a woman is a divine ordinance and institution. For is it not a great thing that even in the state of innocence [before man's Fall into sin] God ordained and instituted marriage?" Luther added: "Marriage should be treated with honor; from it we all originate, because it is a nursery not only for the state, but also for the church and kingdom of Christ until the end of the world." He further noted, "The best thing in married life, for the sake of which everything ought them up to serve Him. To do this is the noblest and most precious work on earth.

In Luther's Ninety-Five Theses, he described the keys of the kingdom, which Jesus gave to His own through the Holy Spirit, as "the treasures of the church." Yet today, believing couples and children in the Christian home find the gospel of the forgiveness of sins to be the power of God unto salvation even as Apostle Paul described in his time. (Rom 1:16)

Sources:

- 1 Durant, Will. *The Story of Civilization – Caesar and Christ*. MJF Books, New York, 1944, p. 222.
- 2 Luther, Martin, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 1, (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House (CPH), 1958), p. 118.
- 3 Luther, Martin, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 54, (St. Louis, MO: CPH, 1967), p. 25.
- 4 Luther, Martin, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 4, (St. Louis, MO: CPH, 1964), pp. 22-23.
- 5 Luther, Martin, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 4, (St. Louis, MO: CPH, 1964), pp. 22-23.
- 6 Luther, Martin, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 4, (St. Louis, MO: CPH, 1964), pp. 244.
- 7 Luther, Martin, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 1, (St. Louis, MO: CPH, 1958), p. 116, 118.
- 8 Luther, Martin, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 3, (St. Louis, MO: CPH, 1961), p. 55.
- 9 Luther, Martin, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 3, (St. Louis, MO: CPH, 1961), p. 55.
- 10 Luther, Martin, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 3, (St. Louis, MO: CPH, 1961), p. 353-354.
- 11 Luther, Martin, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 1, (St. Louis, MO: CPH, 1958), p. 134.
- 12 Luther, Martin, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 1, (St. Louis, MO: CPH, 1958), p. 240.
- 13 *What Luther Says*, p. 907, 2836.