

The Portrait of Marriage

Whether we like it or not, there are many messages that we send to those around us. If a man walks into a room wearing a finely tailored suit, we might think that he is an important businessman. On the other hand, if a man enters the room wearing tattered clothing we might think that he is something less than important. Whether the man intends it or not, he sends a message to those around him by the clothing he wears. The same is true about marriage. Whether we realize it or not, husbands and wives send a message to those around us by the way in which we conduct ourselves in marriage. When God ordained marriage, he painted a portrait. The question we must ask ourselves is, Do our marriages accurately reflect this portrait? Before we can answer this question, we must first understand the nature of the portrait that God has painted in marriage.

We find the first mention of marriage in the opening chapters of Genesis when God created Adam and his wife Eve. Adam and Eve were the first married couple. God gave them the task of loving one another and performing the covenant of works: filling the earth with the image of God through procreation and extending the Garden to the ends of the earth. This was the purpose of marriage—to fulfill the labors of the covenant of works. We know, of course, that Adam and Eve forfeited the work of the covenant and rebelled against God. Even though they surrendered their covenant responsibilities this does not mean that marriage lost its significance. We must remember that God did not create Adam and Eve as the terminus of his purposes, but as a foreshadow of greater things to come.

Paul tells us in Romans 5.14 that ‘death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.’ Paul writes that Adam was a type, or a shadow, of the one who was to come, namely Jesus Christ. Adam was the first prophet, priest, and king over the creation to whom God gave the task of filling the earth with his image and extending the Garden to the ends of the earth. Yet, Adam was the shadow; Jesus Christ is the reality, the fulfillment of the type. Jesus Christ is the true prophet, priest, and king, the one who will fulfill the work of the broken covenant of works. Now, if Adam is connected to Christ, in what way is Eve, the first woman, connected to the ministry of Christ?

Paul gives us an divinely inspired and inerrant commentary on Genesis 2.24: “‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” Paul calls marriage a *mystery*, namely something that was once hidden but is now revealed. What does marriage now reveal? God originally ordained marriage to be a shadow, a type, that points to the antitype, the reality, of the relationship between Christ and the Church. This means that Adam is a type of Christ and Eve is a type of the Church. Just as God gave Adam a helpmate to assist him in the covenant of works, so too he gives the second Adam, Jesus Christ, a helpmate to assist him in fulfilling the work of the covenant. The Church is the bride of Christ. Now, this gives important information about the portrait that God has painted in marriage.

The marriage relationship between a man and woman is supposed to be a portrait of the union between Christ and the Church. God has given his Son the responsibility of filling the earth with his image and extending the temple to the ends of the earth. He has given his Son a helpmate to fulfill this task. But, because we live in a fallen world, God does not create Christ's helpmate out of his Son's rib as he did with Adam. Rather, God has ordained that his Son would redeem his bride from among fallen mankind. For this reason Paul writes: 'Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5.25-27). Christ has loved his bride with a sacrificial love. As we can imagine, this has important implications for Christians and the portrait that they paint with their marriages.

Marriage is not simply an outlet to meet the sexual desires of Christians. Neither is marriage simply a means for procreating children. Rather marriage serves the purpose of being a living portrait of Christ and the Church. This means that husbands are to love their wives as Christ has loved the Church. Christ gave his life for the Church. Husbands, do you love your wives in this way? Can you use the word *sacrifice* in connection with the love that you show your wife? Do you give of yourself, time, money, attention, devotion, to your wife in a sacrificial manner? Wives, likewise, do you submit to the authority of your husbands in a manner that reflects the required submission of the Church to the authority of Christ? Do you do things that undermine your husband's authority, treat him respectfully, and love him? In other words, when people on the outside look at your marriage do they see a living portrait of Christ and the Church?

Let us hope and pray that in our marriages that we would desire to reflect the relationship between Christ and the Church—that our marriages would not paint a distorted picture. In the end, God intended that marriage would point to his Son's relationship to the Church and that, as we behold a husband and wife, our minds would be drawn to Christ and the Church.