



The carriage of marriage

Dr. Charles Swindon makes the interesting observation that when Adam first laid eyes on Eve he did not speak with a calm, measured voice; instead he began with a "Wowee!" Regardless of how you think Adam said,

"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

(Genesis 2:23)

It is important to notice that the text about marriage precedes it, "...he (God) brought her to the man" (Genesis 2:22b). Marriage comes first!

How do we know this refers to marriage? The verse that follows these makes that plain,

"For this reason will a man leave his father and his mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."

(Genesis 2:24)

If there were any doubt about this being the context of marriage, Jesus dispels that when he quotes the verse in Matthew 19:5.

Obviously that marriage procedure could not be structured as our marriages are today. There could be no bridesmaids and groomsmen, no flower girl and ring bearer. Today we say *"Love and marriage, love and marriage, go together like a horse and carriage."* In Eden, there was marriage, and then the carriage of love. God Himself led the first couple into marriage and then they began to live together in a life-long partnership of love and faithfulness. While our weddings today are far more elaborate, the same principles apply as that day in Eden when God presided at the first wedding ceremony.

God's institution

There are two principles that underlie marriage as taught by God in Genesis 2. First, marriage is of God. Marriage is not man-made to be used by man as he pleases; it is a divine ordinance established by God Himself. The antecedent of "he" is "The Lord God." He alone is the author of marriage. Second, God in His providence "brought" Adam and Eve together, and it is through His providence that all marriages are still begun — some correctly in obedience to His revealed will and some incorrectly which He permits in His providence, but does not condone in His revealed will. The words "he" and "brought" express the clear teaching about marriage found in this verse.

Helpful counsel

What does the church do to put wheels on the carriage of marriage — the kind of wheels the Bible teaches make a marriage go? First, as a consistory we eagerly encourage young people to date only in the Lord so that all marriage will be in the Lord. Yet we recognize that with the sinful pressures of our secular society fostered by Satan there needs to be more. Any couple planning marriage must have pre-marriage counseling. We approve of any pre-marriage counseling which is based upon the Scripture's teaching concerning marriage. The old adage says, *"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,"* and we have seen how well that adage applies in pre-marriage counseling. For those who are following God's revealed will and marrying someone from the Christian Reformed Church, that is all we do to put wheels on their carriage of marriage.

Second, we as a consistory have a deep concern for those who marry Christians of other denominations. We realize that while they are marrying in the Lord, the diversity of the approach to Christianity could be a serious stumbling block in their marriage. Anyone who wishes to marry someone from another church and wishes to be married by me or in our church needs the pre-marriage counseling, and needs to go through the pastor's class. The purpose of the class is not to pressure him or her into the Christian Reformed Church, but to acquaint them with the way their future partner thinks about spiritual matters. The more they understand the spiritual mind set of their partner, the better that marriage will be. Parents are usually very pleased with that requirement. This is how we put the wheels on the carriage of marriage.

Third, we as a consistory have great concern for those who date and plan to marry outside the Lord. We warn them against such courtship, as I wrote previously, and encourage them to reconsider and seek God's will for their life. But love is blind! Often couples do not see the error of their way, and no one, not the church and not their parents, is going to tell them any differently. What does the church do then? Ignore them? Let them get married by the justice of the peace? Let some other minister with less scruples marry them? No!

The church carefully explains to the couple that in the eyes of God, it is wrong to get married. Nevertheless, the couple is encouraged to go through the pre-marriage and pastor's class. These pre-marriage sessions are more extensive than usual because we want them to be able to deal with the extra tensions that we know are going to arise in that marriage. The pastor's class never pressures the non-Christian to join the church; only the Holy Spirit can lead a person to Christ. This careful presentation of the gospel sows seed in such a way that the Holy Spirit can use it when and where He wishes. Besides this allows the couple to establish a warm relationship with the pastor so that when the difficulties of marriage come upon them — the very things they were warned about but were too blind in love to see — they have a friend and counselor to whom to turn for help. This helps the marriage be strengthened by the tension rather than broken by it. This approach has resulted in marriages in which both partners come to know the Lord in a way they never expected. The Holy Spirit can put Christian wheels on the carriage of marriage. If the Holy Spirit works a change in their lives before the wedding, they can be married by the pastor in church; if not, they have had the benefit of our best instruction, but must go elsewhere to be married for we can only marry those in the Lord.

How does the church deal with the wheels of the carriage of marriage when a son of the congregation marries a daughter of another congregation? Naturally, the consistory sees the same principles applying. This is a marriage of God and partners brought together by God. It offers the same thing to such couples as those who wish to be married in the church. If the bride's church has no pre-marriage program, we will let them use ours; if they think a pastor's class would be good for them, they are welcome to come to ours. Whatever is open to the young women who wish to get married in their own church is open to the young men who will be getting married in another church.

Now you are able to see how we have taken the basic principles of marriage which God established in Genesis 2:22 and applied them to the situation we find ourselves in here in. We hope that this has been beneficial not only to young people and their parents so that they can have reasonable expectations of what the church is able to do to help the marriage to be successful, but also beneficial to all in the congregation who prayerfully hold young people before the Lord during the delightful — and dreadful — years of dating.

Jack M Gray

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