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Marriage and Singleness are Pictures of the Gospel
1 Corinthians 7:27-28, 38

Our marriage law is the product of three ascending moral traditions that have come out of three stages of Western history. We have carry-over from all three.

The **Catholic tradition**, which really dominated Western marriage law from about AD 1300 to 1600, saw first of all and primarily marriage was a sacrament; that is, marriage is a transaction between the couple and God.

- the Church and not the State had the right to perform marriages
- the Catholic understanding of marriage was once you're married in the eyes of God, you're married. So Catholicism essentially didn't believe in divorce, but they believed in annulment, which is to declare certain marriages illegitimate from the start.

Now along comes the **Protestant tradition** which dominated social law from about 1600 to about 1900. Protestantism did not believe the main transaction in a marriage was between God and the couple getting married.

Instead, Protestants believed when you got married, you were actually making an agreement, a commitment of the couple to society. Therefore, Protestants believed the state *should* do marriages and *should* authorize and actually subsidize, like we do today, give tax benefits, to marriage.

That raises an obvious question: why should the State subsidize marriages? Because marriages do something better than the State can do - raise children. If these marriages do a good job of raising their children, it will be less of a burden on the State.

So, if you're a Protestant; and we are, and if you've ever been in or attended a typical wedding ceremony, it's all connected; it's all interlocking.

The parents are giving their consent.

The state government has given its consent.

The church and God has given their consent. It's an interlocking relationship of the couple with the society, which is holding the couple responsible to stay together because it's the basic building block of society.

When the Protestants came in and they became dominant, divorce law happened, because they believed it was the state that married you.

They believed from Scripture you could get divorced under three possible circumstances: adultery, desertion, or abuse/cruelty.

Now from 1900 until the present, the third and more dominant view has been the **Enlightenment tradition**, which came along and said individuals and their rights are the main way to decide what is good and bad in society.

Protestantism (and Catholicism also) looked at the stability of the family in society. The Enlightenment came along and said, “No, the more important thing is the rights of the individual.” The Enlightenment tradition says marriage is between two parties, period. No one else should have any say.

You get married only if it meets your individual needs. You don’t get married in order to provide social function. You don’t get married in order to be faithful to God, or to the State. You get married only if it satisfies you.

Things changed with the Enlightenment. For example, the idea of parental consent, which up until the 1920s or 1930s, was required to get married if your parents were alive.

But under the Enlightenment influence, you get rid of parental consent. You get rid of alimony, because that means you have abiding responsibilities after the marriage ends. Instead, you have prenuptial agreements, which means the couple has the right to actually determine the level of obligations within marriage. The couple has complete control as to what they want the marriage to be. And we now have divorce laws that make it easier than it used to be to get a divorce.

Now the extension of this is gay marriage proponents who believe that marriage is a right, and that they also should have the right to marry.

As soon as you call marriage a right, you’re in the Enlightenment tradition. You’re moving away from the Protestant or the Catholic traditions that said when you get married, you’re entering into a covenant with others besides the two of you.

The Enlightenment has given us something good. If you go back to the way marriage was done in the past in the name of keeping the family together, the laws definitely kept both women and children in abusive relationships. The laws favored the husband and the father in order to keep families together.

The Enlightenment rightly give people the freedom from domestic oppression. On the other hand, the high emphasis on self-serving individualism and freedom also has ramifications.

The health of marriages relates to the social costs are for all of us. It’s not your business if your marriage is dysfunctional; it’s all of our business. This is why marriage counselors are in business and divorce lawyers make money.

When we get married, we make promises - not that everything will necessarily be perfect and all will go well, but we promise to each other that we will not purposefully contribute to marital dysfunction.

So, the promises you make on your wedding day are to your new spouse, to God, and to society. The marriage promises are what binds you in a covenant relationship. A Covenant relationship means each party states up front what they will do to make the relationship work. So for us, **marriage is a picture of the gospel.**

From the Christian point of view, our salvation is based on a promise. God came to Abraham and said, "I'm going to bless you," and Abraham said, "How do I know?"

Genesis 15:9 *He said to him, Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.*

God said, "Cut some animals in half." So Abraham did, and God appeared and went between the pieces. In the Old Testament or in ancient Semitic cultures, the way you made a promise was you cut an animal in half and walked between the pieces.

Back then, that was your way of saying, "If I don't do everything I am promising to you today, may I be cut into pieces and my flesh and my bones be strewn upon the desert for the jackals to eat." It was a much better way to make a promise than many of us do today. We just sign a piece of paper. God goes between the pieces. God makes a promise to say to Abraham, "I'm going to bless you and your descendants. I'm going to come into this world. I'm going to heal this dysfunctional and rotting world."

It's on the basis of that promise that all of our salvation depends. A little later, God appears to Moses and says, "I Am who I Am" out of the burning bush.

Exodus 3:13-14 *then Moses said to God, If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, What is his name? What shall I say to them? God said to Moses, I AM WHO I AM. And he said, Say this to the people of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.*

It's like God saying, "I am the one who will always be there with you. What I am saying to you today I promise to always be saying to you. If I say I love you today, I *will* love you. If I say I'll be with you today, I *will* be with you forever."

When he goes between the pieces, he's actually saying, "I'm going to bless you even if it means I have to be torn to pieces like this in order to do it." When Jesus goes to the cross, He says, "Is there any way out of this? Let this cup pass from me."

Luke 22:42...*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done.*

He's clearly scared, he's clearly upset, he's clearly in agony, but he goes anyway. Why? Because he's the God who said, "I will be there with you." That's why he's there. That's why he went to the cross. He's keeping his promise.

He gave us His promise of the Holy Spirit, so we would not be left alone.

John 7:38-39 *Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. Now he said this about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

Matthew 28:19-20 *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

The ultimate promise-keeper kept and is keeping his promise to you. That's what helps a Christian not be afraid to make promises and then keep them once you make them.

Now, like our society living in this Enlightenment Age, we may want to say:
I didn't know what I was doing when I got married
Or, he or she is not the same person I thought I was marrying
Or, I've changed over time; I want different things now
Or, if you told me it would be this hard, I never would have done it.

But a marital promise is not just to endure each other - it is to evidence the gospel to each other. And, if you have children, you, husband and wife evidence the gospel to them in ways that draw them to Jesus.

Marriage will reveal you sin to you. Marriage will reveal your spouse's sin to you. We need to gospel to remind us that when Jesus died on the cross, the penalty for sin ended, the power of sin remains, in and around us, so we need to be reminded in the gospel that we need grace, and we need to extend grace to our spouses.

Because we look forward to that day when the very presence of sin will end. Our marriages are not sustained on feelings; they sustained on hope in the promises of God made to us!

But what if you're not married?
The Apostle Paul said "good for you!"

1 Corinthians 7:27-28, 38 *Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better.*

The point? Single people don't have the distractions of spouse and kids, therefore, they are freed up even more so to enjoy and serve Jesus the King. It's not at all wrong to be single while wanting to be married - but be content in where Jesus has you at the moment. **Contentment in God and what He's brought or not brought into your life is a picture of the gospel.**

Proverbs 30:7-9 *Two things I ask of you;
deny them not to me before I die:
Remove far from me falsehood and lying;
give me neither poverty nor riches;
feed me with the food that is needful for me,
lest I be full and deny you
and say, "Who is the Lord?"
or lest I be poor and steal
and profane the name of my God.*

Which condition (single or married) will allow you to be a better picture of the gospel?

Marriage is a picture of the gospel. So is remaining single a picture of the gospel.