

Theologians' Views on Dating and Marriage (1)

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In Matthew 19:4-6 Jesus teaches us, “he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

As I take over a share of the responsibility for this rubric and plan a new series of articles, I plan to let this teaching guide my analysis. I want to emphasize three things about this passage. First, God made people as man and woman for the purpose that he would join them together into one flesh. This means that marriage is an institution ordained and executed by God. God is sovereign in dating and marriage.

Dating is an anxious time for many young people. I know I thought that no one would ever want to go out with me, but God was in control and brought my wife into my life just at the right time. In these articles I hope to make plain how God’s sovereignty over dating and marriage can be a great comfort to young people during this tumultuous time in their life.

Second, the above passage teaches us that marriage, because it is executed by God, is a lifelong bond that is unbreakable. When a man and a woman join together in marriage, it is God that joins them and only he can separate them. The teaching, “let not man put asunder” it not merely a command, it is an expression of the truth that man cannot undue the work of God. This means that divorce, although allowed by our laws, is not a reality. When people are married they are joined together by God and they will be married until God separates them in death. This means that dating and marriage is a serious business, one that is not to be taken lightly.

Third, this passage teaches us that marriage is about sex or more correctly that sex is about marriage. We must not understand this teaching in a worldly sense: marriage is not about the fulfillment of our sensual pleasures. We must understand our sexuality in a biblical way. Sex is an expression of the bond that God has established between a man and a woman in marriage. It is an expression of intimacy and unity like that seen between Christ and the church. Sex should be a happy, pleasant, and joyful expression of the bond of love between a husband and wife, but this action like all others must be directed to the glory of God. Sex in a Godly marriage, glorifies God in two ways, it expresses the bond which He has established, and it brings covenant children—his heritage—into the world. This teaching clearly forbids sex outside of marriage; sex must not be a part of dating.

With this basic teaching in mind I plan to focus the next few articles in this rubric on the views of dating and marriage held by orthodox theologians. We will examine the teachings of Augustine, Luther, Calvin and others. These men will have much to teach us about dating and marriage, but unlike almost any other area of theology all three of these men erred in their teaching on dating and marriage. Let this serve as a warning to us. If men such as these can depart from the truth in their understanding of dating and marriage, then we can as well. Let us diligently search the Scriptures on this topic and hold fast to the Word of truth we find there.

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