

## **For Those Who Want To Marry.....In Christ**

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Proverbs 18:22 says, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD." Truly it is a sign of the Lord's favor to find a truly Christian spouse. Great grace and favor from God is upon any man who marries the humble, modest, and sincere Christian wife. The same is true for the young Christian woman who finds a husband that truly loves the Lord not only in word, but in deed and truth. But the word "find" in the Scriptures is telling. A Christian wife or a Christian husband must be found by those who desire to marry. Seeking and choosing a Christian spouse is a matter of faith, prayer, the grace of God. Those who do not tackle this problem with faith can easily enough marry anyone who comes along but their marriage without Christ will be very difficult. Who wants to have a miserable marriage? Isn't it better to be happily married in the Lord?

It is no easy task getting married. To some extent we ought to pity the young man or woman that is diligently searching for a Christian spouse. Where are they hiding? Where are they to be found? There is not an abundance of modest and sincere Christian women out there, especially virgins who lead a chaste and decent life. Moreover there are relatively few available chaste Christian men who are willing to work hard to provide for family and raise children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We also find that our young men and women are settling for second best and do not marry in Christ. Foolish men marry for outward beauty, and foolish women marry for financial security. Some marry poorly out of rebellion against their parents. Those who settle for second best, find themselves second at best in their own marriage.

The purpose of this essay is really quite simple: it is to provide Scriptural guidance for the young man or woman who desires not only to marry but to marry wisely.....in the Lord. It is written for the young adult who already has the good sense that they ought to be searching not just for a spouse but a Christian spouse. It is written for those who want their marriage to last a lifetime and in that lifetime grow together as man and wife - together as one in God's grace. And while there are many reasons for the young man or woman to be discouraged in the monumental task of finding a Christian spouse of one mind and faith, when approached by faith it is by no means impossible. Those who want to marry in Christ ought to remember, *With God all things are possible.....with God nothing shall be impossible.....I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.....Ask and it shall be given you. Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.* Let us begin our search for our spouse by searching the Holy Scriptures and what God Himself says regarding marriage.

### **The First Marriage**

It wasn't long after God created the first man, Adam that God said, "It is not good that man be alone, but I will make Him an help-meet for Him." Though the man Adam, had perfect bliss in His relationship with his Creator, there was no other being on the face of the earth like Adam. Adam as a man was alone. While God had already multiplied His blessings upon Adam, God was yet to give Adam one final and great blessing. God would create for Adam a help-meet, a helper, a wife, "that would correspond to himself, be a counterpart of himself" (Popular Commentary, OT. Vol. I, pg. 6). "And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh instead thereof. And the rib which the Lord God had taken from man made He a woman, and brought her unto the man." Eve did not come out of the dust of the ground, but Eve came out from Adam. In this way God forever established Eve's relationship to Adam, her purpose of existence being clear: she was to be a helper to Adam, a wonderful blessing for him. "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?" Ps. 116:12. Adam immediately recognized the purpose and origin of Eve. "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Adam knew Eve came out from his own body. Adam was no longer alone. Eve was his

counterpart, his complement, a perfect companion. He would be one with her, "one flesh", and incomplete without her. Jesus said, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh" Mt. 19:6.

When God brought Eve to Adam, God instituted and blessed the first marriage between the first man and woman. What marriage should be is evident and clear by the first marriage of our own first parents. "It is a lifelong union of one man and one woman unto one flesh. Marriage was instituted by God and is entered into by rightful betrothal or engagement" (Luther's Catechism, pg 70). Before Adam and Eve consummated their marriage in the usual God-ordained way, they were married or united together by an unspoken promise in the heart to one another. With no sin in the world they did not even know what it meant to be unfaithful. Had they not fallen they would still be married today in perfect bliss and harmony. Without sin their marriage would've lasted for all eternity. But we know what happened. They fell into sin. Marriage has never been the same since. They fell into spiritual adultery, and were unfaithful to God by breaking His Word. Giving themselves over to sin they didn't trust God or one another. Their thoughts became selfish, carnal. Damnation would've been their everlasting fate, had not Christ come and rescued them by way of the Gospel. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" Rom. 5. "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" I Cor. 15.

It was Christ the Second Adam, the Living and eternal Word, the Word made flesh, who before He was made flesh sought out the "hidden" Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The eternal Son of God walked among them. Having "found" and admonished Adam and Eve the Son of God gave them the Gospel promise that the "Seed of the Woman" would crush the head of the serpent. For our sake and for our salvation God would send and give and sacrifice, His only-begotten Son. Many years later a little Babe of flesh and blood was born in Bethlehem. He was the human offspring of Mary, yet Son of the Highest. For our sake and for our salvation Jesus made our sins His own. For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross despising the shame. Suspended between heaven and earth He was forsaken by God that we might never be forsaken by God. Jesus said "Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise." All this your Jesus did for you dear child of Adam and Eve. His love for you was from everlasting. Though we live in a world of unfaithful marriages, Jesus has always been faithful. He came not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. "I am that Bread of Life" Jn. 6.

### **What Exactly Marriage Is, and What It Provides**

By bringing Adam and Eve together in marriage God established and created the natural order of things for all mankind. Marriage is a divine institution. It is divine in that it is the will of our divine God that man and wife enjoy together all the blessings contained in marriage. It is an institution in that it is an arrangement, an establishment, a relationship or natural order created by God for man's benefit. Anything that God has instituted is for the benefit of all mankind. For example, a congregation is a divine institution set up for man's own benefit, whereby men are fed the Word of God, the Gospel Word that comforts our souls with the Bread of Life. Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life, he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." Through this divine institution of a congregation, God feeds us with the Means of Grace, the Word and Sacraments, so that we are kept and preserved in the true faith unto life everlasting. While the divine institution of marriage does not provide us these wonderful spiritual blessings, it is nevertheless one of the greatest earthly blessings any man or woman could receive. In marriage God provides man and wife not only with companionship and its many joys, but in most cases God blesses the marriage with children. "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth" Ps. 127:3-4. "Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them" Ps. 127:5.

But here let us not make marriage into something it is not. We do not want to go too far regarding marriage for it is a sin to add anything to Scripture (Rev. 22:18). While marriage is indeed a divine institution with Gods' blessing (temporal), marriage is not a Sacrament as the Church of Rome teaches. God does not forgive us our sins because we are married, nor does He attach to any marriage spiritual

blessings such as grace, faith, life everlasting, etc. No marriage on earth is eternal. "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" Mt. 22:30. It is somewhat an oxymoron that the Church of Rome makes marriage a Sacrament, thus containing spiritual blessings, and then in the same breath teaches that the unmarried life of a priest is more chaste, more holy than the wedded estate. The fruit of such ungodly and confusing teachings is evident among their clergy the world over. God calls the "forbidding to marry" a "doctrine of devils" in first Timothy four.

Marriage, besides being a divine institution, is also a civil union hence falling under the laws of state. Marriage is a civil union, a public promise, a public contract, made between a consenting man and woman. It has a binding force in the eyes of the state because it is a contract agreed to by a man and woman. It has a binding force in the eyes of God for the same reason. "What God hath put together let not man put asunder." Both God and man (state) command this contract to be kept. "The powers that be are ordained of God" Rom. 11. The government is God's minister. The Almighty stands in force behind the state, and also stands in force far above it. Nations, governments rise and fall at His will. Not only is the state free to make laws forbidding certain marriages (e.g. minimum age, marriage of cousins, homosexuals, etc.), it is also free to decree and authorize who officiates such weddings. A marriage performed by a judge or justice of the peace is just as valid in God's eyes as a marriage performed by a minister or priest. Edward Koehler writes, "Like civil government, matrimony belongs into the kingdom of power, and not in the kingdom of grace.....It is, therefore, not essential to matrimony that marriage be solemnized by a minister or a priest. People whose marriage was solemnized by civil authorities are as properly and validly married before God and man as those whose union was blessed by a minister or priest of a church" (Summary of Christian Doctrine, pg. 285). Even in the Christian Church the validity of a Sacrament is not changed or compromised by the faith or lack thereof of the pastor who administers it. The strength and validity of the Sacrament is given by the Word of God, Christ Himself working through the Word, freely granting us remission of sins through the earthly elements of bread and wine. Even so the validity of a marriage is not determined by the sanctity, or lack thereof, of the man who says, "I pronounce them husband and wife....." (The Pastor's Companion, CPH, pg. 39)

It is also necessary at this point to mention that God's laws regarding marriage are higher than man's laws (laws of state, government). Hence if the state gives sanction, permits, or allows any marriage which God's laws forbid, such a union is not valid before God's heavenly throne (e.g. second marriage of impenitent adulterers, marriage between family members, homosexual unions). God's laws always supercede laws of state (we ought to obey God rather than men, Acts 5:29). Hence a marriage or civil union between two men or two women will never be recognized as valid before God in heaven. "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination. ....Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants" Lev. 18:22, 24, 25. Leviticus 20:13 says, "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them." In Romans 1:26 and 27 homosexuality is condemned as unnatural, a vile affection. "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet." How sad that many young adults in our world today are deceived into thinking such behavior is normal, or even in-born, rather than evil. Colossians 3:5 calls this sin an "inordinate affection". God's Word also condemns effeminate behavior. Webster's dictionary defines *effeminate* as "having feminine qualities untypical of a man: not manly in appearance or manner." Deuteronomy 22:5 says, "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God." I Corinthians 6:9-10 says, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind.....shall

inherit the kingdom of God." P.E. Kretzmann defines these effeminate as "the sodomites, that were guilty of the unnatural vices as practiced by the Greeks in such a shameless manner." (Pop. Comm. N.T. Vol. 2 114) Regardless of what our state or government declares as "legal", in God's eyes homosexuality is a sin. We should urge such people to repent of their sins, lest they perish eternally. Let it also be said that some do repent and truly turn to Christ in faith. Often they then marry the opposite sex and this God-pleasing order helps to keep them from sin.

### **For Those Who Wish to Marry, and Those Who Don't**

As a rule, marriage is needed for most men and women. Marriage is the natural order of things. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession states, "the union of male and female belongs to natural right. Moreover, a natural right is truly a divine right, because it is an ordinance divinely impressed upon nature. But inasmuch as this right cannot be changed without an extraordinary work of God, it is necessary that the right to contract marriage remains because the natural desire of sex for sex is an ordinance of God in nature, and for this reason is a right; otherwise why would both sexes have been created?" (Art. XXIII, par. 11-12). When God created male and female He implanted in them the natural desire for one another. This desire is nothing sinful in and of itself. However, after the fall man abused his own sexual desire to lust after all that God had forbidden (fornication, adultery, lasciviousness, evil and perverse passions). The Scripture says, "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." While God's original purpose of marriage was companionship and fruitfulness, after man's fall the contract of marriage also served to keep men from sins of a sexual nature. The apostle Paul writes, "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. *Nevertheless, to avoid fornication*, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" I Cor. 7. In the normal course of things, marriage helps to keep us from the forbidden sexual sins which lead souls to destruction. "If they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn." This passage means if we are unable to keep ourselves from sexual sins it is better to get married than to burn in lust toward the opposite sex. Marriage is the remedy against sexual sin. Our Lutheran confessions speak frankly on this point. "We are speaking,.....not of concupiscence, which is sin, but of that desire which they call physical love [which would have existed between man and woman even though their nature had remained pure], which concupiscence has not removed from nature, but inflames, so that now it has greater need of a remedy, and marriage is necessary not only for the sake of procreation, but also as a remedy [to guard against sins]" (*Apology of the Augsburg Conf.*, Art. XXIII, par. 13, pg 367).

But God does not command all to marry. Some Christians do not have a strong compulsion to marry nor a strong physical desire. Sometimes God gives a man or woman the special gift of continence, so that they can remain single and yet remain chaste. Again the apostle Paul writes, "I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that." I Cor. 7:7 He also says, "*if* they cannot contain." For those who are single and have no strong compulsion, such can worship and serve and please God also in this unmarried state. One state is not more holy than another. They are free to do so as they choose, "only in the Lord." But no one should think that by doing so, they lead a more holy life as the Church of Rome teaches. "Paul was not married, but he claimed for himself the right to have a wife, just as Peter and other apostles had wives (I Cor. 9:5)" (Summary of Christian Doctrine, Koehler pg. 286). It is true that a single person does not have to devote time and focus on the happiness of their spouse. In this way they may have more time for the Lord. But whatever our state may be, without Christ we are all equally unrighteous. Jesus said, "Without Me ye can do nothing." Likewise, "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" Rom. 9:16. "As God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk." I Cor. 7:17

## Virginity and the Chaste Single Life Before Marriage

God commands the married and unmarried to be chaste, which is to be sexually pure. The married man and wife are chaste by simply being faithful to one another, their marriage bed undefiled. As for the unmarried, such are chaste by remaining virgins until marriage - or their entire life. For some this is not too difficult. For others it is. In the bodies of many there are strong carnal cravings and in this world there is nothing but temptation. We can hardly shop in a grocery store or turn on our TV or computer without fleshly images appearing in one place or another. "Morally speaking, our present age is a sewer. All the vices are flourishing, and virtue of every kind is languishing. Name any vice; it is practiced, defended, and advertised widely. Name any virtue; it is avoided, ridiculed, and condemned just as widely. It is no wonder that virginity is becoming more and more rare. Sex pervades our entire culture, especially such things as its advertising, entertainment, art, and music. Even business, science, and education have succumbed to it. The glamour, propaganda, and peer pressure tempt young people to give it a try" (Virginity, the Forgotten Virtue, Miller).

While God commands both men and women to keep their virginity (keep thyself pure....flee fornication), it is often looked upon as a "lesser" sin if men fornicate than women. The world teaches our young men that it is better to be a "stud" or "player", than to remain pure for Christ and future wife. Some men reason; everybody else is doing it so why not? The world tempts and encourages our young women to sin as well. They are bombarded with the message that men want to marry "experienced" women, rather than chaste virgins. Even at a young age our girls are taught to dress immodestly, to reveal or show as much as they can, as if the purpose of their existence is to draw, invite, and encourage the carnal cravings of men. But the young who love Christ by faith ought to ask themselves the question: is it wise to follow their friends who are traveling the broad path to hell? Isn't it better to love and serve Christ, my Savior from sin? Is it better to be with the "many" or the "few"? Jesus said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and *many* there be which go in thereat. Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and *few* there be that find it" Mt. 7:13-14.

"Keep thyself pure." This is God's holy command, not a suggestion, option, or choice. It is foolish to debate or mull it over in the mind as if there is some flexibility with God. There isn't. Galatians 5:19ff "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication.... and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Likewise all Christians are instructed, "abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." Jesus said, "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." Mt. 5 To sink into the mire and filth of fornication is to have a hard time crawling out of it. "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" Gal. 6. We should keep or retain our virginity out of love for Christ. "For a Christian, the chief reason is that he or she wants to please God out of gratitude for his or her redemption through Jesus Christ. It is, one might say, an "automatic" fruit of the Spirit and of faith" (Virginity, the forgotten virtue, Miller). There are also advantages to virginity when one enters into marriage. Entering the marriage estate pure, there are few problems with jealousy, past loves, etc. When either party enters marriage in a less than pure estate, the other or both must exercise charity to cover a multitude of sins. There must be a willingness to forgive and forget so that sins of the past are never spoken of again. For many this is hard to do though Jesus did say, "Forgive and ye shall be forgiven." Lk. 6 If God has blotted out of His memory our sins with the holy blood of Christ, can't we as well blot out the sins of our loved one, for whom Christ also bled? Doesn't God say, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee" Is. 44:22.

Married or unmarried our bodies belong to the Lord. We are bought and purchased with the price of God's own blood. "Ye are bought with a price". I Corinthians 6:15-17 says, "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." How can we be joined to Christ by faith, and also joined in the flesh to a harlot? Can we serve two masters? Jesus said, "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other." Paul continues, "Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." Here are the reasons why we should hold fast to our virginity. "1. We are members of the spiritual body of Christ. How can we turn this sanctified body, which is joined with Christ, over to someone else in fornication and defile it? Our body and spirit should stay in harmony together, not go two different ways, for then the spirit will also fall away. 2. Sexual sin is different from every other kind of sin, in that you sin against your own body and defile it. 3. Your body is the temple and dwelling place of the Holy Ghost, God Himself; it is not a receptacle of filth. 4. Ye are not your own, but belong to God.....Christians..... have been bought at the price of God's own blood, and their whole being is supposed to be devoted to honoring Him" (Virginity, the Forgotten Virtue, Miller). Ephesians 5:3-4 says, "Fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints."

Perhaps one more important and valid reason for keeping ourselves pure in virginity is so that our conscience will be clean and not defiled. When a Christian falls into sexual sins self-respect is lost and a bad conscience plagues the soul. The mind continually looks back, and again looks back with shame at the sin, the knowledge and burden being great - sometimes overwhelming. A bad conscience can destroy faith and rob a soul of salvation. Consider the conscience of Judas. He committed a great sin and tried to undo his evil by returning the thirty pieces of silver. But this gave his conscience no peace. No man can undo even one sin of the past. Judas' guilty conscience drove him to suicide. When a Christian yields and commits the sin of fornication, one of two things might happen: 1) he begins to deny and defend his sin so that his conscience continually burns (bad or evil conscience) 2) his guilty conscience leads him to despair of God's grace. In either case faith is lost. There is only one cure for an evil conscience, and that is Christ. "He died for all," including Judas. Judas didn't perish in damnation because Christ didn't die for him. Christ did. Judas perished because he thought his sin too great to be forgiven. He did not realize that Christ was greater than his sin. He would have been saved if only he looked to Christ's forgiveness. That is what Adam and Eve did. Though they sinned against God, suffered a guilty conscience, hid from Him, denied their sin (having fallen), their faith was restored when the eternal Word (Christ) sought them out speaking to them the Gospel promise of Genesis 3:15. Even so the only cure for a guilty conscience is Christ and His blood which atones for the sins of all. On the cross Christ died not only for Adam and Eve and Judas, but also your sins and mine. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." This includes the sin of fornication, in whatever form. The guilty conscience is restored and at peace when it finds or discovers Christ by faith, the Savior of all men. Dear sinner, if you are guilty of this sin there is complete forgiveness for your sin in the blood of Christ Jesus your Savior. He indeed "is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" I Tim 4.

### **Strength to Remain Pure**

This rightly now brings us to the fount and source, the strength which each Christian needs to stay and remain pure in their virginity.....HE IS CHRIST. "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me." If left to ourselves, we will not, nor cannot remain pure. Yet if we find our purity in Christ and His forgiveness, it is possible to retain or keep our virginity. "We love Him because He first loved us." We should not think virginity to be an impossible task in this day and age. There are still many Christian men

and women who resist this urge and keep themselves pure, happily entering into marriage. In the Bible there were many honorable men and women who did not defile their body, but kept their body pure. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a virgin. She conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, having never known a man. Anna (the prophetess of Luke 2) was a virgin until she married. She "had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity." There was also Tamar, a daughter of David. The Bible says, "she was a virgin." Though forced by Ammon and her virginity taken away from her, on her part she was still chaste and spiritually speaking, a virgin in the Lord's eyes. As for men, Joseph (of Jacob) was a virgin, even resisting the temptation to commit adultery. Jesus likewise was a virgin. He was righteous and pure for our sake. He fulfilled God's laws regarding purity for our sake and for our salvation, "that we might be called the sons of God", children of the Most High.

For a moment then let us set aside the external thought of outward virginity and purity in that spiritually speaking within, we are anything but pure in God's eyes. Even the virgin who keeps himself or herself pure before marriage must still confess inwardly his or her impurity. To sin even once, is to be unfaithful to God in all ways, "ye adulterers and adulteresses" Jms 4:4. The Bible emphasizes our spiritual adultery. In the Old Testament God commanded the prophet Hosea to marry a whore. This marriage symbolized God's faithfulness to Israel, and their spiritual whoredoms against Him. Spiritually speaking, every sinner is a whore. Even if outwardly our bodies are pure in the unmarried state, inwardly our spirit is corrupt. Even if we are married, and we entered into our marriage outwardly pure, we still entered into our marriage spiritually corrupt. Let us therefore not overemphasize virginity to the point that we consider outward purity enough to satisfy God's demand for holiness. The Bible says, "There is none righteous, no, not one." God's law equally condemns all. "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." Rom. 3 Let's stop making excuses. We cannot fulfill God's law nor can God's law save us. If we are to be saved it must be God Himself who saves us, the Lord Jesus Christ, the living Gospel. In the Gospel we find God declaring as righteous all those the law condemns. God freely declares the world righteous through Christ. "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference." "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." What the law could not achieve, Christ achieved and fulfilled. "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Rom. 8:3 Faith freely receives the righteousness God has already given through Christ. Faith alone in Him is necessary for salvation. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." The law of the Spirit of life in Christ, is the Gospel of Christ which frees us from the law of sin and death. The point is, through Christ God declares us righteous virgins, spotless, holy, and undefiled.

Let us put this truth in picture form. Imagine or pretend we are invited to a summer wedding. It is a nice and beautiful day and we gather together in the church taking our seats. The groom is dressed nicely in a tuxedo. The bride is clothed in a beautiful white wedding dress. They stand together at the altar of God before what appears to be a nervous minister. The minister begins with the usual words. Soon enough he says, "If there be any here present who can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined in marriage, let him now speak, or ever after hold his peace." There is the long and usual awkward pause. Suddenly, to our surprise the minister says, "Dear folks, I am sorry but I must stop everything. I can no longer remain silent. I know and must reveal what this bride has done! She has played the harlot. She has been an adulterous woman. She has defiled herself with many a man." Speaking to the groom the minister says, "You dear sir cannot marry her, for she is far beneath you, unworthy of even a drop of your love. Surely God will judge and punish her for her wickedness. You should not feel obliged in any way to marry her." Can you imagine our shock if we heard such a thing?.....let alone our disappointment that the bride was far less than she appeared. But we would be even more surprised if we heard the groom suddenly say to the minister, "No, she will not die. I will not permit nor allow it. Though I know all you say to be true, I have still promised myself to her. I will uphold and keep my vow. Indeed I will gladly

volunteer to take her place, and count all her sins as my own. I will pay her price. I would rather you count me as the adulterer, the fornicator, the unclean person, that she might be made clean and go free."

Every believer who hears these words will understand the meaning. We know who the unclean bride is, and more importantly we know the honorable and forgiving Groom. He is our gentle and loving Shepherd, the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, who gives His life for the sheep. Who could deny such an undeniable love as His? Who could turn away such a gracious offer from the Lord who has espoused Himself to sinners? But that is what unbelief is. It turns down, turns away, or hardens its heart against the one and only Savior who came to save. If you stood there at that wedding in the knowledge of all your sins, and yet you heard the groom say to you that He would not permit you to die for your sins, but would instead take your place, would you deny our doubt His love? Would you call Him a liar by way of unbelief? Upon the cross of Calvary the one and only Savior of the world extended and opened wide His arms over all the earth. His Gospel reveals His great love toward a world of sinners. Let us not deny this salvation, but rather firmly believe it and rejoice in it! God's promise, His betrothal to us is true. Indeed His divine and gracious love for you is so undeniable, that it carries with it the power to create a returning love and faith in our heart toward Him who loved us and gave Himself for us! Do not resist the Holy Spirit, but hear and accept by faith His everlasting love for you declared in Jeremiah 31:3. "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." If that is not enough for God to prove His love toward you through Christ, then listen to and hear the words of Ephesians five. "Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Can you see now how God declared you to be a holy and innocent virgin in His sight? What love can we give to God that matches or is equal to the love Christ has for us? Doesn't the very hardness of our heart melt, give way, and yield to God when we see from the Scriptures the strong, compassionate, and merciful love of our Savior toward a world of sinners? Can't we now by faith understand and relate to the words of the apostle Paul who triumphantly said, "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom. 8 His love and mercy hold on to us firmly no matter how cold or loveless our hearts are toward Him. When we are weak, He is strong. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

He is everything that we are not. The sinless Groom presents Himself to the sinful bride. We come to this wedding unclean, but He puts upon us, and places over our unclean body His own righteousness. "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints" Rev. 19:7-8. Christ puts upon us the garment of His own righteousness: "To her was granted", given. This is why all Christians honor Christ in their hearts by faith and praise Him as long as that faith continues. This is also why we desire to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. We love Christ for all He has done for us. This is also why when troubles befall us we need not be too shaken up about them. This world will not last, and He will come again. Though we are anything but virgins, God counts us as righteous and pure virgins, holy through Christ. "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." In heaven all the saints are considered spotless virgins who triumphed by faith over a world of darkness. In heaven all trials and tribulations are over. "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" Rev. 7:14. In heaven they know only God's glory, and they are perfectly content therein. "They sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred *and* forty *and* four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, *being* the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb" Rev. 14.

In, by, and through Christ we find all the purity that is needed. He is the Lord our Righteousness. Through Christ we also find all the strength that is needed to resist the many sins and temptations of the flesh. Through Christ not only does God count us righteous but God's own Spirit works within us so that we do those things that are pleasing in His sight. One passage which should never escape our attention is Philippians 2:13 which says, "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Please note that God not only helps us to will or want to do what is right, He also helps us to do it. "Both to will AND TO DO." Regarding virginity and fornication the Scriptures also say, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication." The Holy Spirit moves us, spurs us, helps us to be pure and keep ourselves from sin. "He incites and directs believers to lead a godly life" (Summary of Christian Doctrine, Koehler pg. 155). Sanctification in the narrow sense is the Spirit's work whereby He renews our hearts to do God's will. Our catechism says, "The Holy Ghost has sanctified me in the true faith, that is, He has by faith in Christ renewed my heart, so that I can now overcome sin and do good works." He helps us in three ways. 1) He renews our heart. Psalm 51:10 says, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." The Holy Spirit puts us in the right frame of mind refreshing us with God's grace and mercy. Our burden of sin being removed through Christ, we are lifted up, renewed to do His will. 2) He helps in our struggle against sin that we overcome it. Galatians 5:24 says, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." We suppress, crucify the sins of our body. We put them away by repentance and faith in Christ. We remember our baptism. Though on earth we can never rid ourselves of sin (Rom. 7:19 - The evil which I would not, that I do), through Christ truly our sins are erased (blotted out from God's memory). While the devil wishes only we see our sin and despair (as Judas did), again and again God leads us to repentance that we turn our eyes away from sin, so that they rest upon Christ our Savior by faith. Jesus Himself taught us, "this is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life." 3) The Holy Spirit helps us to do good works. "The believer will bring forth fruit meet for repentance.....he will be zealous of good works" (Summary of Christian Doctrine, Koehler, pg 156). Psalm 1:3 says, "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." Where there is faith in Christ there is also a living and active faith. Luther writes, "Oh, it is a living, busy, active, powerful thing that we have in faith, so that it is impossible for it not to do good without ceasing. Nor does it ask whether good works are to be done; but before the question is asked, it has wrought them, and is always engaged in doing them" (Formula of Concord, Th. D. Art. IV, pg. 941). Good works are the fruit of faith in Christ. Hence, the young woman will dress modestly, keeping herself pure for her marriage. Hence, the young man will flee fornication, and fight, suppress, and resist evil or lustful thoughts. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" Phil. 4:8 .

### **God Strengthens Us Through His Word of Grace**

In our fight against the sins of our flesh we are to remember that God works or strengthens us through His Means of Grace. The believer that seeks to remain pure for Christ (and future spouse) will be, or should be, diligently employed in the study of God's Word. "Search the Scriptures" Jn. 5:39. "From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation.....All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable.....that man may live a godly life" 2 Tim. 3. It is in His Word that we hear the Gospel, food for our hungry soul. The Gospel is the God-given strength we need for daily life. This is why we should read our Bible daily and go to church regularly. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." When we understand that the greatest need of the soul is God's Word and His forgiveness through the Word, we will not neglect the hearing of God's Word but gladly receive it. We cannot do without this "water of life", for without it we die of thirst in this wilderness of sin. We need to regularly hear Jesus say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee."

"These words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and life." Jesus is the Bread of Life. Let us not neglect the most important food of all: God's Word is food for the soul. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" Jn. 10:10.

For those who strive to remain chaste and pure there is also strength in the visible Word, the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Though our baptism took place long ago we should never underestimate its importance in our day to day life. "Baptism doth also now save us" I Pet. 3:21. Not only did baptism long ago wash away our sins (He saved us by the washing of water), not only did baptism create faith and trust in God's promises so that we believe and do not despair, but the Holy Spirit through baptism is even now working in us daily. When the question is asked, *What does such baptizing with water signify?* Luther answers, "It signifies that the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever" (Luther's Catechism, pg. 178). That we daily repent and daily turn to Christ for His mercy is a fruit of our baptism, proof the Holy Spirit is continually working within. Recalling our baptism we put away our sins by repentance and faith, remembering His promises of grace bestowed upon us when we were baptized. Remembering our baptism, the broken and contrite heart gives a sigh of relief saying, "But God has washed me clean of my sins by His Word in baptism! I am forgiven! Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also salvation and life everlasting." In this way the Old Adam is once again drowned, and the new man comes forth. Baptism is a continual death and resurrection. We become dead to sin, but alive through Jesus Christ the Lord. Through Baptism we live to fight another day knowing God has already granted us the victory.

As for the visible Word of the Lord's Supper, each young adult will keep in mind the importance of regularly or as often as possible, receiving the body and blood of Christ. Pastor Miller writes, "The Gospel is the life's blood of saving faith. The Lord's Supper has been called, on that account, the "medicine of immortality." To stay close to the Gospel is to stay close to home, to your heavenly home. If you get away from it, by virtue of distance or by neglect, your faith begins to dry up and wither away, and soon you are not ready for death. You forget or neglect to review your sin and to repent; your prayer life becomes spotty and infrequent; and you lose touch with Christ. By all means then, stay as close as you can to a sound church, keep your Bible in use, get the Lord's Supper often" (A Blessed Death, Faithful Word, Vol. 34, #2, Summer 97). To put it in picture form, each Sunday Christ Himself is present in the Church standing at the altar in the flesh. Being a Friend of Sinners He extends to us in invitation His nail-printed hands for all to see. In faith with Thomas we reply "My Lord and my God!" But there in His hands we also see He is holding the bread and the wine. In His Words we hear Him say, "This is my body.....This is my blood, given and shed for you for the remission of sins." Wouldn't we who hunger and thirst after righteousness gladly receive with believing hearts this wondrous feast! Won't we likewise bow down before Him with all humility, yet at the same time stand in awe of such heavenly means of grace? Would we ever want to miss a Sunday where He stood there by Himself alone, no one coming to receive His Supper, His grace? Such grace, His grace, is truly refreshing to the soul! Of Holy Communion Luther said, "I certainly love it with all my heart, the precious, blessed Supper of my Lord Jesus Christ, in which He gives me His body and blood to eat and to drink orally, with the mouth of my body, accompanied by the exceedingly sweet and gracious words, "Given for you, shed for you" (What Luther Says, #2464, pg. 792). We need to receive the Lord's Supper often, "to obtain strength for a holier life" (Luther's Catechism. pg. 201).

Our final tool or weapon to be used that we lead a chaste and decent life in thought, word, and deed, is prayer. Dr. Walter Maier writes, "One day when Martin Luther found himself burdened with a particularly pressing responsibility, he rose early in the morning with the resolution: 'Today I have so much to do I need to spend three hours in prayer.' Would to God that young people today would pause in the heat of their battle against the treachery of lust and fortify themselves with purifying prayer! When youth has learned to employ the resources of soul energy stored in the reservoirs of prayer it has discovered the divine power before which the legions of lust must fall prostrate" (For Better Not For Worse, Maier, pg. 57). If the believer is to fight against the lusts and sins of the flesh, they must heed the

words of the Lord who says, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify me." God wants to hear your prayers. He desires them only so He can help. "Ask and it shall be given you." "If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it." His grace being upon us, He will certainly give us those things we truly need, especially aid to fight against the sins of our bodies. Jesus impressed this point upon His own disciples when He said, "What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" Mt. 7. We can pray in all confidence because our heavenly Father above loves us through Christ, more than our earthly father or mother ever can. His love rises far above any love we have known on earth, in that He did not spare to give us His only-begotten Son to die for us upon the cross. In prayer the heart trusts the many promises of God. He promises to give us strength to fight against sin. He promises that He will never withdraw His love from us, nor forget about us. He promises that He will keep and preserve us in the true faith. He promises that He will never give us more than we can bear. He promises that all things work together for good to them that love God. He promises that if only we ask, He will give. He promises "Lo I am with you alway!" In Christ Jesus all the promises of God are yea and yes. Our prayers are concluded with a resounding AMEN!

### **What Engagement Truly Is**

One of the most frustrating things in life is to patiently look for, pray for, and wait for a Christian spouse. While each believer who desires to marry is well aware of God's many promises regarding prayer "Ask and it shall be given you".....there is no promise in the Bible from God that just because we want to marry, God will grant us a spouse. In other words, the Bible contains no absolute promise that God will give us a spouse, if we want one. The matter then of marriage or our desire to marry, must be approached with faith. Faith in Christ is the beginning point on our road to marriage, especially if the marriage is to be a happy one. Our faith, our confidence is that since our God is gracious and merciful through His Son (abounding with tender compassion toward the sheep of His pasture), He will bless and guide us on the path to marriage. When marriage is the desire of our heart, by faith we know God will give us those things we truly need. Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." By faith we are to look to the many promises of God in the Scriptures and have faith that He will provide. "Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring *it* to pass" Ps. 37:5. It may not be in the time or manner we choose, our wait may be long even difficult, but we must understand God's grace rules over it all. God has a plan. Through Christ we receive the wonderful spiritual blessings of forgiveness, faith, spiritual strength, salvation, life everlasting. Through the same Christ we also receive the earthly blessings of wife and children, happiness in family and home.

In God's eyes marriage begins at the time of engagement - not later on our wedding day, or whenever we consummate. "Marriage is the lifelong union of one man and one woman unto one flesh. Marriage was instituted by God and *is entered into by rightful betrothal, or engagement*" (Luther's Small Catechism, pg. 70). To be rightly engaged is to be married in the eyes of our Lord. Kretzmann nicely defines engagement this way, "A rightful betrothal is entered upon when one man and one woman, being of marriageable age and not hindered by Scriptural or legal impediments, with the express or implied consent of their parents or guardians, and by their own free mutual consent, promise to be and remain to each other husband and wife in a lifelong union. That is the Scripture view of a valid betrothal" (Pop. Comm. N.T. I, pg 7). In the Bible we find God calling Mary the wife of Joseph when they were only engaged, "before they came together." "The angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" Mt. 1:20. It was the same in the Old Testament when Jacob was engaged to Rachel. After he had fulfilled his obligation of service for seven years, "Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her" Gen. 29:21.

There are proper and improper engagements. An engagement can be broken or declared improper for the following reasons: 1) a secret is kept by either party from the other, which having been known would have kept or prevented the engagement (e.g. past fornication, impotence, inability to bear children, sexual disease, crimes) 2) failure to fulfill conditions set by parents (parents do not give their full blessing to the engagement, but set conditions which must first be met before marriage such as: full time job, joining the church, certain problems worked out, etc.) 3) it was a secret engagement between a man and woman with no proper witnesses (Walther writes, "There is no validity to secret betrothals, that is, those done behind the back or without the approval of the parents, no matter how public they may otherwise be, even if they have been confirmed by oath.") 4) lies and outright deceit on the part of either party. When either the man or woman is not fully open and honest about their past, such commit a great sin against their espoused and Almighty God in heaven. The Bible says, "All liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" Rev. 21:8. The innocent party who was deceived has the right to end the engagement with a clear conscience. Those who wish to marry should not hide the past from one another but freely confess their sins to one another and God. God "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Confession is good for the soul. Forgiveness is good as well. Confessing our sins we will find out if the other readily forgives or prefers to hold a grudge. If it is the other who confesses to us, we will see their sorrow over their sin. It is our duty then to say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee. Christ forgives you, and so do I. Go in peace."

### **Common Sense Considerations**

For these reasons and many more no one should enter into an engagement too quickly. Indeed when choosing a spouse the most important decisions, the key decisions to a good marriage need to take place before we are engaged. Here then the young man or woman asks, but how do I choose? How will I know? Is it possible to know whether this or that person will be a good spouse, the one I should marry? There are, of course, the usual considerations or common sense questions one should ask. Are our families compatible with one another, or are they worlds apart? Will they accept me as a son? Will I accept her as a mother? Will she accept my family or try to separate me from my family? Will my family love her as a daughter, or treat her as a burden? There are also economic considerations. Will she be content in our small home or will she long to have what she used to have in her privileged family? A woman might consider whether or not this man will work hard to provide for her future children or will he be lazy as he is now? Will he give up his toys if our children need to eat or is he in love with his possessions (or himself)? That my family is rich and his family poor.....will this cause problems? There is also compatibility. Will this man treat me as a lady or does he have a violent temper so that physical abuse might occur? When there are arguments, do they end in peace or hard feelings? Do our tempers align or are they so different that we will never understand one another? We will be able to overcome one another's temper with words of peace? Are we happy with one another or are there too many tears? Will she have all the children God will give us or will she complain after a couple? Will she be a career wife so that our children take second place? Is she a feminist? Will he be a wise husband that rules our house with wisdom, or will he be a tyrant whose anger destroys everything he touches?

### **The Role and Blessing of Parents**

It wouldn't be so hard to choose a spouse if all men and women could be objective about it. When there is love and strong emotional feelings things are not so easily seen in black and white. There is a lot of gray. Common sense and objectivity often go out the door. Thanks be to God we have His Word to guide us! Thanks be to God there are loving parents who often see what their son or daughter cannot see because of their "rose colored" glasses. Here then let all who desire marriage understand this ALL-IMPORTANT point: the full blessing of parents (on both sides) is of extreme importance. Moreover in God's kingdom it is normally the father and mother who bless and approve the marriage - sometimes even

arrange it. If the marriage is to last a lifetime, whenever possible, the full blessing of parents is most crucial for a proper engagement. Consider Genesis twenty-four. Isaac's mother had just died and his father Abraham "was old, *and* well stricken in age: and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things." Not wanting Isaac to marry an ungodly wife (the daughters of the Canaanites) Abraham charged his oldest servant to find a wife for Isaac saying, "go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac." Abraham's servant took an oath to do so and prayed for the Lord's guidance every step of the way. In His divine providence God caused Abraham's servant to arrive in Mesopotamia at the very place where Abraham's relatives lived. The servant prayed for a sign that God would indicate which woman God had chosen to be the wife of Isaac. "Let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac." In answer to Abraham's and the servant's prayer Rebecca was that damsel, the future wife of Isaac. She was also a virgin who had kept herself pure. "The damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her." Through the following course of events it was made clear to Rebecca's family that God had provided her in answer to Abraham's prayer. Rebecca would be Isaac's wife, if she were willing. When the father, Bethuel, asked if she were willing to go and marry Isaac, in faith she answered, "I will go." Note well this proves no woman or man should be forced by parents to marry someone they do not want. In this case Rebecca gave her consent and the parents and family sent her off with their blessing. "They blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions." Though she had never met or even seen Isaac, she would marry him, knowing that God had provided and arranged this marriage. Days later they arrived in Abraham's land. "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide." Perhaps he was praying God would provide him a wife? "He lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes." She saw Isaac as well. With modesty she lowered her veil, a symbol of her purity. "Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."

This chapter provided by the Holy Spirit is a great blessing for parents who want to know what they should do when their son or daughter seeks marriage. Likewise in Abraham we see and understand the desire of every believing parent, that their child marry well and wisely, especially that they marry in the Lord. Abraham literally left the matter entirely to God in prayer. He gave the Lord his burden, the desperate yearning of any parent, that their son or daughter find and marry a Christian spouse (and provide many grandchildren). All Abraham did he did in prayer. The Lord in His mercy answered that prayer with a resounding YES. Rebecca was provided for Isaac bringing him great happiness and joy. Moreover Rebecca was literally the mother of "thousands of millions", the mother of the Jewish race, hence Christ. Note also Rebecca married Isaac with the simple blessing of both parents, having never seen or met Isaac - truly a leap of faith. Isaac as well did not have the opportunity to "check out" Rebecca. He married the woman the Lord had provided and he did so by faith. They lived happily ever after, though they had their share of trials and tribulations.

Christians who seek to be married then need to seek the blessing of all parents (or guardians) involved. Neither should enter into engagement without the full blessing of his and her parents, provided parents are not behaving in a selfish manner. The young man would be wise to sit down and talk to the woman's parents, seeking their blessing and permission first - before engagement and not after. Anything less is dishonorable. He should also seek the blessing of his own parents. Likewise the young woman should seek the blessing of all parents, his and hers. Parents are not to be despised. Young adults who despise parental blessing will only bring grief upon themselves. These are the marriages that often end in divorce. Besides this, there is still the fourth commandment which says, "Honor thy father and thy mother, that it may be well with thee." We honor our parents, when we wisely choose (or they choose for us) a God-pleasing spouse (Jacob). We dishonor them when we think ourselves so wise as to not need their guidance or wisdom (Esau). Proverbs 1:8 says, "My son, hear the instruction of thy father and forsake not the law of thy mother, for they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head and chains about thy neck." Dr. Walter Meier writes, "Parents are pivotal, we repeat, and the warning of the ancient

proverb that parental blessing builds the children's homes while their curse destroys them, presents a frequent synopsis of human experience. Prodigious leaders in every branch of human activity have freely acknowledged as one of the most vital human contributions to their preeminence and the happiness of their home-life the love and guidance of their parents, the solicitous prayers and the unflagging interest of a self-sacrificing mother, the generous, deep-rooted Christ-like life of a devout father" (For Better Not For Worse, Maier, pg. 315). Wise parents know the weaknesses and strengths of their sons and daughters. They will have in most cases, the objectivity needed to give or withhold the marriage blessing. Let us then honor God, by honoring the wisdom of fathers and mothers. Seek their blessing! With such a blessing a good marriage will result, and we will bring our parents great happiness and joy. We also will be happily married. Isaac and Rebecca had a good God-pleasing marriage. Their son Jacob did as well. Esau however married ungodly women, "Which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah" Gen. 26:35. Rebecca said, "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth" Gen. 27. "A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son *is* the heaviness of his mother." Prov. 10:1

### **Seek a Spouse of the Same Faith and Confession**

In addition to the all-important blessing of our parents there is an even more important question that the young adult should consider when contemplating engagement: is she or he a Christian? Do we have the same faith and confession? Does she love the Lord as I do and treasure God's Word as we ought? Will he (or she) lead me away from Christ? Will we put God and His Word first in our marriage above all things, that we grow together as one in the grace and knowledge of the Lord? In the Scriptures time and time again we see what happens when a Christian marries an unbelieving spouse. As a rule the unbeliever seduces the believer away from Christ. Consider Genesis six, "And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they *were* fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose." Instead of choosing a godly wife who believed in Holy Trinity, they chose to marry "the daughters of men", unbelieving daughters of unbelieving men. The net result was that the godly men (sons of God) lost their faith in the Savior, the Seed of the woman. Through the wife they fell into sin and unbelief to the point where there were only eight believing souls at the time of the flood.

The case of Solomon is very similar. Remember that at first Solomon was a devout believer. Becoming king his only prayer was that the Lord would grant him wisdom to rule his people. But in spite of his devout faith, "King Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites", ungodly women who worshipped idols (I Kings 11:1). Though God had warned Israel "surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father" I Kings 11. This truth is also mentioned in the book of the prophet Nehemiah, who rebuked the Jews for marrying ungodly wives. "I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives?" Neh. 13:25-27.

In Genesis six, the Holy Ghost tells us the godly men, "took them wives of all which they chose." From this alone it follows that not all marriages are made in heaven. We choose whom we marry. It is not preordained by God. Some choose wisely and some do not. This is not to say that if we pray and trust that God will provide we should not recognize His hand in granting us a good Christian spouse. God does answer our prayers in this way as we saw in the case of Abraham. But if we despise God and His

Word for guidance we will reap the consequences in our marriage. Like Solomon, many a Christian in our world today has looked at the women of the world and seen "that they were fair". They forgot that true beauty lies within. If a young man is to be wise he ought to seek the virtuous woman of I Peter 3:3-4. "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." Sadly, even among Christians outward beauty or physical attraction is often deemed more important than spiritual beauty, faith within. P.E. Kretzmann writes, "Many a young man seeks a speedy marriage with the first pretty face that catches his fancy, for the mere gratification of his sexual desires and with no idea of establishing a home and maintaining a family" (Pop. Comm. N.T. II, pg. 124). Often such marriages of "mixed faith" results in endless strife and debate between husband and wife (sure she's pretty, but who can stand to live with her?). Amos writes, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed" (3:3). Sometimes the unbelieving husband moves the believing wife far away from church, so that she can no longer attend. Sometimes the believer stops fighting the good fight of faith and falls from grace. Sometimes in a "mixed faith" marriage the children suffer, not knowing which parent to follow - religiously speaking. Few things are worse than a Christian parent watching their child grow up in the same unbelief as their spouse.

But all of this is not to say that the marriage of a believer with an unbeliever is absolutely forbidden. We should not go too far on this point either. There are times when the believing spouse holds their ground (spiritually speaking), and by meekness and a godly love instructs the other with God's Word. The unbeliever becomes a believer. Many husbands have been saved by way of the Word through their godly wives and visa versa. Pastors always know of a few cases like this though the opposite is more common. And while it cannot be used as a proof passage to justify the marriage of the godly with the ungodly, I Peter 3 does show that sometimes unbelieving husbands convert by the example of their wives. "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear." This means that it is possible that an unbelieving husband might be won over to the faith, if the believing wife remembers to be obedient to her husband. But a woman would be foolish to become engaged to such a man, thinking she could "spiritually" change him. The passage provided is written for those who are already married, not contemplating marriage.

On the question as to whether or not a believer should marry an unbeliever, Johann Gerhard, an orthodox Lutheran who lived not long after Luther (1582-1637), appears to strike the right balance on the subject. Gerhard writes,

"Although we consider it most certain, best, and most advisable for those persons to marry who agree in the true knowledge and confession of the true religion, so that they can serve the true God and call upon Him with one mouth and one heart, according to the prescriptions of the divine Word; nevertheless when unbelievers or errorists are not also blasphemous and stiff-necked, but there is almost certain hope that they will be converted; then if the other party, who is a Christian and orthodox, has a good understanding of the Christian religion, and so there is no danger of being misled and persuaded; marriage may be permitted, namely if the man is Christian and orthodox, who through marriage attains dominion over the unbelieving or erring wife.

"Here it can be applied to some extent that God, in Deut. 21:11, allowed the Israelites to marry women captured in war from other nations because it was improbable that a prisoner-of-war would bring her master to renounce his paternal religion. Further there are the examples of Judah and Joseph (Gen. 38:1; 41, 45).

But if it is a question of such an unbelieving and heretical person who combines blasphemies with his unbelief or his heresy that overthrows the basis of the [true] religion, and who explicitly confesses that he wants to remain in his heresy, then we say that every believing and orthodox person should hold back from marrying that other person. And we can hardly be brought to accept it that marriages between persons of different religions are to be permitted" (*Pastoral Theology*, Walther, pg 164)

Gerhard also gives a list of Scriptural reasons why it is unadvisable for an orthodox person to marry an unbeliever or errorist (one who does not hold to the full truth of God's Word, but holds to one or several doctrinal errors: Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Catholic, ELCA Lutheran, WELS, LCMS, etc.). "1. The explicit divine prohibition (Ex. 34:16; Deut. 7:3-4; Joshua 23:12; I Cor. 7:39); 2. The reasons given for the prohibition, which show that it is moral and not Levitical in nature (Neh. 13:23ff; I Kings 11:2-4); 3. The experience that the usual result is falling away (Gen. 6:2; 26:34f.; Judges 3:5-7; I Kings 16:31); 4. The disadvantages which arise from it, namely with respect to worship at home, the raising of children, etc.; 5. The nature of marital fellowship; 6. The evil appearance which is thereby given, that one despises the correct faith" (*Pastoral Theology*, Walther, pg. 164, 165).

It is good to notice in Gerhard's words that to some extent it depends upon the person. For example, if an orthodox Lutheran woman wants to marry a devout Jew coming under his authority in marriage, he will almost certainly lead her astray. The same would be true of an orthodox Lutheran woman marrying a Muslim, Mormon, or Jehovah's Witness. These established religions or cults are so entirely opposed to Christ it would be foolish to marry. In like manner a woman would have a most difficult time if the man was a devout Catholic or Methodist, etc. Where will the children go to church? Will he let me take the children to my Lutheran church or is he just agreeing now so that we will be married? Will he forbid me later or constantly try to undermine my faith during our marriage? We should also have the understanding there that there are men who are non-practicing Methodists, non-practicing Catholics, etc., who may have never really been exposed to God's Word and proper instruction. If they are willing to learn there could well be hope. But all this should be taken care of before engagement and if it doesn't happen then "here's your sign". Certainly there are young men and women who take instruction in the Lutheran faith and join the church on paper but not in the heart. But sometimes the opposite is also true. Regarding orthodox Lutheran men who wish to marry things are a little different in that they are the God-given head of the household. If they are firm in the faith, and not wishy-washy (as so many today) they may be able to lead the wife into the true faith by word and deed. But again it is best is to cover all this ground before engagement - or better yet seek to date one who is already faithful to God's teachings of the Bible. If she is nowhere to be found do not give up hope but patiently wait. "They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" Is. 40:31. The Lord has a plan. Therefore find a wife or husband who willingly from the heart joins your Lutheran church which yet remains faithful to God's Word.

### **Conclusion**

Out of love for our Savior who "died for all", let us remember to earnestly pray for all those who diligently look for and pray for a Christian spouse. It is no easy task getting married. And "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Those who wish to marry need our ceaseless prayers. Likewise let all parents who love their children in a godly fashion, see to it that they regularly and diligently and often pray that God will provide their son or daughter with a Christian spouse. Though the world discourages us God's promises in Scripture give certain hope. Above all things let each man and woman who hope to marry be guided by the Holy Scriptures and regularly be fed the Means of Grace. God will not fail to guide and give strength to each believer in this way. Truly God gives us all those things we truly need and if we truly need the blessing of marriage God will provide. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Rom. 8:32. May God sincerely bless you in your search for a Christian spouse. By God's grace those who want to marry in Christ.....will. "Ask and it shall be given you." Amen.

### **A Virgin's Prayer:**

Almighty, everlasting God, heavenly Father, I confess and regret that I am not always as holy, pure, and chaste in body and soul as I ought to be; that my heart is filled with sinful desires and the fiery darts of an evil conscience (Eph 6:16). Dear heavenly Father, deliver me from this sin of mine and bestow Thy grace, that I may be and remain holy in body and soul (1 Cor 7:34), that I may purify myself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit and walk in holy continence and self-restraint (1 Cor 7:1). Keep me from hypocrisy and arrogance, that I not despise marriage, nor elevate myself in my heart and despise married people, for I know that a godly marriage pleases Thee more than arrogant virginity. O Lord Jesus Christ, blessed Son of the virgin Mary, who didst sanctify virginity in Thine own virginal body, who didst say to Thy disciples, "He that is able to receive it, let him receive it," grant me Thy grace, that in the strength thereof I may receive this word and rightly use this gift of living in chastity, apart from marriage, for the advancement of Thy kingdom of grace, and that I may cling to the Lord Jesus unhindered (1 Cor 7:14). Thou pure, heavenly Bridegroom of my soul and of all believers, whether they be married or single, keep me from all impurity and filthiness. O Holy Ghost, who art the Spirit of sanctification and self-discipline (2 Tim 1:7), help me live a chaste and decent life and thus adorn the state of virginity. Grant me Thy grace that I may be a rose of love, a violet of humility, and a lily of purity. Sanctify me and all chaste Christian married couples through and through. Keep my spirit, soul, and body altogether unblamable unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thess 5:23) Amen

- by John Gerhard