

Marriage as an Earthly Workshop for Healing the Heart

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Abstract: Many of us can quickly cite chapter and verse of the key Biblical passages on marriage. Perhaps we can even quote them and talk about how they have helped shape our own marriages. But can we talk about them in context? In Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Peter, and 1 Corinthians, marriage is used by the author to illustrate a more fundamental heart issue. This paper will briefly explore the context of each of these marriage passages to show how marriage can be one of the great workshops God uses to expose and heal broken places of the human heart.

Ed Morse's Section

I thought I thoroughly understood what the Bible said about marriage. After all, I was as comfortable with the Greek text as the English; I had a strong 26 year marriage, and we had three adult children following Jesus. I had lived it, taught it, and counseled it. Yep, "Expert", some would say. Now I look back and shake my head with a sigh.

"Lord, thank You for Your loving mercy towards this ignorant man!"

God, in His graciously humiliating ways, had chosen to show me that I didn't know what I was talking about. And by that same grace, He decided to start teaching me. He began to open my eyes to His word to see what I didn't know was there, to heal places I didn't know were broken. Our marriage began to flourish, and after over a dozen years of this, she and our marriage and God's word just keep getting more and more beautiful to me.

My part of this paper is to share a piece of what I have been learning. Late? Maybe. Worth the journey? Absolutely!

We will explore four classic marriage passages in this paper: Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, 1 Peter 3 and 1 Corinthians 7. Each speaks of particular aspects of marriage, but surprisingly, each is not primarily about marriage. I hope to show that, in each case, the author is using marriage as an application of a far greater principle—an aspect of the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Reading one of these passages without seeing the greater principles makes us miss the greater glory of what's being said; and missing that greater glory makes putting-to-practice nearly impossible.

It makes the biblical message seem unrealistic, or even oppressive. On the other hand, when we start to see the greater principles each author is communicating, the message radiates a glory worthy of our evangelical claims that it is indeed inspired by God. And putting-to-practice becomes a natural, even joyful, response to the truth of Christ. It becomes a transformation happening inside the heart instead of some “try harder” imposition from the outside.

During the last few decades, many have felt the freedom to challenge our traditional interpretations of these passages. I used to resist those challenges, but now I am grateful for them. They have forced me to look at these passages more carefully, more deeply. And that has brought new dimensions of healing and redemption to my marriage and my ministry beyond what I could have imagined.

A “Workshop”?

The idea of a marriage being a “workshop” for the healing of the heart may seem to some a mixed metaphor. Perhaps a hospital or clinic is a better image. In any case, we’re suggesting that Paul and Peter were not only showing how their greater messages apply to marriage, but also showing how marriage can help expose the broken places of the believer’s heart to the healing power of the truth of Jesus Christ.

It was while reflecting on the common elements of Ephesians 5, Colossians 3 and 1 Peter 3 that this idea became clear. Each writer grouped his advice on marriage with

two other areas of life. Paul grouped marriage with family and the workplace.¹ Peter grouped it with the workplace and earthly governments. Each of these is an area of great challenge to the human being. In each area the individual does not have control over their situation. In each, he or she is confronted with what seems unfair, and often is. How does faith shape his or her response, or does it? Each author examines how faith can influence those reactions. But it takes time to grow in faith, and more time for faith to change reactions. That implies much failure. Thankfully, the power of Christ is “perfected in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).

This workshop concept is probably most clearly seen in 1 Peter. Peter explains from the beginning of his letter that hardships faced by the believer are used by God to refine (test/prove) his faith (1 Peter 1:6-7). He goes on to describe three places of hardship—places where the believer often faces unfair treatment (1 Peter 2:12-15, 18-21). He identifies the first two of these as the earthly government and the workplace. He then joins marriage to his list by using the leading phrase: “in the same way” (likewise) followed by his advice to wives and husbands (1 Peter 3:1, 7). Peter clearly sees marriage as one of those places where life can feel terribly unfair. How should the believer learn to respond? We’ll return to that later in this paper. In any case, marriage is one of Peter’s three workshops for developing faith – for healing the heart.

Now let’s turn our attention to the overarching message of each of our four passages.

¹ When Paul and Peter speak of masters and slaves, I believe it can be argued that the principles at stake are directly applicable to any boss and worker relationship. The master and slave relationship represents the worst case. What is effective in that worst case, can be even more effective in cases less extreme.

Ephesians 5 – Healing my misplaced trust.

We'll start with what is probably the most famous New Testament passage on marriage. We'll start here not just because of its fame, but because Ephesians 5:25 was the wake-up call I received around 3:00 AM a dozen years ago, now. It began my journey outside the walls of my comfortable arrogance.

The details are outside the scope of this paper, but let me summarize it. I was preparing to teach a Bible study on what I thought I knew very well: Ephesians 5:25-33. But I suddenly realized that I didn't get it! Verse 25 was the trigger. I thought I knew well, that to "love my wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it," meant I must be willing to die for her. And of course I was. But, early that morning, it struck me that my pagan friends would die for their wives too! It's the manly thing to do. Paul had to be saying something more profound than just that. But what?

By the grace of God, one of Paul's powerful summaries of Christ's love for the church came to my mind. He had said to the Philippians, "Who [Christ] being in the form of God did not consider equality with God something to cling to, but emptied Himself taking the form of a slave..." (2: 6-7). And this emptying was what He was asking me to do for my wife. Serving Christ was, of course, my first priority, but what was He asking me to do as a married man? It was to empty myself of even my, seemingly important, ministry positions for the sake of helping my wife flourish. Jesus Christ was saying that my first priority in loving Him, is loving her. It was to be more about her and less about me.

My ministry had taken priority over serving my wife; and that needed to change. When Karen woke that morning, my first apology began—and so did the healing. We put every area of ministry on the chopping block: our small church; my Bible studies; mentoring. God helped us start new... together. He began redeeming our marriage, and jump-starting major growth in each of us. And the scriptures I thought I knew so well, began to explode in glory and power.²

Ephesians 5:25 is indeed powerful, but it's not Paul's main message in this letter. What is that message? It is this: Christ wants to heal my misplaced trust. What does that mean? He wants to deliver each of us from being shaped by our misinformed hopes and expectations and, instead, be shaped by the truth of Christ. Instead of trusting what the people around us say about life, we get to learn from the One who created it. Instead of finding our joys and fullness from the earth, we get to learn to find it in the Holy Spirit's presence within. Marriage is one of the prime examples of where childhood dreams (and fears) and misinformed expectations, are so deeply programmed by our cultures; that letting them get rooted out of us takes powerful, daily reminders of the liberating truth of Christ.

To see this, we must look at the overall structure of Ephesians.

² What about the rest of the Ephesians 5 message on marriage? Again, this is outside the scope of this paper, but let me suggest this in concept. Paul says the amazing mystery of marriage is a means of teaching us about Christ and the church (verses 29-32), and the other way around. As such, he describes the secrets of how a man should love a woman—setting her apart as abundantly worthy of forgiveness (the “washing of water in a word” in verse 27), and looking way past her flaws to her ultimate sacred beauty (verse 28). He describes the secrets of how a woman, empowered as an agent of Christ, can help inspire her man to be a godly champion for the family by treating him with respect and deference (verses 22-24).

The first three chapters deluge the readers' minds and hearts with who Christ is, and what He has done to rescue us.

In our quest to learn what to do in marriage, it's too easy to skip that foundation and go straight to something "practical." But, without that foundation we are doomed. We are left to change how we act without changing how we think. We are stuck trying to change our short-term present without the perspective of a perfect future. But Paul reminds us that we are being rescued and guarded and infused by the power of the Holy Spirit of the living God, who has welcomed us to become citizens of His eternal, hyper-cosmic kingdom.

It's not until half way through his letter that Paul even begins to tell the reader what to do. That is: "...Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all humility and meekness, putting up with each other in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"(Eph. 4:1-3).

He goes on to emphasize the compelling oneness within the Trinity, and our invitation to participate unified together with God (4:4-8). He speaks of God providing leaders in the church to help foster this stabilizing unity under the headship of Christ (4:9-16).

From 4:17 to 5:18, Paul warns of the ludicrous, God-alienating behaviors learned from the surrounding pagan culture; behaviors that destroy unity with God, and with our fellow believers. He contrasts those dark, alienating ways with the fruit of the Spirit:

goodness, righteousness, and truth—things worthy of wise children of Light. Finally, verse 18 summarizes his argument: “Don’t be getting drunk with wine, in which is recklessness, but be filled with the Spirit.”

What does that mean? The grammatical structure of the Greek text helps. Paul follows his admonition to be filled with Spirit, by using five participles to describe what that looks like. First, it’s “speaking among yourselves in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” (5:19a). Then, “singing and psalming in your hearts to God” (5:19b). Next, “being thankful always to *our* God and Father for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:20). Finally, “being submissive to each other in the fear of Christ” (5:21).

It is this final statement that Paul is clearly leading up to; not only does it remind us what it means to “walk worthy of the calling” (4:1-2), the calling so powerfully proclaimed in chapters 1-3, but it also serves as a lead-in to Paul’s application examples following in 5:22-6:9. Those applications are marriage (5:22-33), family (6:1-4), and the workplace (6:5-9).

What does this tell us about marriage? It says marriage is a place to be so filled with the Spirit of God; so empowered by the redemptive work of Christ; so trusting the One “who is able to do all things way beyond what we ask or think” (4:20), that submitting to, or deferring, to each other becomes a natural expression of the supernatural presence of the Holy Spirit within. Instead of just telling the reader what to do in marriage, Paul first reminds the reader of the transcendent reality of Jesus Christ. Then he shows what attitudes the Spirit of Christ inspires. And they are in stark contrast to the attitudes the

reader's culture inspires. In this light, submission to Christ and to one another becomes a gift inspired by the Holy Spirit, instead of a threat to one's rights. Whether it is the advice to a wife to defer to her husband, or advice to a husband to love his wife, either is still putting the other person's needs ahead of one's own without conditions. Both are examples of a submission inspired by a trust in Christ, and the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Learning this level of trust in Christ takes time. It takes a lot of faith to displace a lot of self-protection. It takes the filling of the Holy Spirit to displace the misconceptions that otherwise fill us. That takes time in the workshop—time to recognize our obstacles; time to process them with God; time to repent and start fresh. All of this happens in the earthly workshop with the Holy Spirit doing His work within us.

Colossians 3 – Healing my insecurities that lead me to act out.

It's easy to misconstrue Colossians 3:18-19 as "marriage-lite." After all, it's only two verses, and they seem a tiny subset of what is said in Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3. But when we ask the question, "what is the deeper message that Paul applies to marriage?", the answer contains, not only the secrets to a beautiful marriage, but to a beautiful life. It explains to the reader how to find so settled a confidence in who he is, that the ugly, seemingly irresistible behaviors can start losing their allure while being supplanted by love. Marriage becomes a place to express that secure identity, rather than the greatest threat to it. So, Colossians 3 is not marriage-lite after all. It's foundational. It is profoundly worthy of the inspiration by the Holy Spirit.

Let's look at Paul's message to the people of Colossae.

Paul uses the first half of his letter to explore with them the wonders of this heavenly kingdom they had recently accepted invitation to. In chapter 1, He opens their eyes wide to just who this Jesus really is, and the incredible, life-changing privilege of knowing Him. The readers can feel the impact of Christ's forgiving grace rescuing them from sinful darkness. Paul wants them to know they are at the historic turning point of all civilization, when God revealed the great secret hidden from previous ages: "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (1:27). The common person can now have the power of God Himself resident within, energizing him with a hope that can endure any hardship in life. In Colossians 2, Paul goes on to tell them, that keeping rooted in Jesus Christ will equip them to resist the incessant barrage of misleading, religious-sounding ideas luring them back to darkness.

By the end of chapter 2, the reader should be deeply inspired by the truth about Christ, and empowered by knowing that the Spirit of Christ is within. On this foundation, Paul can build (in chapter 3) a case for the personal reformation available to every believer. Each is so blessed by Christ, he or she can no longer justify feeling insecure or even being afraid. Since insecurity and fear prompt so many of our broken ways of responding to each other—like anger, malice, slander, lying, and lust—the believer can "put these away" (3:8). Any attempt to justify them in our psyches is obviously indefensible, in light of the overwhelming, sacrificial love of Christ. Paul urges the believers to move beyond those old habitual responses, and in their place, learn to love like Christ. After all, they have been "renewed and are being renewed"

(3:10). They are “chosen by God, holy and loved” (3:12). Relationships can now be about learning to respond to each other as if that is really is true—with a grace-filled love only possible when a believer knows he is securely loved by God. (3:12-17).

All of this is the foundational message, and marriage is Paul’s first application example (3:18-19). If a person feels the security of Christ’s love, he or she can love without fear. The submission of a woman to her man, is a natural result of her secure selflessness described in verses 12-17. The love of a man for his woman, and his resistance to bitterness within, follow directly from that same secure selflessness. Without it, these responses are impossible.

Again, a workshop is needed. Developing this level of security in Christ takes time. And though the allure of behaviors spawned in insecurity subsides, it still takes time to heal the ugly habit patterns. They often must be exposed before they can heal. Marriage does that well. But, when we remind ourselves that we are “chosen by God, holy, and loved” (3:12), we can regain stability, make our apologies, and let “Christ within” (1:27) guide our own long term healing; as we trust God’s work with the other person, too.

So, in this way, marriage again becomes another workshop for the healing of the human heart.

1 Peter 3 – Healing my earth-bound demand to be treated fairly.

The Apostle Peter writes one of the most powerful messages about marriage in the first of his two letters. He speaks to women in the first six verses of chapter 3, and to

men in the convicting single sentence of verse 7. The timeless advice he gives can help any married follower of Christ in any culture. But the power behind that advice is revealed prior to chapter 3. It has to do with straightening out misguided expectations that we will be treated fairly in this world—a misguided expectation even in a marriage. Learning to respond well to earthly unfairness is part of living in “His marvelous light” (2:9). And it proclaims His “virtues” (ἀρετὰς) to the perpetrators of unfairness (2:9-12).

First, let’s look at chapter 3, then its context. As Peter addresses the women readers (3:1-6), he shares the secrets of influencing their men for Christ. In other words, he helps women learn how to be effective with men. As Peter elaborates on those secrets, he also reveals to every reader what he must have learned of God’s heart from Jesus himself. That is, that God places extraordinary value on the “meek/gentle and quiet spirit.” Why? It reflects a trust in God so profound as to stabilize the heart, to free it from insecurity and fear. We’ll come back to this point, but it reminds us of what Jesus said about His own infinitely stable heart: it is able to provide refuge for those who “labor and are heavy burdened” (Matthew 11:28-29).

As Peter addresses the men readers (3:7), he shares the secrets of how to be effective in partnership with women. He combats the chronic issue of male arrogance by urging men to understand the vulnerable situation of women, and respond to it with an ongoing affirmation of their equal value in the Kingdom of God. In so doing, men remind themselves, too. “Lest your prayers be hindered” says to men, don’t even think about ignoring this!

These are indeed rich, life-changing messages. But, as we saw in Paul's letters, marriage is being used by Peter to illustrate an even more foundational message. To embrace that message, we need to start at the beginning of the letter.

Peter begins his letter with a strong reminder to the reader of the unparalleled work of Christ in giving new life to the believer; life characterized by a hope so certain, that it can endure and enrich even in the midst of severe hardship. He puts life's hard journey in the perspective of a glorious destination—a salvation to be revealed (1:5, 9). Getting to see this work of Christ, was the elusive dream of the prophets and the longing even of the angels (1:10-12). Now that it has come, the mind of the believer can be lifted far beyond the meager promises of earthly rewards. It imparts a vision of a godly holiness, unimaginable without the purifying blood of Christ (1:13-20). Now it is fully attainable, by letting all faith and hope be only in the living God (1:13, 21).

This new vision of a new life that is not defined by the transient existence on this earth, enables the believer to move beyond the earthbound survival weapons of "malice, deception, hypocrisy, envy, and slander" (2:1); and instead, to pursue learning purity. After all, the believer is part of the privileged royal and priestly family. He is also a living building block of the royal palace itself, with Christ as the cornerstone (2:3-9). From this privileged position, the believer proclaims the virtues of Christ who calls humans beings, "out of darkness into His marvelous light" (2:9).

But, with all of this glorious preparation for eternity with Christ, Peter faces head-on the darkness of unfair hardship, suffering and rejection facing the believer—like Christ.

This brings Peter to practical examples of where this happens in the daily milieu of life. He acknowledges the believer must continually resist his own “desires that are waging war against the soul” (2:11); but, outside of him are often hostile unbelievers claiming the believer’s good is actually evil (2:12). And they need to see Christ’s light too.

In chapter 2, verse 13, Peter begins to identify the three most likely institutions where the believer is likely to face this adversity. The first is the government (2:13-17). The second is the workplace (2:18-20). And surprisingly, the third is marriage (3:1-7). This is clearly indicated by the phrase introducing the instructions to women, and repeated in the instructions to men. In the original text, it is ὁμοίως, “in the same way” or “likewise.”

What are we to make of this? Peter brilliantly places the answer right in the midst of these examples. It’s easy to see the likelihood of unfair government. It’s easy to see the likelihood of unfair masters or bosses. Peter uses those cases to show the refining purposes of God in each; teaching the believer to trust God in the midst, thus showing His work within the heart. Peter goes so far as to say about suffering unfairly, “For this you were called” (2:21). Then, as the reader is reeling from the audacity of that statement, Peter clinches the argument, “For Christ suffered on your behalf, leaving an example, so you might follow in His footsteps” (2:21). Clearly, Peter now understood what it meant to pick up his cross and follow Jesus (Matt. 16:24 et al).

But, Peter also shows us how Christ was able to bear what He bore, and how we can, too. Christ did not respond to His torture as hopeless humans would, instead, “He

entrusted Himself to the One who judges justly” (2:23). And as He did, God’s plan for redeeming all mankind was fulfilled—and His light overwhelmed the darkness.

This is the context of Peter’s message on marriage. It is “likewise,” his third example of likely places of unfair treatment. It is another of the sources of refiner’s fire Peter introduced his letter with. What does it refine? Faith. It weans me from demanding fairness for myself on earth. It teaches me “to trust the *only* One who judges justly” (2:23). In so doing, I can reveal His calming power to my spouse.

Marriage is one of the workshops that forces us to learn this kind of faith. When we feel the pain of false accusation by a spouse, we are to learn to entrust ourselves to the One who judges justly. We are to learn to fight the temptations to resort to the earthly weapons of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, slander and desire. We are to learn to take the false accusations and continue to love. Easy? No. But God wants to prepare our hearts for eternity. And that is one of the great purposes of marriage, anyway—a workshop for the healing of the human heart.

1 Corinthians – Healing my inability to love selflessly.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul covers a large range of practical issues. Often he is responding to prior questions from the people of Corinth, always going well beyond the questions to foundational principles. He discusses marriage in three sections, chapters 7, 11 and 14. Each discussion is difficult for the modern reader to understand and apply. I suspect that even the Corinthian reader was similarly challenged. That is, until the

underlying theme sinks into the reader's heart. That theme is selfless love. It underlies each discussion from chapter 7 through 14. When read with a desire to learn that selfless love, the underlying principles begin to unfold, and to proclaim truth worthy of having been inspired by God.

Prior to the famous chapter 13, Paul rarely uses the word love. Instead He uses many different words and situations to urge the believer to seek to edify each other, instead of themselves; to defer to one another, instead of having to have things their own way. This builds up the body of Christ.

When it comes to marriage, Paul speaks first of sexuality and issues of separation in chapter 7. In both cases, putting the needs of the other person first, is the core principle. Next, he speaks (in chapter 11) of marriage's symbolic power to communicate Christ.³ Edification and deference are the foundational principles. Finally, in chapter 14, he speaks directly of the need for deference in the church, and in marriage.

Every other topic is built on the foundation of edification and deference, as well. In chapter 8, the one who understands that idols are nothing, should be sensitive to the one not yet that free. In chapter 9, Paul gives his own example of putting their needs ahead of his individual rights. In chapter 10, he says it outright, "All things are lawful but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful but not all things edify. Let no one be

³ See Morse, D. Edward, *Biblical Marriage Communicates Christ in a Pagan Culture: Another Look at Head-covering in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16*, (Presented at ETS Far West Division, Escondido, April 2011) Available upon request: emorse@ghfc.org.

seeking that which is for himself, but that which is for the other” (10:23-24). After speaking on marriage and head-covering in the first half of chapter 11, Paul corrects their attitudes about the Lord’s supper, highlighting their need to seek to edify each other, instead of themselves. In chapter 12, he says their diverse spiritual gifts are for the edification of one another in the body of believers.

“Edification” reaches its most eloquent expression in chapter 13 where it is vibrantly and poetically described as love. Finally, in chapter 14, Paul applies it to their gatherings just before applying it to husbands and wives, once again. Deference and edification need to be the motivating attitudes for anyone speaking in a gathering of the body.

If we accept that selfless love is the core principle Paul is proclaiming, what does he do to help the believer develop it? As in his other letters, Paul delays telling what to do until he has reminded them of what Christ has done. Early on, he reminds the readers of the essentials of their common bond: “Jesus Christ and this One crucified” (2:2). He then reminds them of the work of the Holy Spirit within them (2:6-16). Paul wants them to be so personally stabilized by the love of Christ that, instead of seeking their own rights, they seek how to build up each other —how to edify each other.

I’m suggesting that all of the challenging situations Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians, naturally emerge from the God-ordained institutions and practices that persist to the present time: relationships in the local church body; separation from idolatrous and addictive practices; conducting worship services; observing communion; serving as a

single person; and serving Christ in marriage. In every situation, selfishness is inevitably exposed. In every place, the believer encounters his internal obstacles to loving well. As such, all of these become places where God is letting the believer see such obstacles within himself. Through the power of the gospel, the believer is free to confess them, forgive and accept forgiveness, and explore in intimacy with Christ, the broken places within that are in need of repair.

And that is one of the great purposes of marriage and these other institutions—workshops for the healing of the human heart.

Summary of Ed Morse's section

Biblical marriage is far more than roles and rights, it is a place where God can expose, and begin healing, the broken places of the human heart. Yes, it gives great insights into the unique ways men can inspire women, and women inspire men, but that is an outgrowth of a heart growing in selflessness. God wants to heal the obstacles to selflessness that handicap the heart. He wants to heal my tendency to trust my thoughts or the world's, instead of God's. He wants to heal my insecurities and fears. He wants to deliver me from my earthbound hopes. He wants to teach me a love without conditions. Marriage is one of His great workshops for all of that.

But, if marriage is an earthly workshop, what is the heavenly goal? Mark Saucy will address this.

Mark Saucy's Section

Biblical Theology of Marriage as a Workshop for Healing the Heart

The thesis of this paper finds support not only in the structure and content of the Scripture's NT epistolary literature as Ed has demonstrated – there are indeed canon-wide signs to its claim. In this part of the paper, I will offer a suggestive menu of these signs.

We begin at the end of Scripture's Story in Revelation's account of heaven, the *summum bonum* of the creation as intended by the Creator. Here the primary observation to be made concerns the *absence* of marriage in the sense we have been talking about to this point. Jesus himself leads the way with his comment to the Sadducees in Matthew 22:30, that those in the resurrection "are neither married nor given in marriage."⁴ Accordingly, we find Revelation 21-22 silent on the continuation of the husband-wife relationship of marriage known in the Epistles. Besides anxious questions about the nature of our heavenly relationships with those beloved to us here that this observation might elicit, the absence of marriage in heaven, it seems to me, has a couple of implications.

At the outset we should not miss the connection between the absence of marriage in heaven and what else is absent in that place, namely sin. In both explicit declaration

⁴ All Scripture citations are taken from NASB.

and implicit literary motifs (for example, no sea, *θάλασσα*, Rev 21:1⁵) heaven in every way represents the resolution of the sin problem. “It is done,” booms the one who calls himself “Alpha and Omega.” And gone are sin’s effects (Rev 21:4, sorrow, tears, death, etc.) and perpetrators (Rev 21:8, cowards, detestable, unbelievers, etc.). Gone also is marriage—part of the “first things that have passed away” (Rev 21:4). Or, better yet, gone is marriage as we know it now in the conflicted age we still inhabit--the age where the Adversary still tempts, deceives, and murders; where our flesh still craves its pleasures for itself; and where the world preaches its counterfeit, godless scenario of the human plight and solution. Does the absence of both marriage and sin *together* suggests a relationship between the two? Does it commend marriage to us as a divine means to confront sin’s corruption so that when sin is gone so also is the means of confronting it? The conclusion here can only be suggested from Scripture’s silence, but it seems to me that the absence of marriage in heaven moves us in this direction. Marriage now facilitates the repairing of our hearts from the ravages of sin and flesh that will be finished in the eternal state.⁶

Related to the absence of marriage in this sense also would be the absence of a temple in heaven as stated in Revelation 21:22.⁷ The temple motif of course is canon-

⁵ The sea in Revelation continues the motif of the “deeps” (Heb מַדְיָוִת, Gen 1:2) and the abyss (Gk ἄβυσσος) that has negative, anti-God characteristics from the nature of the sea monsters that inhabit it according to OT poetic and prophetic literature. Its absence in the final state confirms the resolution of the conflict with God’s adversary. F. F. Bruce, *New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes* (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1968), 41-42.

⁶ It is important at this point to stress that marriage is not the *sole* means God has to bring us to experiential sanctification. As we have seen in the epistles each of the primary relational spheres present in one’s life are venues for repairing the heart.

⁷ “And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”

long beginning with the Garden of Eden itself, as Greg Beale has convincingly demonstrated,⁸ but its significance for us lies with the way it parallels the institution of marriage in the Garden—namely, that both were present in their own way *before the fall into sin*.⁹ So, even though heaven does represent the resolution of the sin problem, and the temple in Israel had a function in that question, like marriage does (in this paper)—both marriage and temple *even before sin* appear as divinely instituted signs to the *telos* of heaven’s glory. They are not merely accommodations to the sin-plight of human beings.

In Heaven and Eden the temple is a *literary motif* pointing to other dimensions of the fellowship of the Creator and the creature. Both Eden and the New Jerusalem represent this fellowship because they are like temples—the locale of divine and human communion.¹⁰ Marriage on the other hand is more than a literary device in Eden. Adam and Eve were really married. Similarly, in the New Jerusalem marriage continues to exist, but with different participants. As we know from Revelation and other NT passages marriage in heaven no longer describes the relationship between an individual man and a woman. Rather, marriage describes the relationship between *God and his people* as a whole (Rev 19:11ff. Eph 5:27), similar to the way it described Yahweh’s relationship to the nation of Israel in the OT (Jer 3:20, 32; Ezek 16:32, 45; Hos 2). And as with Israel of old, marriage in heaven stands for the covenantal *telos* God has sought

⁸ Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple in the Church’s Mission: Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004).

⁹ The “one flesh” relationship of Adam and Eve, indicated in Gen 2:24 and cited elsewhere in Scripture in relation to marriage (Matt 19:5-6; Eph 5:31) attains prior to the fall. It was a married couple that received the human vocation from God in Genesis 1:28.

¹⁰ Again, as Beale has argued, the temple motif in Scripture entails the particulars of the divine-human relationship—questions related to *order*—the content and source of the physical life and the moral life of the cosmos (Beale, *Temple*, 29-93).

with his people from the beginning.¹¹ Thus, not only is heaven the *absence* of that which robs human life—namely sin, but it is also the *full presence* and enjoyment of what *is* life to us, namely, the knowledge of God and his Son (John 17:3). Marriage likewise should be seen as serving *both* ends now. On the one hand, it functions as a workshop venue for us to realize our sanctification from sin, and on the other it exists as a profound *means* to learn the final sanctified experience as a foretaste of the most ecstatic relationship possible to human life—the oneness we shall have with God himself in heaven.¹²

¹¹ The presence of God with his people is the content of the so-called “covenant formulary” found in every covenant agreement in Scripture. On this see Petrus J. Gräbe, *New Covenant New Community: The Significance of Biblical and Patristic Covenant Theology for Contemporary Understanding* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster/Authentic Media, 2006), 36-45.

¹² See the eloquent account of the way romantic love is the present haunting of heaven’s *ek-stasis* in the joy of communion with God in Peter Kreeft, *Heaven the Heart’s Deepest Longing* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1980), 143-160.

The communion that the married couple of Eden enjoyed with God before the fall into sin need not deflect marriage’s function into a mere means of procreation. Important here might be the observation in the Church’s earliest theologians who considered Adam and Eve indeed perfect, even “perfect” in their fellowship with God, but as having an *immature* perfection (for example, Irenaeus, *Haer*, 4.37.1; 4.38.3). They were without sin, indeed, but Adam and Eve still needed to grow and learn of obedience and of the ultimate human relationship, namely the one with the Creator. The institution of marriage in this condition seems to imply that they needed grow and learn through continually choosing to obey the Creator’s will *together in a marriage context*.