

*CSL's Good Teaching on Marriage:
A Biblical Foundation*

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My first downloadable pdf dealt with the proposition that the Church has made a total hash of trying to teach about marriage. I discussed several bad teachings and even heresies, but as the old saying goes, the best way to learn about something is to devote yourself to studying the right rather than the wrong. In this pdf, I want to try to present teachings about marriage and relationships that I believe are biblical, because..., well, 'cause it's what I do. If, perchance, a reader stumbles upon my page who isn't a Christian and has a quibble with that approach, too bad. My convictions and my faith inform my writing.

In the last Indiana Jones movie (I don't accept *Crystal Skull* as valid), the climactic scene was in a chamber filled with chalices, cups and goblets. Indy's task was to choose, from among all these cups, the Holy Grail, the cup that was used at the Last Supper. There were silver cups, gold goblets, and jewel-encrusted chalices. Among all these bejeweled chalices was a simple wooden cup, the Grail, the simple cup of a carpenter.

It's my belief that we Christians have done the same thing with marriage, encrusting it with pseudo-spiritual trappings. As an example, in my own lifetime I have seen something added to weddings that is considered almost *de rigueur* today. What am I talking about? The Unity Candle. Can you imagine a wedding today without a unity candle? Of course not; it is seen as a symbol of God's eternal love and the couple becoming "one flesh." However, back in the 60s and 70s when I first started attending weddings, there were no unity candles. Today, they are a must, they are a part of our traditions.

There seems to be an innate desire to spiritualize the events of our life and imbue the things around us with spiritual significance, even if there is nothing inherently spiritual about them. Marriage, of course, is one of these occasions.

"Nothing inherently spiritual? About marriage?" I can't really get away with saying something like that, can I? As good and earnest Christians, we KNOW that marriage something special, something holy. After all, it's a sacrament, right? (Yes, my Catholic background is showing.) And what better way to prove it than to have a communion service for the bride and groom during the wedding? This is another addition to wedding ceremonies that have become popular, and becoming more and more common today.

I'm not arguing against traditions. Traditions are great. In fact, I read an excellent statement that gives the proper place for traditions.

"Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."

By all means, let us have our traditions. However, do not raise them to the point of holiness, and imbue them with special spiritual significance. The things that God calls "Holy" are holy, and the things that we may add as we go along, while good, are not holy.

So let us have weddings, let us have traditions, but let's not present the ceremony and the accompanying trappings that we like as being particularly holy and sacred. Someone married in a hut in India is just as married as someone married in St. Patrick's Cathedral. It is marriage that God instituted, but we have to beware of our human tendency to sacralize our traditions and teachings.

So what is in this pdf? It is not intended as a compendium of all theological wisdom on marriage, but a collection of my blog posts in which I attempted to say what is right and true about marriage. The first chapter deals with the beginning of it all, the institution of marriage by God in Genesis. As the old saying goes, when all else fails, read the owner's manual, and Genesis is the starting point.

Then I deal with the Christian *shibboleth* that marriage is a covenant and not a contract, and discuss the vows that husbands and wives make to enter this God-ordained union. Then I deal with the mythology that the Church has created about marriage in an attempt to sanctify it, but with the unfortunate result of turning the institution marriage into a divine object. I understand that some will have a hard time with this, but please read the section of marital idolatry with an open mind.

Finally, I include a series that I did that has insight into marriage from a most surprising source: Mark Twain.

I can just hear eyebrows rocketing to the rafters as you read that last statement, but please bear with me. Yes, I can see that, on the surface, Twain would seem to be a most unlikely source for christian marriage advice. After all, he wasn't even a christian, and he his tongue was permanently imbedded in his cheek. But two things make him qualified, in my mind. First, Twain knew what love was; he adored his wife Livvy and was completely heart-broken when she died. And second, despite his wit, or maybe because of it, he was an insightful observer of our human condition, and so I cull marital truisms from his *Diaries of Adam and Eve*.

I hope this pdf will be helpful to you.

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As always, my disclaimer: I am not a counselor, doctor, or pastor. For that matter, Wife says I don't play well with others. My advice and comments come from my concern for hurting Christian husbands and wives. Someone once said to me, "Church shouldn't hurt", and I believe the same thing goes for marriage. I call 'em as I see 'em, but please, don't take my word as gospel. Yes, read what I say, pray about what I say, but be a Berean (Acts 17:11) and do your own "due diligence."

Chapter 1: Why Marriage?

Having looked at the concept that God created marriage to make people holy and having rejected it [*see the Bad Teachings downloadable pdf*], is there anyway to discover the purpose of marriage?

It seems to me that the best thing to do is to go to the source, to see what God said at the beginning, when He created marriage. The place to look, is of course, Genesis 2, where we read:

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (Gen. 2.18-25)

And there it is: ***it is not good that man should be alone***. God says that it is not good for man to live alone, that he needs a companion. The purpose of marriage is companionship and completeness.

Mind you, I am not talking about Jerry Maguire-type of completeness. None of this, "You complete me" garbage. While that may seem romantic, it's a crock, completely Hollywood; it is merely trite claptrap. (Do you get the idea that I really don't like this "soulmate" garbage?)

No. Marriage was created by God for companionship. With that said, I need to add that this companionship is not just friendship. Marriage is not merely about friendship, with Hubs and Wifey being best buddies and pals. Not at all!

Instead, in creating marriage, man and wife, God conceived of and created marriage as *One Flesh*. Through sexual union, man and woman become husband and wife, *One Flesh*. There is a sexual component of marriage, built into its very structure, that sets marriage apart from all other friendships and relationships. This is God's design from the beginning.

Want proof that this was God's intent? Well then, let's look at Malachi 2.15:

*Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? **Godly offspring.***

There it is. God says He made them *one*, and that He was seeking godly offspring. You don't get godly offspring from any other relationship. You don't go batiking with your friends, and beget children. You don't serve at Salvation Army soup kitchens with your Sunday School class and conceive children. These are things you can do with any or all of your friends. But children? Only with your spouse, only in marriage, do you enter God's full will for *One Flesh* and family.

So, when we go back to the beginning, we discover that God, in creating marriage, created it with a sexual component to create a *One Flesh* bond/relationship and a mechanism for continuance, for perpetuation, of a godly people.

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Chapter 2: Marriage: Covenant or Contract?, part 1

In the introduction, I wrote about the Church's tendency to try to imbue common objects and actions with spiritual overtones, and how this supports the encrustation of man-made tradition onto the teachings of the Bible. As Christians, we are so prone to the sacralization of those things that we hold dear that we end up creating our own sacred cows. As a card-carrying iconoclast in good standing with the union (our motto is "Sacred cows make good hamburger"), I am going to write about one of the most sacred of the church's sacred cows, the "Covenant" of marriage.

Marriage is a Covenant!

One of the greatest *shibboleths* in the Christian church is this statement: "We need to understand that marriage is a covenant, not a contract." I've heard this from pulpits, on Christian TV and radio, and read it countless times in Christian writing, whether it be books or the internet. It is a truism of Christian teaching that marriage is separate from all other kinds of agreements, because it is a *covenant instituted by God*.

I have an annoying habit; I ask questions. I can't help it, it's a gift. And one day, as I was reading (for the umpty-umph time) someone make this point yet again on an online marriage forum, the question popped into my head,

"Where does the Bible say that marriage is a covenant?"

I couldn't think of anywhere in the Bible that marriage is called a covenant. And so I had to do a search using my ESV Online account, and I found one verse, in the Old Testament, in which marriage is referred to as a covenant.

*But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife **by covenant**.* (Mal. 2:14)

There it is: "your wife by covenant." That should settle it, right? For a while, I chewed on that, wrestling with it, like so:

"Yes," I thought, "but it's only one verse."

"How many times does the Bible have to say something before you accept it as true?"

"Uh, do you 'baptize for the dead', then? That's mentioned only once."

You get my drift; I was struggling with this idea. After all, if you're going to create a doctrine, a teaching, shouldn't you have more than one verse that is explicit and direct, in your corner?

Erm, Marriage Is a Contract

And then, it happened again. Another question came to me, and so I'm going to ask you: how many times does the Bible refer to **contracts**? After all, if marriage is different from other contracts because it is a covenant, shouldn't there be something, somewhere, in the Old Testament, to distinguish covenant from contract? Go ahead, fire up your computer, go to your favorite Bible site and search for *contract*. I use the English Standard Bible, but on *Bible Hub* and *Bible Study Tools*, you can search in other translations: NABS, KJ, RSV, NIV.

It's not there, is it? Uh-uh. You know what that means? There are no "contracts" in the Bible. Or, maybe, just maybe, all contracts in the Old Testament were *covenants*.

"That can't be! We know that marriage is separate from contracts!"

Oh? How do we know that? Because it's been preached *ad infinitum*? Is "common knowledge" really all that authoritative? Contrary to all this popular belief, scholar David Instone-Brewer says

In contemporary English, the best translation for the ancient Near Eastern concept of "covenant" (Hebrew *berith*) is the term "contract." (*Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, p.15.)

What clinches all this together is the fact that the "marriage is not a contract, it's a covenant" idea is completely foreign to Jews, both modern and ancient. In fact, Jews still practice the ages-old custom of drawing up a marriage **contract**. Called a ketubah, this 'contract' detailing the obligations of the groom to his new bride, which dates back over 3000 years, is still practiced today.

It all comes down to this: during the Old Testament times, all contracts were covenants, and all covenants were contracts. Including marriage.

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Resources: *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, David Instone-Brewer

Links:

www.biblehub.com

www.biblestudytools.com

Chapter 3: Marriage: Contract or Covenant, part 2

In the previous chapter, I wrote about the idea that marriage is actually a contract. For so many years, I've heard "Marriage is a covenant, not a contract." But it appears that, in Bible times, marriage WAS a contract, and Jewish customs dictated a written contract, a *ketubah*.

Historic Background

In the ancient Near East, it was customary for young men to provide a "bride price" to the father of his intended. If he did not have the money, he would work for his future father-in-law (think Jacob and Laban). In return, the father-in-law would "endow" his daughter with a dowry on the occasion of her marriage. These were the terms of the covenant, the contract. There was a two-fold reason for this dowry, by the way.

First, it provided stability for the new home, the new marriage. It set the new couple up in good stead. Second, it was the daughter's share of her father's estate. Remember that only sons inherited from their fathers? The only exception was made by Moses if there were no male heirs to the father (Num. 27). So this was a way for a daughter to receive a share from her father's estate. One example of this is seen in the instance of Achsah approaching her father, Caleb. Caleb had said that the man who took Kiriath-Sepher would have his daughter as wife, and Othniel did so. Achsah came to her father and asked for "the upper and lower springs" in addition to the land that he had given as dowry. (Judg. 1:10-15)

The Ketubah

My podiatrist is Jewish, and when I told him, during one appointment, that I was reading about the *Ketubah*, he said, "Ah, yes, the Jewish Marriage License." Sources that I have read speak of the custom of the *Ketubah* as being "thousands of years" old. The *Ketubah* is a contract which spells out the obligations and duties of the husband to his bride, to support her. Apparently, pre-nup agreements aren't a new invention! According to the Wikipedia article on *Ketubah*,

The Jewish husband takes upon himself, in the ketubah, the obligation that he will provide to his wife three major things: clothing, food and conjugal relations,....

That is very interesting, as those are the three things that God required a husband to provide, or his wife could divorce him:

If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights. And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money. (Ex. 21:10-11)

“Why Are You Looking At Jewish Contracts?”

“After all, we’re Christians, and we follow a different teaching, right?”

Wrong. I’m looking at it because our “different teaching” has no basis in scripture, whereas the Jewish *ketubah* does. In yet another area, Christians have created a mythology that has no support from either the Old or New Testament. We say that our teaching that “marriage is a covenant, not a contract”, is based on the Bible’s teaching of *covenant*. But the concept of *Covenant* isn’t Christianity’s gift to the world of religion, it is Judaic. So if we want to learn about *covenant*, we have to look into the source of the idea, the Old Testament.

One of the best known biblical weddings comes about as the result of a contract negotiation. In Ruth 4, Boaz goes to the town center, gathers ten of the city elders [a *minyán* in Jewish parlance] in the city gates, and negotiates for the hand of Ruth. He uses the Levirate marriage law to prise Ruth from the man who was first in line to ‘inherit’ Ruth, and proclaims,

You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife,... (Ruth 4:9-10a)

Negotiation, witnesses, public oath and attestation. All part of contract and all part of covenant.

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Link: *Ketubahs*: Search www.bing.com for “Ketubah”, and then click the “Images” tab.

Chapter 4: Marriage: Contract or Covenant, part 3

So I've demonstrated how I believe that the Church has created a teaching by which it tries to differentiate between 'contract' and 'covenant', and attempts to elevate marriage to a higher, spiritual plane. I believe that I have shown that there is no biblical support for this teaching, that the Old Testament word for 'covenant' (*berith*) is the same word for 'contract', and that during OT times, Jews treated marriage as a contract.

In doing so, while we create a comforting mythos, we actually damage God's Word and God's people in the process. One of the best marriage bloggers/writers today is Paul Byerly, who authors both *The Generous Husband* and *The XY Code* blogs. I consider him to be the Mac Daddy of Christian marriage and sexuality bloggers. In his GH blog of 1/4/2015, he addressed the problem of melding our tradition and teaching to the Word of God.

Adding to the word of God, even to clarify, always risks doing harm to the integrity of the word. We run the risk of turning traditions into the word of God, which they are not. We risk violating God's word for the sake of our traditions, and we risk making the word of God void by our traditions. Good intentions are not enough to protect us.

Modern Examples

Recently, I've seen some interesting "traditions of men" passed on as explication of the Word of God. I've read where one teacher, in order to differentiate covenant from contract, tries to say that "covenants are vertical, while contracts are horizontal." In other words, covenants are between man and God, while contracts are between men. I give that teacher style points for his delicate delineation, but I've got to say that it doesn't deal with the fact that *berith* means 'contract'.

Another attempt at trying to create a covenant/contract distinction is to say that there is a difference between "two-party agreements" (contracts) and "three-party agreements" (covenants). It is purported that the presence of an extra party, God, elevates the contract into a covenant. This seems to be a variation of the first teaching (horizontal vs. vertical), and suffers from the same affliction: lack of explicit biblical support for the teaching.

A third, more common concept deals with the mechanism of the marriage, the "I do's." The bride and groom exchange 'vows', and many times are said to have made 'vows to God.' The concept behind this is that making vows elevates the marriage into the realm of spiritual covenant, in collaboration with God.

My question is this: why is the promise/vow that I make to my spouse more spiritual or special than the promise I might make to my parents or my children, to my church or my God? Yes, the entering into marriage is momentous. So is entering the service on your country, or assuming a constitutional office. We give vows and make pledges for these and many other events, but are we saying that our word and oath is not as honor-bound as our marriage oath? Is our integrity based on a sliding scale of spiritual import? (After all, wasn't it Jesus who said, in the Sermon on the Mount, *All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one?*)

Basically, what it all comes down to is this: it doesn't really matter if an agreement is a contract, a covenant, or a vow. Whether it be two or three parties, agreements and promises are made. But here's the kicker: all can be broken.

A covenant with God can be broken; a contract with a partner can be abrogated; a vow to a spouse can be violated. In each and every situation, whether you call it a covenant or contract, a failure to live up to the promises made means that the covenant or contract is violated. If the covenant or contract is of any import, then said violation is serious and there are consequences. What matters is that our teachings about these consequences line up with the Word of God, and not our tradition.

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Link: Generous Husband, "Adding to the Word of God", 1/4/15. <https://www.the-generous-husband.com/2015/01/04/adding-to-the-word-of-god/#sthash.tdgM2Gt9.dpuf>

Chapter 5: Marital Idolatry, part 1

Some time ago, I was involved in a discussion of Mark 2:27, in which Jesus said, *The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath*. The Jewish religious leaders, the Pharisees, had asked Jesus why His disciples didn't follow the Sabbath regulations, and Jesus told them that the Sabbath regs that they had instituted were not the Law of God, and that God's command of the Sabbath was for man, not the other way around.

One person in the discussion tried to object, saying that the laws of God were God's revelation of His character, and that in giving the Sabbath law, He was making requirements for man to follow in order to be in line with God's righteous character, not doing something for man's benefit. And, yes, I agree; God's laws ARE a revelation of His character, and I have no qualms in agreeing with that part of his statement.

It seems to me, however, that this man was rather limited in his thinking: why can't it be both? Yes, it is true that God's commandments are a revelation of his character. However, God's laws are also the gift of guidelines for us, telling us the best way we can live our lives. In fact, the meaning of the word Torah, which we translate as *Law*, actually means *teaching*. To the Jews, God's Law/*Torah*, is God's teaching. And so, the Law of the Sabbath IS for man, just as Jesus said.

Man-Made Laws

During the time of Jesus, the religious leaders taught so many man-made regulations as God's Law. In Matt. 23:4, Jesus said that the Pharisees *tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger*. The Sabbath "laws" were a good example of Jesus' statement, as they introduced many restrictions on what people could and couldn't do on the Sabbath. There were Pharisaical laws even down to dictating how far someone could walk on the Sabbath. After all, that's the reason Jesus said, in the next chapter, *Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath*. If you, as a Jew, had to do any fleeing on the Sabbath, you could only flee so far, according to the Pharisees.

With their bad teaching and over-burdensome regulations, the Pharisees distorted the Sabbath to the point that it neither was a revelation of God nor a guideline for the benefit of man. Instead, it was just another cross on which to nail men with bad teaching.

The same thing is going on today, in the area of marriage. The church has made the institution of marriage into an idol, and a cross on which to crucify suffering brothers and sisters. Not only has the church made marriage an idol, but with bad teaching, misinterpretation of scriptures, and even failure to instruct, it has failed to give

christians proper preparation for marriage, and given false counsel once brothers and sisters have entered into marriage.

“God Hates Divorce!” Erm...

We all know that “God hates divorce”, right? It’s right there in Mal. 2:16:

“For I hate divorce,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, (NASB)

For most of my Christian life, I was adamant about this point: God hates divorce!!! I knew that for a fact! But then, I started reading articles, and blog posts, and first-hand accounts of brothers and sisters who were in misery in their marriages. And I began to read, study and think about marriage as an institution. I read posts of other people who had other ideas. And to my surprise, I found out that maybe the “accepted” translation of Mal. 2:16 was wrong. I found that other translations have a different wording (these are taken from the *Bible Hub* website):

- *“For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD...: (ESV)*
- *“If he hates and divorces his wife,” says the LORD God... (Holman)*
- *He that rejects her, sending her away, said the LORD (Jubilee)*
- *When thou shalt hate her put her away, saith the Lord (Douay)*
- *“The man who hates and divorces his wife,” says the LORD (NIV)*

What? The NIV said that? That last one threw me; for I had been using the NIV for years, and I didn’t remember that wording. But there it was on the *Bible Hub* website: *“The man who hates and divorces his wife”*. So I looked up Mal. 2:16 on the *Bible Study Tools* website, and found the reading I remembered:

“I hate divorce,” says the LORD God (NIV)

Wait a minute!!! Two websites have two different readings? For the same translation of the Bible? What gives? I did some checking, and I found that *Bible Study Tools* uses the ’84 NIV and *Bible Hub* uses the 2011 version. In fact, at the bottom of the Bible Hub page, this alternative reading is given in a footnote to v. 16:

Or “I hate divorce,” says the Lord

So modern scholarship demonstrates that an adamant declaration, “God hates divorce”, is not a viable position.

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Resource: Bible Hub: www.biblehub.com - an excellent online study tool.

Chapter 6: Marital Idolatry, part 2

“Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this Man and this Woman in **holy Matrimony**; which is an **honourable estate**, instituted of God in the time of man’s innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church.”

We’ve heard these words in every church wedding we’ve ever attended, right? But have you ever thought about what they are saying, and whether there might be more to it than just what is on the surface?

To begin with, we don’t really talk much about marriage as an “estate,” do we? Instead, we zero in on the words used in the wedding formula for the creation of marriage, “instituted by God.” Commonly, we say that marriage is an institution. And it is this idea that we worship, that Matrimony is a holy condition. That somehow saying the words “I do” confers upon a man and woman a state of grace that isn’t available to the unmarried.

“Holy Institution”?

Okay, so we talk of marriage as an institution, but shouldn’t we still consider it as holy? After all, didn’t God “institute” marriage? And didn’t Paul say,

Marriage should be honored by all... (Heb 13:4)

Why, yes. Yes he did. God DID institute marriage.

But He Who instituted Marriage instituted Government, as well. Tell the truth: how highly do you “honor and esteem” the institution of Government? After all the same Bible that has Heb. 13:4 tells us:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. (Rom. 13:1)

and

Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. (Rom. 13:7)

How highly do we speak of Government, and how highly do we esteem those who make our laws? Try as you might, I’m guessing that you can’t make a statement about

marriage that can't be applied to government. After all, when all histrionics are over, we're still left with the fact that God instituted both marriage and government.

A Simple Truth

A couple of years ago, my wife and I were talking about this, about the increase of bad marriages and yet trying to hold on to the idea that "Marriage is a Holy Institution," when she said something that seemed to lift the fog. She said of the people who enter into this institution, "The institution is worthless if you don't honor it."

The institution is worthless if you don't honor it.

In essence, any institution is only as good as the people who are in it. Government is only as good as the people in it, and a marriage is only as good as the people who are married.

So, how should we think of marriage, then, if it isn't some hallowed state of grace that God has set apart? Is marriage merely a piece of paper or a relic of a previous era? No, of course not. It is true that marriage was created by God, and we know that God said "It is good," that it has God's blessing on it.

I think that the problem is that we don't esteem marriage high enough. In our society, any two people can get a license and get married, no matter their state of maturity or preparation. And no matter how ill-matched, how ill-mated or ill-prepared, we are willing to pronounce their union "good," to accept that the naifs are part of the Institution of Marriage.

And then we nail them to the cross!

... to be continued.

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Chapter 7: Marital Idolatry, part 3

Just as the Jews of Jesus' day created laws and regulations binding men to the Sabbath in order to keep it holy, so Christians have created myths and teachings about marriage in order to keep it as a revered icon for the faith.

To how many Christian events, occurrences or institutions do we attach the descriptor, 'Holy'? We don't refer to "Holy Baptism," do we? Yes, we may sometimes speak of "Holy Communion," but for most of us, plain old 'communion' will do. And for those who do refer to "Holy Communion," do you create regulations and myths to protect communion and keep it holy? (Of course, if you believe in transubstantiation, you are excused from this exercise.)

But we do speak of 'Holy Matrimony', don't we?

By doing this we try to attach a spiritual essence to marriage, a *je ne sais quoi*, a certain ineffable state, that makes it other-worldly, heavenly by nature, and not part of the normal, natural life that God created.

This isn't a sin of the modern church. Bad teaching about marriage is one of the cardinal truths of Christian life, apparently. For example, one of the most common *shibboleths* about marriage, handed down from the Church Fathers, down through the likes of Matthew Henry into modern-day faith, is the idea that marriage is a picture of the relationship between God and His Church, between Jesus and the Christian.

Of course, things can get really uncomfortable when this teaching meets the *Song of Solomon*, in the Old Testament. In the fourth chapter of *SoS*, the Lover describes the body of his Beloved, and this is part of his inventory:

*Your two breasts are like two fawns,
twins of a gazelle,
that graze among the lilies. (4:5)*

Er, uh, okay then.

Pretty personal talk between a couple that aren't married yet, right? Now observe how Matthew Henry turned this bit of earthy badinage into a 'heavenly allegory':

The church's breasts are both for ornament (Ezek. 17:7) and for use; they are the breasts of her consolation (Isa. 66:11), as she is said to suck the breasts of kings, (Ia. 60:16) . Some apply these to the two Testaments; others to the two sacraments, the seals of the covenant of grace; others to ministers, who are to be spiritual nurses to the children of God and to give out to them the sincere milk of

the word, that they may grow thereby, and, in order to that, are themselves to feed among the lilies where Christ feeds (ch. 2:16), that they may be to the babes of the church as full breasts. Or the breasts of a believer are his love to Christ, which he is pleased with, as a tender husband is with the affections of his wife, who is therefore said to be to him as the loving hind and the pleasant roe, because her breasts satisfy him at all times, (Prov. 5:19) .

..... um, yeah.

I'm sorry, but with this kind of mindset, this skewed reality, it's no wonder that the church messes up the reality of marriage, Christian or otherwise.

In our eagerness to elevate marriage and imbue it with a sanctity that isn't necessarily inherent, we have constructed a prison with our rules and regulations, and like the Pharisees of old, refused to help those struggling under the burden we have placed upon the backs of those who need our help.

At the 1896 Democratic nominating convention, William Jennings Bryan, a rafters-rattling orator, delivered his most famous speech, which ended with the line "You shall not crucify mankind on a cross of gold!" Unfortunately, today, the Church crucifies mankind on the cross of "Holy Matrimony."

Jim Croce answered it best with "I can't hang upon no lover's cross for you." And God doesn't expect you to have to do so. When the Creator was finished with His creation, including marriage, He said, "It is good."

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Chapter 8: Traditional Vows, part 1

When I was a younger Christian, I enjoyed modern worship, as it was very emotive. However, in the past 15-20 years, as I've gotten older, I find that I have come to appreciate more and more the stability and meaning of older forms of worship and prayer. For me, there is a connectedness in the creeds that we say; after all, I am making the same confessions of faith as Luther, Wesley, Zinzendorf, Spener, Wycliffe and Hus. I sing the same faith that Watts, Newton, and Charles Wesley sang in their hymns. I find that standing in tradition helps to keep me grounded in my faith.

Which brings me to another tradition, the wedding vow. I know that it is all the rage to have couples write their own vows, but the more I think about it, the more I wonder if this isn't somehow connected with the degradation of marriage as a whole in today's society. Think about it; marriage has lost its place as an institution, and even lost its definition. After all, the world tells us that all of the following are just modern permutations of marriage:

- Serial marriage
- Open marriage
- Polygamous marriage
- Same-sex marriage

I think we can agree that all these, and more, aren't 'redefining marriage' so much as reshaping marriage into an unrecognizable mass of mess on the anvil of today's perverted values. And I am also wondering if Christians aren't somehow complicit in the degrading of marriage. Doesn't our redefining the promises of marriage represent our rewriting the contract/covenant and indicate a desire to create marriage in our own image, rather than God's?

“With My Body, I Thee Worship”

This is a line from the *Book of Common Prayer* and for centuries was part of English wedding ceremonies. According to my reading, this line was spoken by the groom during the wedding, and he pledged to worship his wife with his body. I also discovered that the wife, in the *BoCP*, did not make the same vow. While not a reciprocal promise, I thought the statement to be intriguing, because of the promise to worship. When I read that the husband promises to worship his wife with his body, the question that immediately sprang to my mind was “How?” I know to worship God, with prayer, praise, singing, etc., but how do I worship my wife “with my body”?

It seems to me that one important clue can be found in the meaning of the word “worship”, specifically, its derivation: *worthscipe*. In Old English *worthscipe* meant to see the worth of something or someone. When we worship God, we are saying that He is

worthy of our devotion. After all, Jesus did tell us that the greatest commandment is to “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*” Sure sounds like living in worship to me.

Guess what? We get to do the same thing for our wives. We are to see the worthiness of our wives, to love with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength as well. And no, she doesn’t replace God, nor become His equal. But she certainly rates above my buddies and my hobbies. Oh, and for all you Good Christian Husbands™ who actually take the Bible seriously? Guess what? In your estimation and service, you are to show her as much care as you show yourself (Eph. 5:23). After all, despite the fact that the Church has distorted the teaching about LYWACLTC™ [see Bad Teaching pdf], there is a core teaching of the Bible on loving your wife as Christ loved the Church.

“How Do I Worship Thee...

Let me count the ways” (apologies to Elizabeth Barrett Browning.) Guys, guess what? The Bible does encourage you to *worthscipe* your wife. That old saw about JOY being comprised of “Jesus, Others and You” isn’t half bad, and (just stating the obvious here) the wife comes at the head of the line of the ‘Others’ category.

“Worship her? Really?” If we go to the meaning of worship, ‘to ascribe worth, esteem, and value,’ then, yeah, worship. I wrote a post on my blog about love and respect being a two-way street [link below]. To me, the biggie verse is 1 Peter 3:7, where Peter tells husbands to

“... live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”

In my *Two-Way Street* post, I demonstrate that Peter isn’t just talking about being a physical protector, but being a loving, godly husband.

So, how do we worship “with my body?”

Service

To my mind, one word pops up: Service. We talk of serving the God we worship, so why should showing our wives our feelings and beliefs of her Worth-ship to us be any different? After all, if a man claimed that he loved God but ignored His Word, His Church, His commands, etc., why would we believe him? The same thing applies to husbands. You can say that you love your wife, but if you ignore her needs and push her to the back of the line in you attentions and affections, then you’re just lying.

Now, I could attempt to provide a checklist of services that husbands can and should provide, but I’m not going to go there. (Right about now, I’m remembering the preacher who told his congregation that he wasn’t going to give a catalog of sins on the off-chance

he might accidentally leave off one that was somebody's favorite.) So many writers have created their lists of "Five Ways to Serve Your Wife Today," or "20 Easy Steps To Making Her Happy." They're all good and they're all over the internet, so they are easy to find.

No, I want to go to the heart of the matter, the biblical obligation to *try*. I'm writing to Christian husbands, so if that's you, then I know that you supposedly take your relationship to God and His Word seriously. I know that it's popular to say that husbands are not responsible for their wives happiness and vice versa. And that's true. (And for the record, I do think that Roger Miller said it best when he sang, "You can be happy, if you've a mind to.")

So, yes, you aren't responsible for your spouse's happiness. But that doesn't mean that you can't do your best to help, to accept the responsibility to try. Rom. 12:18 says, "*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*" No, you can't make someone happy, but as much as depends on you and your Christian service, THAT is what you are called to do. And do I need to say that your wife comes at the head of the line of those you are called to live peaceably with? I didn't think so.

That old vow from the *Book of Common Prayer*, "With my body, I thee worship," wasn't just pulled out of thin air because it sounded good. No, it was based on the Bible and its views of the obligation of husbands to serve. People may write their own vows, but if they are Christians, they should understand that they are promising that they will be assuming their biblical obligations. For husbands, that means that we are called to love our wives at least as much as we love ourselves, and that will mean preferring them over ourselves. Not to the point of being subsumed (I've addressed that before), but as a life of love and service.

Wifely vows, next chapter...

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Link: Love & Respect: a Two-Way Street: <https://curmudgeonlylibrarian.wordpress.com/2015/09/23/love-and-respect-a-two-way-street/>

Chapter 9: Traditional Vows, part 2

In the last chapter, I addressed myself to husbands on the promise made in the traditional wedding vow, “With my body, I thee worship.” In this chapter, I am going to examine the traditional vow that brides made to their husbands.

But before I do, I’d like to expand on why I think this topic and these ideas matter. In the first year of operating my blog, I wrote a series of posts on the Apostles’ Creed, explaining that the Creed is more than just something to recite, but is the basic confession of belief of Christians in all times and places, and that it is important for Christians to know what they believe.

A couple of months after I completed the series, I came across a book by the late Charles Colson entitled *The Faith*, and I found that this book is a warning about the same problem, an ignorant Church not knowing what it believes or why. This sentence, from the first chapter, sums up the dilemma of trying to live as a Christian today:

How can a Christianity that is not understood be practiced?

And, I believe, the same goes for marriage...

Historical Background: *The Sarum Use*

In my last chapter, I wrote of our culture re-creating marriage in its own image, and I stated that I am concerned that Christians are helping in the debasing of marriage through their own ignorance of what marriage is. I posited that the desire to rewrite vows to suit our tastes is symptomatic of our ignorance, and started looking at traditional vows, and the why behind them.

The source for the vow “With my body, I thee worship” is the *Book of Common Prayer*, which was compiled and published in 1549 under the auspices of the Church of England during the English Revolution. Tended by Thomas Cranmer, it became the source of liturgy for the English church for 450 years. I discovered, however, that there was a widely used source for liturgy in England that predated Cranmer by over 300 years.

The *Sarum Use* was created under St. Osmund, bishop of Sarum (Salisbury), in the 11th century, and set in order Christian worship in England after the Norman conquest. There were other *Uses*, but the *Sarum Use* quickly became the accepted source for church liturgy in England, until the English Reformation and the *Book of Common Prayer*. (I know that all this is just dry history, but I do love this kind of stuff. As my mom was wont to say, “My trivia is important to me.”)

“Bonowre And Buhsum In Bedde And At Borde”

Having waded through that background, let’s bring it back to the subject at hand, wedding vows. As I said in my last post, there was a vow by the husband (“With my body, I thee worship”) that the bride did not make. But was there a reciprocal promise, a vow, that the bride made to her husband? Why, yes. Yes, there was.

In looking for information about the history of wedding vows, I was surprised to find that there was a vow that predated the “I thee worship” statement by the groom; this was contained in Medieval English and Celtic wedding ceremonies and originated in the above mentioned *Sarum Use*.

So, what was this bridal vow? In Chaucerian language, the bride vowed to be “bonowre and buhsum in bedde and at borde.” “Bonowre?” “Buhsum?” Here is the bride’s vow translated from Chaucerian English into modern English:

*I take thee to my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward,
for better for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to be bonny
and buxom at bed and at board, to love and to cherish, till death us depart,
according to God’s holy ordinance.*

Buxom???

Settle down, husbands, don’t get too excited (well, just a little, but more on that later.) Yes, in the marriage ceremony, the bride promises to be “bonoure and buxum [agreeable and compliant], in bed and at borde”.

And, yes, my sesquipedalian heart did beat a little faster in learning the etymology of “bonny” and “buxom,” which is actually relevant to understanding the vow. Today, we think of “bonny” as a quaint Scottish compliment made of a pretty girl, as in “Ach, she’s a bonny lass.” But it is believed that bonoure/bonny is derived from the French *bon*, or “good.” After all, I don’t think folks who spoke of “bonny Prince Charlie” were talking about “pretty Prince Charlie,” unless I missed something in my history books.

And buhsum/buxom? Buhsum is from the Old English *bugen*, “to bow”, and has cognates in Dutch (*buigzaam*) and German (*biegsam*), both of which meant “flexible,” “pliable.”

So, in the vow from the *Sarum Use*, the bride, in pledging to be “bonny and buxom,” was saying that she would be both good and pliant to her husband. And wouldn’t you know it! Looking at the traditional vows of marriage has landed us in the whole submission debate, which sparks such a violent reaction to traditional vows in the first place.

A Detour Into Third-rail Theology

Followers of my CSL Twitter feed know that I follow politics, and that I am not above using my Twitter account to make political comments. In my political readings, I am frequently coming across the term ‘third-rail issue’, which is used to describe topics that are so sensitive that even broaching the issue is instant death. (The term comes from the third rail of subway trains, which provide continuous electricity to moving trains.)

In conservative Christian circles (meaning people who actually believe what they say they believe), the topic of submission has been, for years, the third-rail of theology. (As in, “oh, no he DI-N’T!”)

This is something I’ve touched on, in previous posts on my blog, and haven’t really addressed, as I have no wish to frolic in that particular briar patch. But I have noted that many teachers twist themselves into theological pretzels in an unctuous desire not to offend. Permit me to quote myself:

I realized that every time I have come across someone who feels that they need to address “Submission” in the Bible, they begin with an apology to women and wives that they have to even mention the topic. After beginning with caveats as to what “submission” doesn’t mean, they proceed to hem and haw their way through their presentation (with continual apologies for bruising wifely sensibilities), and finally end with a “See? That wasn’t so bad, was it?” conclusion that conveys the idea that the Bible doesn’t take the subject of “Submission” so seriously. More often than not, what the speaker or writer is trying to communicate is, “You can trust me, I’m not one of those knuckle-dragging troglodytes that actually believes in ‘Submission’.” [This can be found in chapter 6 of the Bad Teachings pdf.]

I get their dilemma; as Christians (still operating on the premise of believing what we say we believe), we want to maintain the evangelical *shibboleth* that the Bible is our sole guide for doctrine and practice. But we want to be as inoffensive as possible, so as not to raise the hackles of half the congregation. So although *submit* is a biblical word, we also realize that it is an affront to modern sensibilities of today’s pew-dwellers, and so are left with trying to explain why “submit doesn’t mean submit” or trying to find ways of invalidating its relevance to today’s Christians.

I get this; hey, I’m a Methodist. For the past four decades, half of the UMC has been trying to explain to the other half why the Bible doesn’t mean it when it says that homosexuals can’t inherit the kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:9). It is quite possible that at the 2020 General Conference, the UMC will finally splinter beyond recognition over the issue.

No Conclusions, Just Questions

As I said, I don't want to romp about in the "Submission" briar patch, but sometimes I do wonder at the motivations of some people. And questions naturally come to me. Such as...

Why do we think it is alright to demand that husbands love their wives like Christ loved the Church, but wives don't have to respect their husbands until they measure up to some undefined standard?

Why do we think husbands still should vow to "with my body I thee worship" but wives no longer need to vow to be pliant and agreeable?

Why do we think that we can change the Bible to suit our personal preferences and tastes and still think that we are disciples of Jesus?

Iconoclast or Apostate?

Iconoclasm has a good Biblical foundation. An iconoclast is someone who destroys false idols, and there are many examples of iconoclasts in the scriptures: Moses and the Golden Calf, Hezekiah and Nehushtan, Josiah cleansing the Temple. I like to think that I am a bit of an iconoclast in my own small way. But I worry that our fervor to rewrite traditional wedding vows in order to reshape marriage in our image isn't iconoclasm, but merely denying marriage as God created it.

Don't get me wrong, I think that iconoclasm is healthy. But isn't it incumbent upon iconoclasts to make a good case why something that has been around for centuries is detrimental and needs to be destroyed, before destroying it? Are our institutions and practices to be as malleable as our creeds?

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Resources:

The Faith, Charles W. Colson

Chapter 10: Mark Twain on Relationships, pt. 1

And now for something completely different. Extremely different.

To my mind, one of the greatest commentators on the human condition (and all-around great curmudgeons who ever lived) was Mark Twain. A veritable quote machine, it is quite possible that he was America's first superstar. Yes, his books are classic literature (Twain defined classic literature as books "which people praise and nobody reads.") For me, one of the pluses about Twain is that he truly pissed off the Moral Majority of his day with the book *Huck Finn* (come to think of it, he still does.) For example, another popular writer of the time, Louisa May Alcott, was on the committee that banned it from the Concord, MA, library.

But lost in all the humor and quotes is the fact that Twain was a keen observer of humanity. Oh, he could engage in wondrous verbal slice-and-dice in his writing and public speaking, and could make jokes at the drop of a hat, but behind the humorist's mask was a deep understanding of people: their foibles, their pomposities, and their cussed humanity.

Recently, I went back and re-visited an old favorite of mine, *Eve's Diary*. The link at the end of this chapter will take you to the downloadable 1906 edition of the book, on Project Gutenberg. (Be forewarned about the Project Gutenberg link—that was an illustrated edition and caused a scandal in libraries. 😊)

As I went back over Twain's humorous version of the Adam and Eve story, I was struck by just how insightful he was into the relationship between men and women. Admittedly, he could play off of a stereotype with the best of writers, but given his material, I like to think of it as archetype, not stereotype. And as I re-read this old favorite for the first time since I started blogging about marriage and relationships, I was surprised to find that his insights from 100 years ago are not only applicable today, but truly universal.

Why Are We Here?

On the first day of creation, Twain has Eve writing in her diary pondering that very question. She knows that she is created by God, and that the world has been created for her, but why? And she comes to an interesting, albeit tentative, conclusion:

So I am coming to feel convinced that that is what I AM—an experiment; just an experiment, and nothing more. Then if I am an experiment, am I the whole of it? No, I think not; I think the rest of it is part of it. I am the main part of it, but I think the rest of it has its share in the matter.

The diary continues and she writes for several days, maybe even weeks, but she doesn't give up wondering about her "Why." On another day, Eve writes in her diary,

At first I couldn't make out what I was made for, but now I think it was to search out the secrets of this wonderful world and be happy and thank the Giver of it all for devising it. I think there are many things to learn yet—I hope so; and by economizing and not hurrying too fast I think they will last weeks and weeks.

How remarkably Christian of the Deist writer Twain, don't you think? This brought to my mind the Q&A from The Westminster Catechism:

Question. 1. What is the chief end of man?

Answer. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.

And as Eve said, there are so many things to learn yet, even for us. And we don't have to economize. Of course, one of those wonders for Eve to learn about was...

The Other

A few days after Creation, Eve discovers that she is not alone, that there is another Experiment in the Garden. At first, she is kind of non-committal about this new experiment, but does begin to notice its comings and goings, as she observes the rest of the animals. And then one day, she is surprised to learn something: it talks! We are treated to this observation in Eve's diary:

When I found it could talk I felt a new interest in it, for I love to talk; I talk, all day, and in my sleep, too, and I am very interesting, but if I had another to talk to I could be twice as interesting, and would never stop, if desired.

And, yes, Twain plays off of a well-known stereotype, but who among us doesn't think that we are not only interesting, but interesting to others when we speak. I know I do.



Since Eve's diary was translated from the original, there are a few surprising revelations that might offend the truly orthodox among us; for example, it was Eve who named the animals, and not Adam, as we are told by Moses:

During the last day or two I have taken all the work of naming things off his hands, and this has been a great relief to him, for he has no gift in that line, and is evidently very grateful. He can't think of a rational name to save him, but I do not let him see that I am aware of his defect. Whenever a new creature comes along I name it before he has time to expose himself by an awkward silence. In this way I have saved him many embarrassments. I have no defect like this. The minute I set eyes on an animal I know what it is. I don't have to

reflect a moment; the right name comes out instantly, just as if it were an inspiration, as no doubt it is, for I am sure it wasn't in me half a minute before. I seem to know just by the shape of the creature and the way it acts what animal it is.

When the dodo came along he thought it was a wildcat—I saw it in his eye. But I saved him. And I was careful not to do it in a way that could hurt his pride. I just spoke up in a quite natural way of pleasing surprise, and not as if I was dreaming of conveying information, and said, “Well, I do declare, if there isn't the dodo!” I explained—without seeming to be explaining—how I know it for a dodo, and although I thought maybe he was a little piqued that I knew the creature when he didn't, it was quite evident that he admired me. That was very agreeable, and I thought of it more than once with gratification before I slept. How little a thing can make us happy when we feel that we have earned it!

So eager to be of use, so desirous to help.

Trouble In Paradise

But it is right here that a problem first appears that has plagued men and women since, well, the Creation; miscommunication and misunderstanding. For you see, Adam also kept a diary, and of this proclivity towards helping him out, he writes:

*The naming goes recklessly on, in spite of anything I can do. I had a very good name for the estate, and it was musical and pretty — Garden Of Eden. Privately, I continue to call it that, but not any longer publicly. The new creature says it is all woods and rocks and scenery, and therefore has no resemblance to a garden. Says it looks like a park, and does not look like anything but a park. Consequently, without consulting me, it has been new-named — Niagara Falls Park. This is sufficiently high-handed, it seems to me. And already there is a sign up:
KEEP OFF THE GRASS
My life is not as happy as it was.*

But, like the stereotypical male, Adam keeps it inside, which is a complaint of Eve's, and leads her to an interesting conclusion:

He talks very little. Perhaps it is because he is not bright, and is sensitive about it and wishes to conceal it. It is such a pity that he should feel so, for brightness is nothing; it is in the heart that the values lie. I wish I could make him understand that a loving good heart is riches, and riches enough, and that without it intellect is poverty.

Eve intuits a universal truth about where value lies, but, unfortunately exhibits a trait that is all too human: the ability to reason logically to the wrong conclusion. In this case, that a difference between the two sexes indicates an inferiority.

sigh—Twas ever thus.

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Resources: *Eve's Diary* is a free download at the Gutenberg Project: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/8525/8525-h/8525-h.htm>
Adam's Diary is also available at the Gutenbert Project:
<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1892/pg1892-images.html>

Chapter 11: Mark Twain On Relationships, part 2

I'm writing about some of insights I observed as I re-read an old favorite of mine, Mark Twain's *Diaries of Adam and Eve*. This is a short chapter, with seeds of a rant that I will hint at, but probably not go into.

In the previous chapter, a problem began to raise its head in Paradise. After Eve started naming and labelling everything around them, Adam says, "My life is not as happy as it was."

But is there something that is motivating Eve, other than the desire to be the perfect Helpmate? Yes, there is, according to the diaries. In the interim, Eve has learned what fear is, and now is starting to get after Adam about his dangerous proclivities.

... fire [has] revealed to me a new passion—quite new, and distinctly different from love, grief, and those others which I had already discovered—FEAR. And it is horrible!—I wish I had never discovered it; it gives me dark moments, it spoils my happiness, it makes me shiver and tremble and shudder. But I could not persuade him, for he has not discovered fear yet, and so he could not understand me.

What does he do that scares her, makes her shiver? Well, Adam is a guy and he does guy things that are exciting and dangerous. Here is Adam in his own words:

She has taken to beseeching me to stop going over the Falls. What harm does it do? Says it makes her shudder. I wonder why. I have always done it—always liked the plunge, and the excitement, and the coolness. I supposed it was what the Falls were for. They have no other use that I can see, and they must have been made for something. She says they were only made for scenery—like the rhinoceros and the mastodon.

I went over the Falls in a barrel—not satisfactory to her. Went over in a tub—still not satisfactory. Swam the Whirlpool and the Rapids in a fig-leaf suit. It got much damaged. Hence, tedious complaints about my extravagance. I am too much hampered here. What I need is change of scene.

Can you see the problem? Adam is a guy and wants to do guy things. After all, we are told that the most common last words of men are either "Hey, hold my beer" or "Look at what I can do." Thus are many wives made widows.

Eve, as the mother of all women, is the first to try to "civilize" her husband, to tame him, so that he is (a) acceptable to take out in public, and (b) survives.

In the movie, *Hello Dolly*, there is a funny scene in the Harmonia Gardens restaurant where Dolly (Barbra Streisand) starts to cut Horace's turkey wing, and he gripes, "I don't want my wings cut!" Dolly's sly rejoinder is, "No man does."

And that is Adam's complaint; Eve is clipping his wings!

With that, Twain shines his light on the eternal dilemma of men, the struggle to balance being a husband with being a guy. There is a popular conceit that men are just big boys. You know the saying, The only difference between men and boys is the price of their toys. It's not that men are just big boys, we're guys. And there's nothing wrong with that. It's a wise wife who realizes that her husband is both a husband and a guy, and doesn't try to stifle one to enhance the other, but instead gives him room to play both roles. And it's a wise man who realizes that, yes, he needs to grow into a husband, but that he can still keep a slingshot in his back pocket, just in case.

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Chapter 12: Mark Twain on Relationships, part 3

In re-reading Mark Twain's *Diary of Adam and Eve*, I was quite surprised to discover, in addition to more proof that Twain is the wonderful humorist that we all know him to be, but also to find that he had keen insight into the human heart. All too often, people can be funny but at the expense of others. In my mind, empathy for one's subjects is what separates a true humorist from run-of-the-mill hacks.

When creating his characters for the *Diaries*, Twain decided to portray Adam as an aloof "guy", happy to be left alone in the Garden, but willing to put up with the foolishness of the other "creature"; you know, live and let live. Yes, he feels put upon by many of her ways, but she is living in the Garden, too, so, well, there you are. What are you gonna do?

It is in Twain's depictions Eve's fascination with Adam, though, that I think Twain shines true. She loves everything in the Garden, but her diary is filled with her interactions with and thoughts about Adam. They seemed to me to be spot-on, given the verse in Gen. 3 that says, "Your desire shall be toward your husband." Eve's desire is definitely for connection with Adam; she tells how she loves to watch him, to spend time with him, to talk to him. But his aloofness sometimes causes her sorrow:

THURSDAY.—my first sorrow. Yesterday he avoided me and seemed to wish I would not talk to him. I could not believe it, and thought there was some mistake, for I loved to be with him, and loved to hear him talk, and so how could it be that he could feel unkind toward me when I had not done anything?

....

But when night came I could not bear the lonesomeness, and went to the new shelter which he has built, to ask him what I had done that was wrong and how I could mend it and get back his kindness again; but he put me out in the rain, and it was my first sorrow.

The illustration of this episode from the 1906 edition is touching:

Later in the diary, Eve makes the observation that sparked this entire series:

*Tuesday—Wednesday—Thursday—and today: all without seeing him. It is a long time to be alone; **still, it is better to be alone than unwelcome.***

[my emphasis]



I know that Twain is a humorist, a writer of entertaining fiction, but every once in a while, a writer makes a statement that is so accurate, so profound, that you recognize it for what it is: Truth. Eve endures loneliness because that is preferable to being unwanted.

Better To Be Alone Than Unwelcome

When I read that line, I was taken aback by that simple statement, stunned at how profound it was, and I had to stop reading for a bit to think about it. It's true, isn't it? It's sad, but Twain, over 100 years ago, hit upon the exact predicament of people in loveless, sexless marriages. Oh, it's true that refusing spouses want their Other to be in the house with them, to be married to them, but the Other is unwelcome in the bedroom.

At the time of the writing of this chapter, we're coming into the holiday season, and for the CSL household, Thanksgiving marks the beginning of Christmas movie watching. I have a number of Christmas movie musts, and one that is always on my list for holiday viewing is the now-classic *Home Alone*. We all know the story of that movie, of how Kevin 'wished' his family away, and eventually became lonely. But it hit me that a comma might make the difference between a movie title and a disheartening truth for so many people:

Home Alone
or
Home, Alone

Twain's Eve realizes an important truth: rather than be in the company of someone who doesn't want you, it is better to be alone. Whenever we approach a holiday season, with its focus on God and family, it always saddens me to think of those who will be home with their families, but alone in their homes.

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Chapter 13: Mark Twain on Relationships, part 4

I have been looking at the surprising wisdom found in Mark Twain's *Diaries of Adam and Eve*, concerning marriage and relationships. In the last chapter, I wrote about Eve's observation about how it is preferable to be alone rather than unwanted and how it was an eye-opener. But I would be remiss if I didn't say anything about the way that Twain developed his two characters, and gives insight into masculine and feminine psyches. Yes, your cuddly Curmudgeon is a throw-back, and for that I make no apologies, so if someone wants to take me to task for not being grounded in the 21st century — oh well, shuckydarn.

Basically, Twain has Eve do most of the talking which, given his depiction of her loquacity throughout the story, comes as no surprise. But what Twain does with Eve's growth is intriguing. Throughout the diary, Eve records her thoughts and observations, as if she were documenting her life. After all, as I pointed out in the first chapter in this series, she refers to herself as an Experiment. Of course, while there is another Experiment in the Garden, she knows she is the Main Event.

Eve makes three statements, after the Fall, that not only gives insight into humanity, but shows Eve's growth as a character. The first statement is made shortly after the Fall (by the way, Adam is led to believe it wasn't apples, but his "chestnut," that caused the Fall. You'll have to read it to understand it.) Her statement is:

The Garden is lost, but I have found HIM, and am content.

Yes, I realize that Twain is theologically unsound, but I think that, in Heaven, when I meet Eve, that she will express sentiments akin to this. Somehow, I don't believe our first parents spent the entirety of their long lives doing penance and wearing hair shirts as acts of contrition toward God in order to atone for The Fall. They were expelled from the Garden, away from God's physical presence, true. But they did have each other, and they did start a family. And we all know the blessings (and heartbreaks) our children bring us. So it is not hard for me to accept that Twain saw in Eve the opportunity to grow in love for her husband.

Eve's second statement is actually a great statement of faith, and one that I wish every wife AND husband would be able to make. If they could join in making this statement, it would go a long way toward establishing marital harmony, both in and out of the Church. Eve's statement is a simple acceptance of the wisdom of God's design:

He is as God made him, and that is sufficient. There was a wise purpose in it, THAT I know.

I truly believe that much of the source of today's marital discord and strife is founded upon the fact that we think that God didn't know what He was doing when He created male and female. We truly believe that we know more than God Himself when it comes to living as man and wife, even though He created us and created marriage!

I've written before how men and women are different, and that there is nothing wrong with that. Other writers and bloggers I've come across say the same, and it's starting to get out there that male and female sexuality and sexual response are different. And that it's okay! God made us this way, and it is a wise couple that learns how to integrate their two sexualities into one.

In a follow-up comment to that, Eve also says,

Then why is it that I love him? MERELY BECAUSE HE IS MASCULINE, I think.

To me, that is both simple and profound. It seems obvious, on its face, but how many of us actually make the connection that we are drawn to the Other because of their masculine or feminine nature? Yes, we have our own ideas as to what constitutes our "type", but beneath that is the draw of the masculinity or femininity of the Other.

Twain was not a Christian, and so he held no truck with the 900-year-old men and women of Genesis. Instead, he has Eve record this in her diary:

Forty Years Later

It is my prayer, it is my longing, that we may pass from this life together—a longing which shall never perish from the earth, but shall have place in the heart of every wife that loves, until the end of time; and it shall be called by my name. But if one of us must go first, it is my prayer that it shall be I; for he is strong, I am weak, I am not so necessary to him as he is to me—life without him would not be life; how could I endure it? This prayer is also immortal, and will not cease from being offered up while my race continues. I am the first wife; and in the last wife I shall be repeated.

This is not Twain the Humorist speaking; this is Twain the Lover, the Husband. Samuel Clemens was married for 34 years to Olivia Langdon, and adored her to distraction; she died in 1904, and he missed her terribly. The two diaries were published after her death, and I understand this to be Twain writing his wife into Eve's story.

Storytime:

The reason I think this is because of another story, a true story that Tony Campolo used to tell back when he was unabashedly Christian.

Campolo tells of speaking once on marriage at Bryn Mawr, the Ivy League women's college, and how he was being eaten alive by the students arguing that marriage was antiquated, that you should be able to mate with someone for just as long as you love them, and then move on. He tells how he was trying

to share his Christian worldview about marriage but getting torn to shreds by these intelligent women.

But then he thought to tell them of the parents of a friend of his, another professor. This friend's parents were a farm couple whose life's work was to put their two boys through seminary. One day, when the two sons (both professors and preachers) were visiting, the mother was preparing breakfast; in the middle of preparation, she suddenly went stiff, and fell. The boys were stunned, but their old father quickly picked up his wife, ran her out to his pick-up and tore out to the hospital. But it was too late; she died of a stroke.

The sons stayed with their father, helping him deal with all of the final preparations, and on the day of the funeral, they attended church, then came back to the house and received well-wishers, etc. That evening, as they were sitting on the porch, talking about the day and sharing memories, Dad suddenly asked, "Where's Mom right now?"

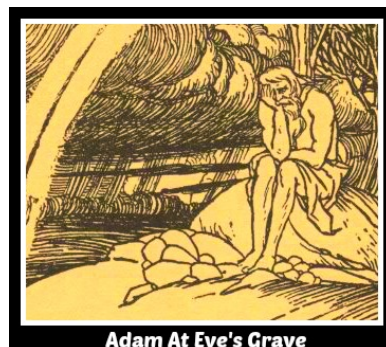
The sons, both scholars and preachers tried to give standard Christian truths about Heaven, "to be absent from the body...", etc., when the old man suddenly jumped up and said, "I'm going to the grave; take me to the grave." When they tried to persuade him that it was late, he said, "I just buried my wife of 52 years, don't tell me to settle down!", and so the three of them drove out to the cemetery.

When they got there, the old man grabbed a flashlight and pattered around the grave a bit, rearranging some of the flowers, got down on his knees and smoothed some dirt, etc. Then he stood up, and said, "Let's go home. It's been a good day. It's been a good 52 years, and it ended just the way I wanted it to; she died first. I didn't want her to have to live with the pain of being widowed. It ended good."

And Campolo says that when he finished that story, it was silent, and he knew that he had those Bryn Mawr students, that they couldn't come back at him; despite their platitudes and ideals, they realized that they didn't have what that man and woman married 52 years had; they didn't know what love actually is.

But Twain did. Above I said that Twain wrote his wife into Eve's diary. But he also wrote himself into Adam's. After Livvy's death, Twain has Adam write in his diary about losing Eve:

Wheresoever she was, THERE was Eden.



Adam At Eve's Grave