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## **Foundations of Sand and Shadows of Love (Part III)**

Thus far in this series we have considered the Christian view of marriage through the theology of St. Augustine and the liturgy of Thomas Cranmer. Augustine's understanding, which Cranmer follows, is often characterized in three words that he often used, proles, offspring, fides, fidelity, and sacramentum, sacrament. Having considered the first reason of marriage as proles, we turn next to fides. To do so we should begin again with the original idea of matrimony.

In the second chapter of Genesis, when Adam beholds Eve taken from his side, he declares joyfully, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." The communion of man and woman derives from the union of their creation. In the words of Augustine, "They are joined to each other side by side who walk together and observe together where they are walking." Their union which is described first of all as physical is really much more than that. Husband and wife constitute a union of human life in its totality. The whole of human existence is shared; theirs is a giving and receiving that is at once physical, intellectual, emotional, and volitional.

In this original life the principle is established that " a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh." (Genesis 2:24). This one flesh is what it means to walk together and observe where they are walking.

But into this totality of human life came sin. And because of sin we discover the second reason for marriage – fidelity. In the Christian perspective of matrimony, fidelity has not just to do with faithfulness between husband and wife, but also with redemption from the fall of human nature and the corruption of sin.

With the fall of man, the entire complex of human personality became perverted and disordered. Alienation from God was the first consequence. "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." Along with alienation from God came alienation in all the other areas of human life, intellectual, emotional, and moral. Man was therefore in conflict with God, his neighbor, and himself. Chaos and death followed. These effects of sin have now become the common experience of our lives.

By the idea of fidelity, Augustine reiterates the teaching of St. Paul

that marriage is a remedy for the effects of sin, in particular for lust and fornication.

By remedy, St. Paul understood a means of control and a way of healing. When the alienating corruption of sin entered into the souls of men, it entered into their sexuality as well. The desire of sensuous nature and the longing of friendship have been disordered and disconnected from communion with God and from procreation. But now, through the grace of God in Christ Jesus, marriage becomes a means of redeeming activity, a remedy.

St. Paul writes, "... to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body but the husband, and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife." (I Corinthians 7:2-4.)

At first glance, St. Paul's instruction might seem to be mere license to fulfill the desires of lust under the cloak of marriage. But that is not Paul's, or Augustine's, understanding.

Lust and fornication pervert God's intention for the union of man and woman. Lust considers a person a mere sexual object. Fornication attempts to isolate sexual pleasure from the responsibility of marriage and from procreation.

Marriage acts as a remedy against fornication and lust. Matrimony vows love and honor and respect for the spouse who is not a sexual object. Marriage provides the context for responsibility, to love "for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health...till death us do part"

Moreover, Paul speaks of an obligation, a "due benevolence" that the husband has in relation to the wife and that the wife has in relation to the husband. Each gives to the other "power" or "authority" over the body. The wife offers "authority" over her body to the husband, and the husband offers "authority" over his body to the wife. In the debt of love, married persons possess a mutual knowledge of the desire for sexual intimacy that is to be recognized and accepted and given the one to the other in trust and in joy.

Paul is speaking of a righteous means to sexual fulfillment that marriage secures under the overarching obligation of the love of God and the life of holiness. There-fore, marriage as fides denies immorality and returns the goodness of sexuality to its proper context and freedom.

In summary, the Augustinian idea of fidelity is simply this. Marriage is a medicine against carnal incontinence, a way of counteracting the tendency of human nature toward promiscuous sexual behavior, and a dedication of one's sexual life to God. In this view, Augustine follows Scripture again.

For Cranmer this idea of remedy is the second reason for matrimony. The grace of marriage becomes a way to bring the creative form of sensuous appetite back under the direction of godly reason and divine fellowship. Thus what has been damaged by sin is given a way of restoration and hope. For Cranmer, remedy is a reason for marriage

equal to that of friendship and procreation because the element of redemption and re-creation is brought into focus.

In the Solemnization of Matrimony, Cranmer sums up this idea of fidelity as a reason for marriage in this way: "Secondly, it [marriage] was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication, that such persons as be married, might live chastely in matrimony, and keep them-selves undefiled members of Christ's body."

For those who favor same-sex unions, fidelity would itself be desirable because, in their view, promiscuity of any kind, whether heterosexual or homosexual, ought to be discouraged. But the real problem of homosexual practice does not reside in promiscuity per se. The problem resides in another aspect of the fall of human nature. Homosexual practice is a mistaken expression both of the sensuous appetite and of friendship.

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