

God Provides the One

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The estate of marriage is under severe attack. What was once the strength of American society is now considered old fashioned or traditional. Sexual promiscuity is acceptable and even praiseworthy in our country. We see it in the movies, on television, and in books: sex outside of marriage is all right. Love, in America, is defined as a feeling which comes and goes. If it doesn't work out, or if problems arise, we can always flee our relationships and find another. There is no feeling of commitment in this land caught up in defending rights, because commitment equals slavery and a loss of freedom. People vehemently defend their "right" to experience pleasure without commitment. This leads to fornication, "live in" arrangements, adultery, and divorce. The majority of Americans have rejected God's institution of marriage, and, as a result, we find our society being hardened and given over to their lusts (Ro. 1:25-32).

Because we Christians live as lights in this depraved and hardened society, we attract attention and ridicule for holding onto biblical truth. We are laughed at for believing that marriage is a *life long* union between one man and one woman. We are considered ignorant and old fashioned for not having sex before marriage, and not allowing its practice among us. This, in turn, puts severe stress on our youth.

Our youth are encouraged to be sexually promiscuous by our society, and many of them fall to the world's deadly logic. Others, trying to remain pure to the sixth commandment, find themselves prey to marrying in haste. Interdenominational and inter-religious marriages have become all too common, bringing with them all the heartache and problems imaginable. Our youth are in danger, and they need to be educated as to God's will in marriage. It is imperative that we instruct them as to what true love is: a selfless action towards another, and not a selfish feeling in oneself. We need to urgently show our youth the blessings of a God pleasing

marriage, and even define to them what marriage is. We need to encourage them to trust in the Lord's providence for finding them a godly spouse.

This final point will be the main topic of this paper: God is the one who provides a spouse. We will also see that God normally exercises this providence through our actions and decisions. Finally we will review the ways God wants Christians to cooperate with him in finding a spouse. Before we look at God's providence in marriage, let us briefly review what marriage is.

Our dogmaticians have simply defined marriage as a life long union between one man and one woman, begun at the time they freely commit themselves to each other.¹ We believe, as the Bible teaches, that God instituted marriage on the sixth day of creation and that God is the one who joins every man and woman in marriage.² God has blessed marriage for unbelievers and believers alike with three distinct blessings: 1) Companionship 2) Sexual happiness 3) Procreation.³ Because of man's fall, God has given another purpose to marriage: to prevent sexual immorality.⁴

For two believers in marriage, God has reserved another special blessing: a strong relationship towards each other because of the strong relationship both have with God. Many people point to Ecc 4:12 and the "three strand cord" to refer to this (i.e. husband, wife, God). Whether or not the cryptic phrase in Ecclesiastes refers to the marriage of two believers, we can still defend our position of God's special blessing to the believer on the basis of Eph 5:21-33. A believer will see this portion of Scripture and, by the power of the Holy Spirit through the salvation Jesus won for us, imitate it. Another portion of Scripture showing this special bond, is the praise Lemuel gives the God fearing wife in Prov. 31:10-31. Such godly praise can only come

from one believing spouse to another. This special bond of faith between two God fearing spouses must be stressed to our yet unmarried members.

The blessing of marrying a believer is one of the greatest earthly blessings one can receive from the Lord. Happiness in a marriage between two strong believers will certainly follow, because of their contentment and thankfulness for all of the Lord's blessings. But the question is now, "How does one receive such a God fearing spouse? How can I be sure that this one or that one is *the* one?"

The Bible makes it clear through many examples and statements that God provides a God fearing spouse.⁵ Ultimately, God provides everything for everyone, believer and unbeliever alike. First of all, God has created each one of us and has determined the time and place where we are to live.⁶ He provides clothing, food, shelter and all physical necessities for believer and unbeliever alike.⁷ He provides all things for all people, with his ultimate purpose being that people may seek him out, turn to him and may not perish.⁸ It can't be stated enough: in God we have our being. We could not live without him. He provides everything we need for our life. In him we live.⁹

God provided a spouse for every married person, believer and unbeliever alike. He gave each individual a significant other in marriage. But, we might ask, what does this mean? Does this mean that God provides even a godless spouse? Does this mean that no matter whom I marry, my spouse is provided by the Lord? Ultimately we can say yes, but this does not mean that God is responsible for a godless or unfaithful spouse. God's purpose in our marriage is not necessarily our happiness, but that his name is glorified. As in all things, this is God's ultimate purpose. His name is glorified in many different ways, and some examples (pertaining to marriage) may be: to bless a marriage of believers with happiness that they may praise the Lord;

to allow a person to marry an unbeliever and have problems to teach him to inquire of the Lord; to allow blessings even in an interdenominational marriage, so as to lead heterodox spouse to the truth of God's word. The examples of how God's allows his name to be glorified (even in marriage itself) are too numerous to be counted.

When God provides a spouse, he usually does not do it through miraculous means as he did for Adam or Isaac. As with all things, God usually provides through certain natural means. For example, God usually provides us with our daily bread through the means of money he gives us through the work we do. God provides health through the means of exercise and a healthy lifestyle. God provides us with knowledge through the studying we do. With regard to almost everything, God provides through means.

In regard to marriage, God provides through the means of our decision. God, who knows all things and lives in a constant present state (past, present and future are all now according to God), allows humans some degree of freedom to make choices regarding our physical life (and our physical life only).¹⁰ He guides our decisions, halts them or even uses them for his purpose and will. Ultimately, he knows everything that is going to happen, and it is all to glorify his name. In our view of things, though, God guides history and people, using our decisions and placing them in a way that his ultimate purpose is served.

God wants us to use our freewill to make decisions pertaining to this life. With regard to finding a spouse, God uses our decisions to bring the one he has chosen for us to us. Does this mean that it doesn't matter whom I marry, because it will be God's will? Oh, how foolish is the person who thinks this way, and yet so many do.

God's will will certainly be done no matter whom we chose as a spouse, but it will certainly not be a blessing for us if we choose foolishly. God will use our rash decision, but he

may use it to humble us. Rarely does something good come from a rash marriage based only on physical attraction or emotion. Conflicts will arise and cause unhappiness in marriage. Yes, God will even use this spouse of your choice, the one he allowed you to have, for his purposes. This purpose may be to humble you before him, that you may learn to inquire of him before you make a decision. A biblical example of one who did not inquire of the Lord before he got married is Samson.¹¹ Samson fell in love with a beautiful woman. He didn't inquire of the Lord whether or not he should be with her, but just followed his emotions. This led to his detriment as he was stripped of his power, blinded and led to prison. Thankfully, God used this affair to bring Samson to repentance. This goes to show that God's purposes will ultimately be fulfilled. God can even use evil to bring about good.

In an inter-religious marriage, God can still use a believer to bring an unbelieving spouse to faith.¹² At the same time, there is a great danger of losing one's faith, as happened in the case of Solomon¹³ and many others in the Bible.

It must be said that God enjoys and wants to bless people with happy marriages. Proverbs 18:22 says, "He who finds a wife, finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD." God wants to give us what is good, especially to the believer. He wants us to have a godly spouse: one we can have a special bond of faith with. But how do we find such a spouse? If God provides through our decision, how can we be sure that we are getting a godly spouse, one the Lord wishes to bless us with?

Many people go about it the wrong way by looking and praying for signs. They may think that just because they met someone in a special and romantic way, a way that seemed out of the ordinary, that person must be the one. One might pray, "Lord, the person who does this and this, let that person be the one." The problem with these "experiential" ways of determining

whether or not such a person is one's spouse is that they are based on human reason rather than God's word. Human reason and emotion is tainted with sin. It is not perfect. God may allow one to meet somebody through some special way, even through a way prayed about, but this does not mean that the person is necessarily God-fearing and the one through whom one is truly blessed. We should not restrict God to time, person or place in our prayers, but always pray, as did Jesus, "Your will be done."¹⁴

Luther, in his Lectures on Genesis 24, provides an excellent way for a Christian to find a spouse, a spouse who is truly a gift from the Lord and "the one." Luther provides a four-point plan for the Christian in search of a spouse: 1) Prayer 2) Scripture 3) Parents 4) Physical means. This four-point plan is a basic outline and not in any order of chronology. Prayer should be constant, throughout the process. Searching Scripture should also be done unceasingly. Our parent's, family, and friend's advice needs to be constantly inquired of. Physical means (going out and meeting people) needs also to be done, otherwise how will you meet your spouse?

In his lecture, Luther has this to say about prayer:

But I warn again that for entering marriage it is above all necessary to call upon God that He may choose and bestow the wife or husband. If this is alone, God's blessing and all good fortune will follow. God gives the husband grace to have patience and to take the weakness of the wife in good part, and she, in turn, may be able to adjust herself to her husband's way's. On the other hand, where fear of God and prayer are not added, irritations very easily occur.¹⁵

And again:

Let him who desires a good wife call upon God. He will hear him when he prays, and will grant one who, if not endowed with all the virtues of Rebecca, is nevertheless suitable and respectable.¹⁶

God wants us to search for a spouse by first inquiring of him through prayer. He alone can bless our endeavors and grant us a godly spouse. But what shall we pray? Luther offers this example:

Lord God, Thou hast created me a man. Thou seest that I cannot be continent. I am calling upon Thee. Direct and bless my undertaking. Give me counsel and help. Choose for me a woman with whom I may be able to live honorably and to serve Thee, and by faith and prayer, to overcome the inconveniences and difficulties of marriage.¹⁷

Along with one's prayer for guidance and counsel is looking into Scripture. The Bible is the only means through which the Lord promises to speak to us. In Scripture, God gives us advice as to what to look for in a spouse. We have the examples of godly men and women such as Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca. We have Proverbs 31, which describes to us a praiseworthy wife. These are just examples of the countless ways the Lord advises us through Scripture.

Along with prayer and Scripture is the advice of godly friends, relatives and, especially, parents. It is important to remember that our sinful wants and desires can mislead us, even in Scripture. If the Devil used Scripture to try and tempt Jesus into sin¹⁸, we can be sure that he will do the same with us. Experience teaches us that emotions have a way of dulling ones understanding. An old English proverb states, "Love makes blind." This is certainly true and must be remembered. We need the clear heads and understanding of godly friends and family, who are not as emotionally attached as we are, to guide us, for the Devil will do everything in his power in trying to trick us to make the wrong decision. He may even use Scripture to do this.

Luther points out that we shouldn't be ashamed or afraid to ask for our parent's guidance. He points out that it is actually one of their duties to help us look for a godly spouse. Using Abraham's example he says:

Therefore it is necessary for parents to provide an honorable and godly marriage for their children, to look for and obtain a bride. They should not suppose that she will come from somewhere by chance or novel and unusual manner.¹⁹

Along with prayer, Scripture and advice from godly parents and friends, comes the next stage: going out and using the physical blessings God has given us to attract our spouse.

Abraham, our great example of faith, didn't just sit and wait for God to provide a wife from heaven for Isaac. No, he sent out his servant with physical gifts. He sent him to search for the one the Lord would provide, trusting always in the Lord's providence. We too need to go out and meet people. God has given us feet to go out, mouths to speak, and hands to help. If God cares for us by providing us with a spouse, we should rejoice the in fact that he also encourages us to work with him. As God encourages us to cooperate with him in finding a spouse, we trust that he will provide for us. Luther says to this point:

Consequently, these things tend to spur us on to faith and to pray that he who is about to enter into marriage may call upon and believe that God will grant a wife he is asking for – the wife who is suited to his character. Therefore you should maintain with confidence: "O Lord, I know that thou wilt send an angel along with me to arrange everything. I shall provide the hand and the tongue, and I shall do my share: the rest will be thy concern."²⁰

We should also take some regard to our physical appearance. Beauty is a gift from God, and we should use all of his gifts to his glory. Not taking care of ourselves, or making ourselves presentable to people is not using a gift God has given to his glory. This does not mean that we should always be worrying about how we look, or become vain in the process. The key is to always remember that our bodies are a gift from God, and that they should be used to glorify him, and not ourselves.

Concerning physical attraction, many people say it should be of little or no concern when searching for a spouse. We should agree that physical attraction is neither the only thing to look for, nor is it the most important feature of a spouse. Faith is what we look for. A God fearing

woman is to be praised.²¹ At the same time, beauty is a gift from God and, as all gifts from God, should direct our thanks and praise to him. Luther has this to say about beauty:

*Beauty is something created by God and should by no means be despised. A little drop of external pleasure is granted to the flesh, since our nature has been so corrupted, or created that we have great fondness for women who are beautiful, especially for those who are respectable, well-mannered and endowed with fine talents, those that show some promise that they will make good housewives. Such women are very excellent gifts of God.*²²

In summary, Christians, in their search for a spouse, should keep these four things in mind: 1) Prayer 2) Scripture 3) Parents 4) Physical means. Through these means, one will truly find a godly spouse and one that is from the Lord. At the same time we must remember that the Devil will try his hardest to make our lives miserable. Luther says that it is a miracle that any marriage is happy, considering all that the Devil does to prevent our happiness and destroy God's institution of marriage.²³ But even if the Devil makes our marriage difficult we can take comfort and trust in the Lord. Luther says:

*When the spirit and faith are associated with the invocation, then one will be able to take cause of everything else in reasonable manner, to deal with ones parents and listen to their advice. Later on, if everything does not turn out according to your wish, you nevertheless have this comfort: "I have prayed. I have asked God, my parents, and my relatives for advice. If anything untoward happens, I shall bear it calmly." On the other hand, if you have entered into a marriage at your own risk, and without the knowledge of your parents, it will everlastingly trouble and distress your heart.*²⁴

It still must be said, God takes pleasure in our happiness when we thank him for his goodness. God will bless the person who inquires of him for marriage. Getting married is just the beginning. The Devil will try his best to make us unhappy. This will, in turn, lead us back to our Lord in prayer and study of Scriptures, that we may totally rely on him. He will bless us for this, as he promises: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."²⁵ With this promise let us encourage our

youth not to fear marriage, but to praise God for it. Let us also guide them to trust and pray for the Lord's providence.

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¹ WLS Dogmatic Notes, p. 83f

² Gn 2:18-24; Mt 19:4-6

³ Cf. Schuetze, John D. Scriptural Principals As They Pertain To "Live-In" Arrangements, Fox River Valley Pastoral Conference, Sept. 1998

⁴ Cf. 1 Cor 7:2

⁵ E.g. Gn 24 (When God provided Rebecca for Isaac) or the statement of Prov 19:14 "a prudent wife is from the LORD."

⁶ Cf. Ac 17:26

⁷ Cf. Mt 5:45b

⁸ Cf. Ac 17:27

⁹ Cf. Ac 17:28

¹⁰ The A.C. quotes Augustine of Hippo in Art. 18 as saying: *We grant that all men have a free will, inasmuch as it has the judgement of reason; not that it is thereby capable, without God, either to begin, or, at least, to complete*

aught in things pertaining to God, but only in works of this life, whether good or evil. "Good" I call those works which spring from the good in nature, such as, willing to labour in the field, to eat and drink, to have a friend, to clothe oneself, to build a house, to marry a wife, to raise cattle. To learn diverse and useful arts, or whatsoever, good pertains to this life. For all of these things are not without dependence on the providence of God; yea, of Him and through they are and have their beginning. "Evil" I call such works as willing to worship an idol, to commit murder, etc.

¹¹Cf. Judges 16:4-22

¹² Cf. 1 Cor 7:14,16

¹³ Cf. 1 Kg 11:3

¹⁴ Cf. Mt 26:42

¹⁵ L.W. vol. 4, p. 226

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 270

¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 246

¹⁸ Cf. Mt 4:5,6

¹⁹ L.W. vol. 4, p. 251

²⁰ *ibid.* p.253-254

²¹ Prov 31:30

²² L.W. vol. 4, p. 270

²³ *ibid.* p..247

²⁴ *ibid.* p. 248

²⁵ Ro 8:28