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Marriage is the most beautiful gift. Marriage is very influential and very serious.

R.C. Sproul: ~~M~~Marriage can become a source of true delight which humans will not want to change for anything else or for any money . never.+

But for making marriage a delight, you need to know the Truth and make an effort, even more than that, you should keep making efforts through all of life. Today, I want to share with you some of my reflections and a little research about marriage.

Besides my own meditations on the Scripture, I used and tried to understand a few books, which were written by godly people, who love Christ. All of these authors are pretty famous and perhaps you are acquainted personally with some of them. I have read and understand these books:

Reforming Marriage: Gospel Living for Couples Paperback by Douglas Wilson

Trinity and Reality: An Introduction to the Christian Faith by Ralph A Smith

Living for God's Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism by Joel R. Beeke

And some materials written by R.C. Sproul, J. Calvin and M. Luther.

Marriage is a territory of openness

~~To~~ be the one who has been known by somebody and still be loved is one of the highest goals of marriage.+R.C.Sproul.

This process of knowing should develop through communication. And here are two positions: some people are afraid of this process, because when they will know somebody, they will hate this person; while the other group is afraid that when they will know somebody, they will fall in love with this person. Which are right?

Communication is a bilateral process which is based on the ability to listen. All of us need to develop this skill. Marriage is a unity of two radically different persons. For this unity to become a territory of openness, it is necessary to learn to listen, and to listen with the heart, not just with the ears. We can call this ability to listen . reading between lines, listening with the heart, being attentive to intonation, to facial expressions, to gestures. On the other hand, both the husband and the wife should learn to express their feelings, thoughts, and desires in words. It is difficult to build a



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relationship with someone who is offended because his or her spouse didn't guess what he or she was thinking.

We need to learn how to speak, but only after we first learn how to listen. The skill of listening displays humbleness and wisdom. Human beings are strange creatures, because often when they say: "Go away," they simultaneously scream: "Hug me!" No, it is not a disease, it is a fear to be naked, to be open, but marriage, like any other relationship, can't be deep without true openness. We are sinful people and we need to abandon the idea of looking strong. Only God is really strong. We should be open and not be afraid to be vulnerable. Falseness and shortcomings are a serious obstacle in communication because they ruin trust.


A lie is an attempt to run away from openness and responsibility, and in the end, it brings pain and destruction.

Knowing is impossible without communication. Communication requires some sort of nakedness. Sometimes this nakedness is attractive - it captures, excites, draws us close to another person, for example, when a husband or wife does something which is worthy to be on the first page of the top-ranking newspaper. But sometimes it repels and embarrasses and even scares - not the nakedness itself, but something that is revealed in it. But love never fails. If when we become married, we think that we will find an ideal person - we are wrong. Of course, our husband or wife is the best for us, but love is the ability to accept another, not to be seeking the best person. After all, I am not ideal, so why should I think that I deserve an ideal partner?

Love is action and faithfulness. It is acceptance and service. It is self-renunciation.

We imitate God when we keep learning to be open. God reveals Himself. He gives us the possibility to know Him, He shows Himself in the Holy Scriptures. When His Bride rejects His revelation and turns away from God, she is dying and suffers.

God is an example for us. He knows about all our sins and still loves us. Even more, He takes care of His Bride and gives Himself up for her sake. This is amazing comfort. We need to reflect this comfort in our marital relationship. The apostle Paul shows this model of a relationship in Ephesians 5: Christ and His Bride (Church) is



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the image for the marital relationship between a husband and wife.

In his commentary on Ephesians, Calvin wrote that it is not natural to not love your wife. God has defined marriage in order that two become one. This is a goal that any other earthly union cannot achieve. We read in Genesis, that a man should leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and by this statement God points out that man should choose marriage above any other union, because marriage is the most holy among the human unions. It mirrors our union with Christ, who endows us with His own life because we are the flesh of His flesh. Marriage is a great mystery which cannot be completely described by words.

Marriage was conceived as intimacy, such a kind of intimacy that permeates a human being on all levels. Openness, which is possible only because of listening and speaking, is the basis of this intimacy.

God takes marriage very seriously. Marriage, as I have said before, is an image of the relationship between Christ and the Church. And because of that, we have a serious challenge: while people are looking at our marriage, they should see the love and beauty of the relationship between Christ and the Church.

It is hard to find somebody, who will argue with these two truths:

1. Marriage plays a big role in the inception of a person. Because all of us are derived from some kind of family, whether from a good family or from a family with a multitude of troubles. As psychologists like to say: We all are from childhood.
2. During the time when there is the possibility to make the biggest impact on a person, that person is surrounded by father and mother, brothers and sisters. Marriage is not just about a husband and wife, it touches a much broader circle of people, and after all, it covers the whole world. Marriage is responsibility.

If we will sum up exactly what Scripture teaches about marriage and make an emphasis on the truths which are under attack in the modern world, we can say this:

- Family is a covenantal relationship.
- An oath, a promise, formed between husband and wife to create a family
- In marriage a husband and wife became one body and this is not just about the physical relationship. Both partners need to be learning how to be one body

throughout their entire lives.

- In marriage, both partners receive a new status and new responsibilities, and these become more important than any obligations in other relationships.

- Marriage is to become an expert about your husband or wife, and it is possible only through communication and openness (as was said before).

- The family was the first social institution from Old Testament times, from the creation of the world, and this model continues and it is constant and unchangeable in its essence, in spite of many attacks.

- Family controls the future. Children are submitted to parents and they appear in the institution of the family, in the relationship which exists between their parents.

This process forms the influence of the family on the future.

- When God created community, He created it as a community of love

- The covenant love between husband and wife is essential family love. It comes before parental love and normally remains after it. Through that covenant love, children are born. Children learn to love their parents in response to parental love.

As they grow, they learn to love others, and the love of their immediate family extends to the larger family, to friends and neighbors, to the local church, and eventually to people they will never meet, living in places they will never visit.

Through works of charity and missionary giving, family love is extended to all mankind. When children grow up and marry, the process of nurturing and extending family love begins again.+

- Claims of fighters for equality force us to suppose, that true love undermines the hierarchy. But in the reality of the Biblical worldview, it is vice versa. Three Persons of the Trinity are equal in essence and having all divine attributes, while at the same time, order and structuring are present in their relationship. Trinitarian love doesn't diminish nor erase this structure, but it is clearly revealed in it. It does not mean that any relationships between equal persons doesn't exist or can't exist. This relationship expresses equality, which is characteristic of the essence of Three Persons of Trinity. Family relationships in the Bible are structured. Husband, subordinated to Christ, is the head of the household. A wife should submit herself to her husband. Children should obey their father and their mother.

- Biblical hierarchy (which we see in Ephesians) it is not prison, nor captivity, nor oppression. It is a service to ones who are subordinated to you, faithful service - even until death, and this is the model of Biblical leadership and hierarchy in the family. Service, which does not seek its own, but instead leads a family to the true goal of gratitude and worshiping God. Husbands love their wives and take care of



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them, parents sacrifice for the sake of their children, who are subordinated to them.

- The family has a tremendous influence. Parents, who are raising children in obedience, lay the foundation for the social order. Obedience and keeping the law in society are largely dependent on obedience to the parents in the family. That's why parents are having such a great responsibility.
- Honoring and self-sacrifice are two manifestations of love, which we need to grow in ourselves and become a good example for our children to follow.

While looking at world around us, it is scary to read these words. Among the spirits, which are moving around in pagan society it is hard to read these words, but it is the Word of God. We can have stones thrown at us, be accused of backwardness and encroachment on human freedom, but in reading the Holy Scripture we know that only in the Lord and by following His words will we be free. Everything else, which contradicts His words is nothing more than devil's trap and his chains.

Sometimes, while people are reading Ephesians, something like this is happening:

- Husbands rub their hands, saying: *Finally, now you will wash my socks, bring me coffee every morning and just do everything that I will say. I am a boss and you should just obey.*
- Wives sigh and say: *Well, it was my decision to come to church and marry this man, so I need to live with him and suffer*

But this is not what Paul has written. Talking about Christ, he points out that you must leave your throne and descend to the sinful world in an order to serve your beloved, completely giving yourself up in an order to bring her to the main thing - worship.

Having power, we bear responsibility. We, husbands and wives, we parents - bear responsibility.

The example of Christ and the Church as a bride, becomes an example for the husband: she, the Church, became the bride, not because He forces her, but because He gave Himself up and sacrificed Himself for her sake.

The apostle Paul also mentioned parents, and he addressed the husband and wife, that they should leave their parents. He quotes Genesis 2:24. To leave means not



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just physically, but emotionally as well. In our country, this a big problem. Traditions and economical situations often force children to live with their parents in one room, even, when they already have their own children. I often see married couples disobey God's commandment about separation from parents and as a result, everyone around suffers. But one thing cheers me up: Ukraine is developing, Christians are learning, and they make progress in submitting our culture to God's Truth.

Keeping in mind the importance of separation from parents, we also need to take into account that our parents have invested something in us. When we build a new family, we need to talk about our previous experience in an order to avoid unnecessary conflicts. The new family is the conscious experience of two different people who agreed to create conjoint rules, to form conjoint values. We need to be open to one another.

In the commentary on Eph. 5:28-33, Calvin wrote that it is not natural for a man not to love his wife, because God defines marriage as two becoming one. When Moses said that a man will leave his father and his mother and be united to his wife, he points out that this union has priority above all others. This union is the most holy because it mirrors the union with Christ.

Husband and wife both belong to God, but at the same time, they belong to one another and complement one another. They were created by God and share the love of Christ, and both of them are inheritors of eternal life. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ giving us an adoption at the same time gave us the restoration of the family relationship.

The apostle Paul shows us the relationship between Christ and the Church and emphasizes that this is an example for the union of husband and wife, and in this union both participants have their own place and their own role. I will read you a description of these roles from the Marital Liturgy, which is used in reformed churches in Ukraine:

- Christ is the Head. He revealed His love when sacrificed Himself. Following Christ's

example, the husband should be sacrificial and loving to his wife. The duty of the man - in his life with God, he should be an example for his wife. He must take care of his wife and protect her. His status is not merely authority, but also a responsibility. - Wife keeps this unity and honoring the status, which her husband has as the head of the family. The Church relies on Christ and she is under His Leadership, it is the same with the wife in her relation to her husband. The wife is called to help her husband in everything, which is according to the will of God, and to live in love with him.

This kind of relationship requires learning. ~~%don't~~ live for myself+ - it is not just some understanding which I have, it is everyday practice and it requires constant learning. If we will live like this, people around us will see the unity which we have in Christ and the love which He reveals to us.

Because of our sinfulness, in every marriage there are some troubles and adversities, but in these situations, we can rely on God and ask Him for help because our hope is in Him, as well as our help. Ps. 124:8 ~~%Our~~ help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.+

Because we have God's forgiveness, we have an example for our marital relationship: forgive one another.

We are not alone in our journey, and it is not the first time that Christians were called to defend God's truths about what marriage is. On the basis of Holy Scripture, such famous reformers as John Calvin and Martin Luther greatly influenced the understanding of marriage in society. Looking back on their experiences, we need to continue displaying God's truth about the family to the world.

Luther

Luther was a monk and the girl whose name was Katharina von Bora was a nun. On the 13th of June 1525 they were married, which was unacceptable and wrong according to the Roman Catholic view at that time. They lived a happy life together and people said that Luther would not change his wife for France or Venice. Katharina was really that person, who takes care of Luther, and brought order into

his life and house. Katharina saved him from deep falling into debts. Katharina gave birth to 6 children (3 boys and 3 girls). Besides these, Luther and his wife adopted 6 more kids.

Here are couple of phrases written by Luther, which characterize his relationship with Katharina:


- In the household business I concede to Katharina, in everything else, I am guided by the Holy Spirit
- His marriage would please his father, rile the pope, make the angels laugh and the devils weep, and would seal his testimony.
- The joy of marriage, like everything else in life, is a gift that we can only thankfully receive.
- To have peace in the family is gift which is comparable to the Gospel.
- This one is especially valuable for thus, who are not married yet, so listen carefully please: It is easy to get married, but to treat your wife with love is much harder. Unity of the flesh is not enough for this matter. In marriage, you need unity of tastes and characters, and you can't reach this unity during one night.

Is it possible for an unmarried person to say such things? Of course not. When Martin and Katharina become married, they in fact brought the Church back to marriage, because it is very hard to give advice about marriage when you aren't married yourself. They raised questions about marriage and raising children to a whole new level.

Luther defended marriage and criticized celibacy. In 1520 Luther in his letter to the Christian nobility of the German nation argued for canceling celibacy (or at least, for its unnecessariness). In fact, he stated that on the basis of Scripture everyone has the right to become married, even a priest.

Later on, when he became the head of a family, referring to Augustine he said:

“Marriage is the duty and means of obtaining holiness. Marriage was founded before the fall. Because of marriage, the Earth was filled with people. After the fall, marriage became a means of obtaining holiness. This is what Augustine said and no



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one can refute it. I will add to this that children are the fruits of love +

Speaking about love, he said that love between husband and wife is so special, that you can't find it anywhere else, because it can't exist anywhere else. Also, he said that the husband should work with the sweat of his brow to provide for his family. In his sermons, he also said about the duties of parents regarding raising children and he gave some rules for a child's behavior. Luther states that parents should spend requisite time with children, that this is an important deed in God's eyes, and if they miss it - they are threatened with hell.

His view was in contrast with the understanding of marriage in medieval times. The same is true with our views, which are based on the Bible - they are a contrast to the conception of marriage outside the Church.

Calvin said that family is an instrument in God's hand, and it should not become our hope, because only the Lord is our hope and our mind should be aimed at the future life.

Why do I think that these words are so important? Because today we have two extremes: despising marriage and a cult of marriage. Neither of them are good. So, we as children of the Heavenly King, we should be conscious about the vanity of life (even though it is God's gift) and at the same time, we should be conscious that we are in a constant struggle.

Openness, which is based on the skills of listening and speaking, on covenantal relationships, and on imitating Christ's example in marriage by both husband and wife - this is that thing which will make a marriage solid and lasting.

Marriage is an amazingly beautiful gift, and if we follow Christ's example, then we change the world and bring the Gospel to those around us. May Lord bless all of us on this path!